

1950s

Bob Drucker '58 is best known as the Wizard of Westlake for leading SI basketball teams from 1966-1986, taking the 'Cats to the NorCal championship and to the state finals in 1984. Drucker got his start in basketball long before coming to SI when, in 1947, his mother took him to the San Francisco Examiner basketball camp at the Mission Armory. He won a shooting contest, received a trophy and had his picture in the paper. That first taste of glory got Drucker hooked on the game. Later, as a student at St. Anne's, he found himself in a PE class taught by one of his heroes — Jim Kearney '48 — who won the Brophy Award at SI (and later the Christ the King award) and played football for USF's undefeated, untied and uninvited football team of 1950–51. (Kearney later became a distinguished principal in several San Francisco high schools.)

"He was a hero back then to all the seventh and eighth graders," recalled Drucker. "We would go to USF football games at Kezar and see him play on the same field the '49ers used, and that was good enough for all of us."

At SI, Drucker played on the 110s, 120s, 130s and varsity teams and trained with Rene Herrerias '44 and Jim Keating. "These men, along with Phil Woolpert, who coached at USF, were the kind of men you admired and respected. They were young and enthusiastic and had a profound influence on me."

Drucker, who served as sports editor for Inside SI, did not find scintillating teachers in his classrooms. "They just talked for the entire period. It wasn't even the Socratic method." In his junior year, Drucker found himself in J.B. Murphy's math class. "That was like an island at SI. He would lecture for 5 or 10 minutes and then have us do student-centered work."

Drucker found himself grateful for the help provided by scholastics. "Fr. Ed Malatesta, SJ, knew I was struggling; he took me aside and encouraged me to work harder. He recognized that I could do better, and we became fast friends until his untimely death."

In the 1990s, both Drucker and the late Jim Kearney were inducted together into the Bay Area Prep Hall of Fame. Drucker later coached golf with Kearney's son, Steve Kearney '81. (For Bob Drucker's fabled career as a basketball coach, read the next chapter.)

1960s

Basketball

SI won three basketball league championships in the 1960s, the first in 1960 with Stan Buchanan as coach and the second in 1965 with Bernie Simpson '54 as coach. Playing for him were Charlie Dullea '65, who would go on to become SI's first lay principal, and Bob Portman '65, a first-round draft pick from Creighton, who played with the Warriors between 1969 and 1973. Also on the team were Bruce Scollin, Mike Doherty, Frank O'Malley and junior Rich Ames. Ironically, the toughest game of the season was the first league game against Balboa, whose star player, Willie Wise, would go on to play professional basketball. At a packed Kezar Pavilion, Portman fouled out with 2 minutes left on the clock, but SI prevailed to win by 2. SI lost only one game that season against Lincoln and the Wildcats found themselves playing an undefeated SH at the end of the regular season. A last-second 15-footer by Portman put SI ahead at the final buzzer. SI proceeded to win the city championship, beating Wilson and Lowell, and went on to the Tournament of Champions to beat Gilroy and Richmond before losing the NorCal crown to Fremont of Oakland.

SI won a league championship again in 1967 under Bob Drucker '58 in his first year leading the Wildcats. The basketball court in the McCullough Gymnasium bears Drucker's name for good reason. In his 20 years coaching at SI between 1966 and 1986, Drucker turned in a 394–150 record, taking SI to eight league titles, two CCS championships and one NorCal win. Drucker earned the title "Wizard of Westlake" when Bob Enright '76 gave him the nickname based on John Wooden's moniker, the Wizard of Westwood.

After a stint in the Army, Drucker applied for a job at St. Cecilia's where he coached basketball while earning his degree at USF. In 1965, he came to SI along with Leo La Rocca, and the following year, Fr. McFadden selected him to coach the varsity basketball team. (Fr. McFadden had a rule preventing first year teachers from coaching.) The victories came as did the satisfaction of seeing young boys grow into fine men.

One example, Drucker recalled, was Levy Middlebrooks '84. "He came as a big, shy freshman with some skill, but he struggled a bit when he played on the freshman team. As a sophomore, he still was a little timid. Then something happened in the middle of the season that year. He improved right in front of our eyes. His confidence grew, as did his presence on the court. At the end of the regular season, I moved him up to varsity to help the team practice. Even the varsity kids were noting his improvement. Paul Fortier '82 became his mentor, and Paul's determination to help him improve was inspirational. Most kids I coached went through that kind of transformation, but not in such a dramatic way."

After 20 years of dragging his own children to his games, Drucker was ready to retire from the sport, and he returned to the classroom in 1986. In 1992, he went from teaching history and counseling to working as a full-time counselor, but he returned to the classroom in 2003 as a full-time history teacher. He served as assistant coach to Jim Dekker in 2002 when the SI varsity girls basketball team took first in CCS, and he now serves as the boys' varsity golf coach.

"It was difficult to 'retire' at age 46," said Drucker. "But I was an intense coach, and my father died at 58. In the back of my mind, I thought that would happen to me if I had continued coaching basketball."

His intensity, he said, comes from the passion he has for the game. "I love how creative basketball is. Some people paint, and others write. For me, X's and O's are an art form. But drawing plays on cocktail napkins while taking my wife out to dinner was not the way to win her heart. The game consumed me."

Coaching golf is different, he noted. "We're not allowed to coach on the course during competition. Sometimes I think the most important service I offer our golfers is driving the van."

Nearly all the Drucker family is involved in SI. Bob's son, Joe, graduated in 1990, his daughter Chrissy graduated with the first coed class in 1993, and his daughter Katie Kohmann works in the school's development office as alumni coordinator. His wife, Kathy, and his daughter Molly might as well be honorary SI alumni for all the time they've spent at SI watching Bob coach in his distinguished 40-year career.

Fr. Ed McFadden, SJ

In the 1960s and 1970s, SI turned from a good city school into a great regional school; much of that was due to the efforts of Fr. Ed McFadden, SJ '41, who served as principal between 1964 and 1976. He helped usher in the modern era of high school administration at SI. "When we grew up in post WWII America, many men, including priests, were products of the military," said his close friend Bob Drucker '58. "Their watchwords were power and obedience and authority. Relationships between scholastics and priests and students and teachers were adversarial. That waned with the '60s when people questioned authority and with the advent of Vatican II when relationships became more collegial and collaborative."

Drucker found this true in his relationship with Fr. McFadden, whom he grew to respect. "He was a visionary who recognized the need for more laymen and the need for a professional counseling office. He knew we needed to expand the language department to include more modern languages and hired Riley Sutthoff to teach French. He saw the need for more honors and AP courses, and he was a pioneer in the Jesuit Secondary Education Association."

Drucker most appreciated Fr. McFadden's hands-on advice he would give to new teachers. "He'd give you a few suggestions after visiting your class, and he would choose what classes you would teach each year. He cultivated his faculty in that manner, hiring young laymen such as Chuck Murphy and myself."

Summer of Love

Students and teachers at SI also saw the ugly side of the movement, especially regarding the drug scene. On a Saturday morning in 1967, one of Bob Drucker's players, Steve McCarthy, cut his eye. "I took him to Park Emergency. When I walked in, I saw a beautiful 18-year-old girl reciting nursery rhymes; she was so out of it from drugs. I had never seen anyone like this. At 27, I was frightened; this was my neighborhood, but I had no idea what was going on as I was a bit naïve."

1970s

The 1974-75 & 1975-76 Basketball Teams

By Mark Hazelwood '80

St. Ignatius has had a rich sports history, and in particular a great basketball tradition. City high school legends — from Kevin O’Shea, Fred LaCour, Bob Portman, Paul Fortier and Levy Middlebrooks to Jesse Lopez Low, Nico Mizono and the rest of the 2004 CCS champion Wildcats — have “laced ’em up” for the Wildcats over the past 60 years.

Never, however, has SI ever had a greater run of hoop success than during the years 1974–75 and 1975–76. These two teams, coached by the “Wizard of Westlake” Bob Drucker, set a standard of success that has never been duplicated.

In the fall of 1974, Coach Drucker was beginning his ninth season as coach. He had enjoyed great success in those first eight years, winning a WCAL title in 1968, and never suffering a losing record. In 1974, he welcomed back four returning seniors: forwards Juan Mitchell and Tony Passanisi, center Michael Bowie and point-guard Dan Buick. This group had helped lead SI to an impressive 20-win season and a second-place finish the year before. It was not, however, a championship, and Drucker continually reminded his players of this as the ’74–’75 season progressed.

Joining the returning seniors were a powerful group of players moving up from the JVs: forward/center Billy O’Neill; forwards Kurt Bruneman, Tom Stack and Bob Enright; and guards Mike McEvoy, Craig Bianchi, Louie Carella and Dan Abela.

During pre-season play, Drucker tried to find the right mix. The team struggled early on against Marin Catholic and Redwood before earning comeback wins. As the pre-season progressed, the team improved offensively. Buick and Bowie started to develop some chemistry with Buick looking to give what was called the “Bowie Lob” as often as he could to the 6-foot, 7-inch senior. SI finished the 12–0 pre-season, with 30-point wins over Mills and Carlmont.

As always, the WCAL would be a tough fight every night. Right away, SI was matched up against archrival Sacred Heart at Kezar. On January 3, 1975, a capacity crowd of 5,000 watched one of the great basketball games in the storied history of the two schools. During regulation, no team led by more than 6 points. With Bill Duffy and Bill Duggan, the Irish hung in there with the ’Cats and, with 26 seconds left, pulled ahead 52–50. Senior Tony Passanisi responded and nailed a jumper from the corner to put the game into overtime.

Duggan returned the favor for SH by hitting a 30-footer at the buzzer to send the game into a second overtime. As the second overtime wound down, SI trailed 61–60. With less than 10 seconds left, Kurt Bruneman fired up a shot that bounced off the rim. Out of nowhere came Bill O’Neill, who pulled down the rebound, and put it back in to clinch the victory. Looking back at all the games he coached, Drucker called this a classic.

The ’Cats then rattled off seven more wins, including a 90–32 trouncing of Bellarmine. SI clinched the regular season WCAL title, whipping St. Francis. In the final regular game of the season, SI traveled to Serra hoping to be the first city team to go undefeated since Wilson in 1968. A hostile “Jungle” crowd helped the Padres move out to an early lead. Juan Mitchell led the ’Cats back to send the game to overtime. Unfortunately, Serra guard John O’Leary hit five free throws, and Serra pulled the upset, ruining the perfect season.

After the game, Drucker told the press: “It’s like getting the monkey off our back. When the guys left the locker room, I could see relief on their faces. We’re going to be all right.” SI’s colorful coach was prophetic.

In the WCAL semi-final playoff game the following week, Michael Bowie poured in 33 points, grabbed 14 rebounds and had three blocks as SI clobbered Mitty 70–40. Drucker’s crew was then paired up once again with Serra in the finals at USF. With 5,000 mostly SI partisan fans looking on, SI jumped out to a 47–36 lead before hanging on to nip the Padres 54–52, earning both revenge and the WCAL title.

SI then moved to the Central Coast Section Tournament. First up in Region I was San Mateo High, featuring star forward Sylvester “Sly” Pritchett. Holding Pritchett to eight points, the ’Cats pulled away late and won 84–75. Unfortunately, SI lost Dan Buick for the rest of the playoffs to a broken hand.

Facing Westmoor in the next round, Drucker worried about the loss of Buick and about his team growing overconfident, as SI had beaten the Rams earlier in the season. As they had all season, the team responded. Stepping in for Buick, junior guard Mike McEvoy recorded 19 points and five steals to lead the ’Cats to the Region I title.

Not satisfied, SI then advanced to the CCS final tournament at Maples Pavilion. In the semifinal contest, the Wildcats took on Region III champ Gilroy. Showing great leadership, Billy O’Neill led SI with 13 points in a defensive struggle as the ’Cats prevailed 57–40.

In the season finale at Maples Pavilion, SI faced Cupertino, led by All Northern California performer and future Los Angeles Laker Kurt Rambis. Rambis, a junior, had played superbly all season in leading Cupertino to a 27–1 record, nearly identical to SI's 28–1 record. In front of a sold-out crowd of 6,500, SI's front-line held the Pioneers' big man in check and the 'Cats matched Cupertino point for point.

As the game wound down to the 1-minute mark, Juan Mitchell committed his fifth foul, putting guard Mike Saladino to the line. Saladino missed the free throw, but Rambis tipped in the basket, giving Cupertino a 61–60 victory. Despite the CCS final loss, SI ended with an incredible record of 28–2. No St. Ignatius team had ever won so many games.

With the beginning of the 1975–76 school year, Drucker said good-bye to starters Mitchell, Bowie, Passanisi and Buick. The 1975–76 team returned McEvoy, O'Neill, Carella, Abela, Bianchi, Enright and Bruneman, who gained so much experience from the year before. Drucker now added Craig Wallsten, Alan Smoot, Chris LaRocca, Brad Levesque, Dan Hurley, John Skapik and sophomore Tony Zanze.

The fantastic season the year before led to high expectations. SI was picked as the fourth-ranked high school team in Northern California by the San Francisco Examiner. Without Bowie and Mitchell, Drucker knew this team needed to win with defense and good outside shooting.

SI started the pre-season right where it left off the year before with impressive wins over St. Joseph's, Marin Catholic and Washington. Despite a loss in the El Camino Tournament to Westmoor, SI finished the pre-season 12–1.

The 'Cats opened the defense of their WCAL crown against St. Francis. In what would be a typical, unselfish performance for this team, SI had five scorers in double figures, led by Mike McEvoy with 18 points. SI won 68–59.

SI continued its winning ways and eventually took on archrival Sacred Heart. Extracting revenge for a JV championship loss two years earlier, Bill O'Neill scored 20 points and SI whipped SH 68–56 at Kezar. After cruising past St. Francis and Riordan and edging Serra twice, an undefeated WCAL season came down to the final game against Mitty. A year earlier, the 'Cats had fallen just short of this goal. This time McEvoy and O'Neill saw to it that there would be no letdown. Combining for 34 points, the senior leaders led SI to win 68–50 and the perfect league record, a feat never before accomplished in the history of the WCAL.

The Wildcats went on to face Bellarmine in the WCAL Tournament's final game at USF. SI kept the Bells close in the first half, shooting just 11 for 31 from the field. In the second half, playoff hero Craig Bianchi came through, scoring 17 points to lead the 'Cats to their second straight title with a 47–40 victory.

Drucker's boys, now an amazing 26–1 returned to the CCS tournament to face a familiar opponent, Westmoor, which had an impressive 25–1 record. The Rams took it to SI early on, leading 30–27 at the half. The Wildcats then tightened their defense, holding Westmoor to eight points in the third quarter. McEvoy, Bruneman, and O'Neill once again came through with big shots down the stretch and the 'Cats, avenging their early season loss to the Rams, claimed the Division I title for the second straight season.

Next up for SI was Region III winner Carmel. Again playing great defense, the Wildcats allowed their lowest point total of the year, winning 49–31 and setting up another showdown with Kurt Rambis and Cupertino in the CCS final at Maples Pavilion. SI kept Cupertino's high powered offense under control in the first half, but simply could not generate enough offense. Eventually, Rambis, who would score 27 points and grab 12 rebounds, wore SI out and led the Pioneers to a second straight CCS title over a disappointed Wildcat squad.

The loss was especially tough for senior O'Neill. "We didn't really care about Carmel," O'Neill told Ray Ratto of the San Francisco Examiner. "I mean Carmel is where you go on your honeymoon. Nobody plays basketball there. But Cupertino was the big one for us."

SI's season did not end with the loss to Cupertino as it had the previous year. The 'Cats were invited as an "at-large" team to the Tournament of Champions. It was SI's first invite to the tournament since 1965 when the 'Cats were led by Bob Portman. As Drucker would lament later, his team was simply not able to get over the Cupertino loss. With an ill O'Neill playing only limited minutes, the 'Cats lost to Del Mar in the first round, playing their worst game of the season.

Showing typical pride, SI rebounded in the double elimination tournament by whipping St. Mary's of Stockton in the next game 81–46, giving the Wildcats their 29th win of the season and earning another shot at Rambis and Cupertino. Unfortunately, SI would have little left in the tank, losing to the Pioneers 64–55. The

loss did not erase the accomplishments of the long season, which included the WCAL title, the perfect conference record, the all-league performances of O'Neill, McEvoy and Bianchi and the tremendous showing in the CCS.

Over the 2-year span, SI had won 57 games and lost 6. From the inside play of Bowie, Mitchell and O'Neill to the outside shooting of Passanisi, McEvoy and Bianchi, they had played at a level of basketball that had not been seen before at the Prep. It may never be seen again.

Dan Tracey '77

Fr. Gordon Bennett, SJ, our chaplain, was young and approachable and got along with kids. Mike Silvestri helped me out after school with math problems I didn't understand in class. We played Riordan on Halloween night in 1975, and I recall Coach Haskell saying the SH and Riordan games were special because players from those teams would be our buddies after graduation. We beat Riordan 27–0 that night. The day before, Bob Drucker had predicted the score and had written it on the chalkboard in the coach's room.

1980s

The basketball team would win the WCAL title four straight times between 1981 and 1984, culminating in the greatest victory in modern times for any SI hoops team since the school won the state title in 1926.

In 1981, the team earned the nickname the "Cardiac 'Cats" after clawing their way to co-champion status in the WCAL. Seniors Jeff Thilgen, Frank Byrne, Tom Feeney, Rob Mascheroni, Hugh Campbell and Dean Klisura were seasoned veterans, having played varsity the previous year. Joining them were senior Ray Arata and juniors Mike Radonovich, Gino Cerchiai, David Hamilton, Damien Haitzuka, Rob Ennis and Paul Fortier. They led SI to an 11–1 pre-season finish and an 11–1 round-robin finish before beating Bellarmine (57–50). A 39–38 loss to Riordan forced one more game against the Crusaders. SI won that match 64–44 for the league crown before heading to Stanford's Maples Pavilion for the final two CCS games. There, SI beat Fremont 58–49 and followed with a 54–52 win over Gunn High School for the school's first CCS crown. Fortier, Thilgen and Mascheroni made the All-Tournament Team for their efforts.

The next year, Bob Drucker and assistant coach Shel Zatzkin again led the 'Cats to a WCAL title, with Drucker winning his 300th game along the way by defeating Riordan 54–47. Drucker and Zatzkin won again in 1983 after a 9–3 round-robin finish and a 50–44 victory over SH in the playoffs. The team won the first two CCS games but lost 46–45 to Fremont of Sunnyvale for the sectional championship.

In 1984, SI's starting-five included standouts Levy Middlebrooks, David Wilson, Dan Oyharcabal, Paul La Rocca and Joe Vollert who helped SI to a 10–2 pre-league record. The league games included a triple-overtime cliffhanger against St. Francis that SI won thanks to the inside domination of Middlebrooks. SI lost its final league game to SH to spoil an otherwise undefeated season, but the team had its revenge in the first playoff game against the Irish. It was déjà vu all over again when SI lost to Riordan and then came back to beat the Crusaders for the league crown. In CCS competition, SI beat Milpitas and Cupertino before besting Riordan once again for the sectional title.

At the Oakland Coliseum, SI won the Northern California Championship (formerly named the Tournament of Champions) by beating Rancho Cordova, St. Elizabeth's and Amador Valley. It was the first TOC win since Rene Herrerias led the Wildcats to that victory 29 years previous. Even though SI fell 65–45 to Long Beach Poly at the Oakland Coliseum on March 17 for the state title, it enjoyed a remarkable run and a phenomenal season to which future teams would aspire but never quite achieve.