

Clarence “Dutch” Burch, still considered to be Oil City’s “GOAT” in basketball, scored 757 points in his career, and you wonder if it could have been more.

Years ago I heard – was told? – that coach Hud Wells maybe didn’t handle Burch right as far as playing time was concerned during his sophomore season in 1947-48.

Burch saw zero varsity action as a ninth-grader. He was on a junior high team. And the next year, the future Pitt star and NBA draft pick – did not crack the starting lineup at Oil City from the get-go.

The Oilers lost three games in December, to Grove City, Erie Academy and a non-leaguer to Franklin.

Oil City’s starting lineup to start the season consisted of four lettermen: Dick Erickson (who would score a then-school record 216 points that season), Paul Schell, Jim McDaniel and Ed Gollsach. They were joined in the starting five by Jack Reed.

After the losses to Grove City and Academy, Wells decided to start Bob Fields with his four lettermen against Franklin. It is not known if Burch played any varsity those first two games, but he did see action against the Nursery, netting six points.

Then came a holiday break and when Oil City began play again in mid-January, Burch and Jack Vaughan were in the starting lineup.

Burch would go on to score 166 points that season. Could it have been more? And what if he had played varsity as a freshman?

When the Oilers won the Section 2 title in 1949-50, Burch’s senior year, the other “stars” of the team were Lou Kraft, a big guy at the other forward, and Jim “Red” Blaney, a leaper at center.

Those guys were on the jayvees as sophomores.

In his day, it was rare for anyone to score 1,000 points. The first player in District 10 to reach that milestone was believed to be Cochran’s Bruce Wagner in 1947.

Burch scored 361 points as a senior, the school record at the time. Some eight years later, the Oilers had two, three, four guys score 300-plus, led by Bob Hartz.

And, again, not only have they had only one 1,000 point scorer, but NO ONE log a 500-point season. Mike Emick, Tom Current, Ron McCoid and Morgan Hadley (Bill’s son) have been to the 400-point level.

Going back to what I heard years ago, apparently Wells didn’t use Burch maybe as often as he should have even after he joined the starting lineup.

All of that – playing as a freshman, seeing more PT as a sophomore – could have vaulted him to the 1,000 points level.

Makes you wonder.