



From the 1981 Oil Can: Rick Fletcher instructs his players during a timeout. Assistant coach Jodi Gault is to his left.

Girls basketball coach. Athletic director. Art teacher.

The late Rick Fletcher was all of these, but most of all he was an official.

Fletcher, 71, died unexpectedly Thursday. A 1970 Oil City High School and 1974 Thiel College graduate, he was with the Oil City Area School District until his retirement in 2017.

“He actually officiated what many consider the most important PIAA championship game in history – the rematch of Sto-Rox and Trinity the year *after* their epic brawl in Hershey,” said Tim LaVan, himself a math teacher and the athletic director at Oil City and a basketball official.

“Rick, Billy Hall (Oil City’s own) and L.J. Frisina (Corry guy) were given (the game) because Bob Lombardi *knew* that (it) would be controlled.”

Lombardi was then assistant executive director of the PIAA in charge of officials.

A fight broke out in the 2003 PIAA 2A state championship game between Sto-Rox of the WPIAL and Trinity out of District 3 (Harrisburg area). Trinity won the game, 66-49, and Sto-Rox was fuming.

It started when Sto-Rox's John Geiger was taking the ball out of bounds in front of the Trinity bench. After the official handed Geiger the ball, he turned around and began punching Trinity's Matt Wesner, who was seated on the bench.

**PIAA CLASS AA  
CHAMPIONSHIP**

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**Sto-Rox 62, Camp Hill Trinity 53**

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**CAMP HILL TRINITY (31-2)**

	FG-A	FT-A	Reb	PF	TP
Kevin Morris .....	4-20	1-2	4	1	11
Chris Crane .....	5-9	1-2	15	4	11
Chris Cassidy .....	0-2	1-2	2	0	1
Matt Wesner .....	4-8	0-1	3	2	9
Mike Walker .....	4-20	0-1	3	2	10
Jeff DeFrank .....	1-1	0-0	0	0	2
Steve Kindler .....	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Brian Morris .....	3-3	0-0	2	2	7
Leslie Dow .....	1-1	0-0	0	2	2
Matt Hirsch .....	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
<b>Totals .....</b>	<b>22-64</b>	<b>3-8</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>53</b>

  

**STO-ROX (27-3)**

	FG-A	FT-A	Reb	PF	TP
Mike Harper .....	2-6	0-0	4	1	4
John Geiger .....	3-9	10-11	9	1	18
Davon Huger .....	6-9	2-3	8	0	14
Adam DiMichele .....	8-19	0-1	13	2	16
Louie Parrilla .....	3-4	0-0	1	3	8
Tyrone Cole .....	1-1	0-0	1	1	2
Chuck Banks .....	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Aaron Adams .....	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
<b>Totals .....</b>	<b>23-48</b>	<b>12-15</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>62</b>

**(Team rebounds included in totals)**

Camp Hill Trinity .....	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>53</b>
Sto-Rox .....	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>62</b>

**Three-point field goals:** Camp Hill Trinity 6-26 (K. Morris 2-10, Walker 2-11, D. Morris 1-1, Wesner 1-4); Sto-Rox 4-9 (Parrilla 2-3, Geiger 2-4, DiMichele 0-2).

**Turnovers:** Camp Hill Trinity 8; Sto-Rox 12.

**Officials:** Larry Frisina, Rick Fletcher, William Hall.

**GIRLS' BASKETBALL**

Geiger said he was provoked by someone on the Trinity bench who grabbed him between the legs from behind.

The fight that broke out not only cleared both benches but involved Sto-Rox fans.

Later, after order was restored, Davon Huger, also of Sto-Rox, was ejected for swinging at a Trinity player.

The PIAA placed both teams on three years' probation and censured their coaches for the incident. The PIAA said there were discussions with the Giant Center to increase security for championship events.

Meanwhile, Huger and Geiger not only got their rematch but revenge, a 62-53 victory apparently without incident, in the game officiated by Fletcher, Hall and Frisina.

When LaVan came to Oil City in 1994-95 after four years in Pittsburgh Public Schools, Fletcher began recruiting him to officiate. "There were a few of us (including Steve Hensler) who would meet in Rick's art room each morning to talk about the game we had before," LaVan said. "My closest friends are officials and coaches I have met because Rick asked me to become a basketball official. I honestly can't imagine my life without what basketball and officiating has given me."

"I owe a great deal of gratitude to Rick – and to (his wife) Linda for sharing him with me and so many others he mentored," LaVan said.

Fletcher also helped LaVan as he took the job of athletic director at Oil City. "Rick was always a giver," LaVan said.

Fletcher had been athletic director since 2011.

But he was probably best known as a girls basketball coach, a position he held from 1976-84. The "Oilerettes" won three Section 2 titles and missed the playoffs only two times.

His tenure began as Trish Erickson was finishing her career and ending when Bridget Hale and Jane Hajduk were beginning their's. In between, he developed players such as Terri Babbitt, Jane Taylor, Joan and Karen Smith, Lynne Licht, Brownie Tarleton, Lynne Licht and Joan and Karen Pleger to name a few.

"(I was) so sorry to hear this news," said Joan Smith, a transfer who played on Venango Christian's state championship team in 1980. "He put a lot of time into his work as an educator and basketball coach. I played for him for just two years and had much respect for him as a coach and person...Funny story: we had two Joans, two Karens and two Smiths on the team at once, which caused much confusion as to who he was yelling at during games!"

What's more, Bill Mook, who built Franklin in a power, assisted Fletcher and Jodi Gault, one of Venango County's first stars in girls hoops, pretty much got her coaching start under him. Gault later won more than 500 games at Pitt-Johnstown.

"I have such great memories of coaching with Rick. He was the best. The players respected him. And we were successful. (It's) so very sad...and shocking." said Gault who offered her condolences to Fletcher's wife, Linda. The couple lost a son, Dustin, not that long ago.

Jessica Johns and Erika Miller McFarlane called him the most amazing/best art teacher ever. "Fletch is the reason my parents bought me a potter's wheel for graduation," McFarlane said on Facebook.

Another wrote, "I am an art teacher and potterer because of him and Alice (Walkowski). I hope they both know how deeply they inspired."

Dottie Valimont, a colleague who taught physical education in the district as well as coach the girls track team offered, "If you ever said, 'Rick, can you help me?' the response was always, 'What can I do?' One weekend at Siverly one year we all screened T-shirts for the students. Siverly staff and some parents got together on a weekend. Rick made the screen and showed us how to do it. Then (he) got an assembly line going and we had them hanging everywhere on the second floor to dry so the kids could wear them Monday!

"Those are the kinds of things (he did) through his time at the school. What a great teacher and friend," Valimont said.

And, said Missy Crocker, president of the Oil City Football Parents the last two years, "He was a great supporter of Oil City athletics."

### **Sidebar**

Fletcher was a mainstay on Oil City's Section 2 championship team as a senior in 1970. He blocked five layups in the first eight minutes of the regular season finale against Meadville, a 71-57 victory that clinched the title. He finished the game with 13 points and 23 rebounds.

The 6-3 Fletcher and the late Mike Emick, who would go on to have a big year in 1971, shared "big man" duties on this 21-3 team that lost to Strong Vincent in the District 10 Class A (big school) championship game. But the 6-4 Emick missed some playing time over the course of the season, especially in late February. He did return for the playoffs.

One of those February games came on the 18th when Tom Mix scored 45 points against Corry. (It was thought to be a school record, erasing the 44 Ron McCoid scored in 1966 – also against Corry. It was not known at the time but Al Foster scored an unheard of 51 points back in 1918. That was the school record, but it got lost in the shuffle. It didn't matter, though, since they didn't know it then, but Emick would score 56 points the next year against Rocky Grove. That's a school record that still stands.)

Anyhow, Fletcher grabbed 25 rebounds in the game that Mix scored 45 on 15 field goals and 13/15 shooting from the line.

The other players on the team were: Bob Stahlman Sr., John Wright, half-mile state champion Rick Weaver, Scott Morton, Dave Bemis, Doug Schwab, Larry Rosenberg, Don Clark, Jerry Cunningham, Tom Current, Bob Schott and Kike Barszcz.