



### **1971 VC Vikings**

Front row from left: managers Lynn McDonald and Don Slater, coach Keith Lane, AD Rodney Hartle and sports information director Barry Bagnato. Back row: Marty O'Connor, Bob Rogers, Bob Burns, Dave Niederriter, Tom Etzel, Mark Garbacz, Dave Hall, Denny Serafin, Jim Flaherty, Dick Eckert, Jim Caffrey and Tom O'Connor

February 2021 marked the 50-year anniversary of two of the three highest scoring individual games in Venango County history, including the record 56-point performance by Mike Emick against Rocky Grove.

Emick's output on Feb. 9, 1971, came only four days after Mark Garbacz bucketed 52 points on Feb. 5 to lead Venango Christian to a 107-30 romp over St. Mark Seminary of Erie. (Garbacz's school record was matched by Andrew Burda Jan. 25 in an 80-55 romp over Forest Area.)

Oil City drubbed the visiting Grove, 121-48, in Emick's signature outing for its highest scoring game ever.

It was reported in the next day's paper that Emick broke the school record of 45 points set the year before by Tom Mix against Corry.

Years later, it was discovered Al Foster held the school -- and, apparently, state -- record with 51 points (22 field goals) on Feb. 8, 1918, in a 105-14 scoring feast against Titusville. Foster's record

probably got lost in the shuffle since it also was lost in the story. It wasn't mentioned until the fifth paragraph of the six-graph account in *The Derrick*.

The headline read, "Titusville Is Swamped." The sub-head read, "Oil City High School Runs Up Huge Score (still its most lopsided decision ever) Against Queen City Boys." And mentioned in the first paragraph, "Attendance was good."

Foster went on to star at Grove City College, serving as team captain in 1924, and in 1922 converted a then-school record 13 of 14 free throws as the Crimson beat West Virginia, 31-23. He was later a member of the OCHS faculty.

But getting back to the Emick-Garbacz thing in 1971. Even though the schools are five miles apart, they never played, making for a sort of "virtual" rivalry. But there was the constant "we can beat you" chatter between them.

Oil City finished 21-4 under coach Bob Lynch and won its second straight Section 2 title; VC was 19-6 under coach Keith Lane. McDowell was the bugaboo for both squads; the Vikings lost to the Trojans three times during the regular season before finishing with a 63-61 loss to Elk County Christian in the Diocesan playoffs. The Oilers' lone game against McDowell, a 41-38 defeat, was closer than any of VC's results (10.6 avg.) with the Trojans, and came in the District 10 big school championship game.

Adding snap to the rivalry were the scoring outbursts by Garbacz and Emick, both well-built 6-4 kids. Even though he sat out 5:30 of the game against the Orioles, Emick hit 16 of 17 free throws to go with his 20 baskets to tie the Section 2 scoring record set Jan. 19, 1954, by Meadville's 6-9 Lloyd Sharrar against Franklin. Emick was a thorn in the Grove's side all year – he scored 22 points and grabbed 32 rebounds in a 94-39 victory earlier that season.

Garbacz had 23 baskets against St. Mark to break Dave Lynch's single-game school record. And even though he quickly relinquished the county scoring record to Emick, Garbacz still owns the national rebounding mark with 55 against East Forest on Feb. 22, 1970.

Emick, Garbacz, Foster, Lynch --- and now Burda -- are the only Venango County players to deliver 50-point games. Lynch, who later played professionally in Belgium, netted 24 field goals en route to his 50-point outing on Jan. 28, 1969, in a 108-75 win over George Junior Republic. Burda collected 22 baskets and was 4-for-10 from the line Monday.

The county girls' record is 48 points set in the fall of 1976 by Oil City's Trish Erickson.

Two Forest County boys have reached 50. West Forest's Mike Vermillion notched 54 against East Forest on Feb. 11, 1969, and East Forest's Doug Schneider counted 51 against Villa on Feb. 12, 1999. No Clarion County player apparently has ever hit 50 – although Redbank's Nick Smith came close with 49 against VC on Jan. 14, 2019 -- but a Clarion County *League* player has: Karns City's Bob Zanella corded 50 against Clarion on Jan. 16, 1979.

The state scoring record, by the way, is 114 points by future major league journeyman pitcher Pete Cimino (Twins, Angels) as his school, Bristol, stomped (pun intended) Palisades, 134-86, on Jan. 22, 1960. The 6-2 Cimino scored all 70 of his team's points in the second half.

The District 10 record is 63 points by Ricky Ladjevich of West Middlesex in 1990. Fred Riley of Clearfield owns the District 9 mark of 59 points in 1968.

Emick scored a still-standing school record 494 points in 1971 -- 60 ahead of No. 2 Ron McCoid's 434 in 1966 -- and then became a solid player for Mercyhurst College, graduating with a bachelor's degree in biology. He remained in the Erie area to raise a family and was active in youth basketball. He died after a brief but debilitating illness in 2017 at the age of 63.

Garbacz, then a Hawaii resident, was killed in a car crash while visiting Wyoming in 1995. He was only 42 years old. Garbacz was a computer specialist for the U.S. Army Support Command at the time of his death.

Garbacz finished the '71 season with 610 points, and is No. 3 on VC's all-time scoring list with 1,470 points, trailing only Maxx Rynd, 1,749 in 2011, and Lynch, 1,512 in 1969.



### **1971 Oil City Oilers**

Front row from left: Craig Weaver, Tom Evans, coach Bob Lynch, Dave Vans and Tom Cielepak.  
Back row: Don Clark, Ted Kaufman, Gerry Cunningham, George Sterner, Casimir "Kike" Barscz, Doug Dale, Mike Emick, Tom Current, Gary Davis, Lou Stack, Steve Flinchbaugh, Joe Best, Larry Rosenberg and Jon Settlemire

