

OHIO STATE FLASHBACK: MINNESOTA MASSACRE

Total Chaos

Minnesota Massacre Memories Still Fresh Even 25 Years Later

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State basketball fans might label the Buckeyes' dismal 31-point loss at Northwestern Jan. 25 as one of the most unsightly moments in the history of the program.

But those who still remember the unbelievable horror and chaos that occurred in a road game exactly 25 years earlier know the title of "ugliest game" will never be reassigned.

What started out as an important and heated affair between conference foes Ohio State and Minnesota that day — Jan. 25, 1972 — turned into one of the more violent and hideous exchanges in modern American sports.

Nearly everyone associated with that game can talk about its final, shameful moments like they happened yesterday. Just about all still have ready regret.

All except Mark Minor.

"Hey, it happened, it's over and we won the game," Minor, the team captain that season, told *BSB*. "I don't look back on it with any lingering feelings because we did what we set out to do. We won it and they couldn't take it. In fact, we really handled them. We controlled the game."

But control was exactly what was missing as OSU center Luke Witte was knocked to the Williams Arena court after a flagrant foul by Clyde Turner with 36 seconds remaining. Turner's teammate Corky Taylor came over and extended his right hand to Witte, already up on his knees, in an apparent attempt at good sportsmanship, then kneed Witte in the groin.

Accounts vary from there as mass hysteria ensued with fans streaming onto the court, players going at

one another, coaches trying to restore order, even writers trying to defend players and police rushing in from outside the arena.

"I was standing near the scorer's table because the foul just occurred and I can still remember their mascot ran onto the court and decked Minor and knocked him out cold," former OSU guard Allan Hornyak told *BSB*. "That's when I knew things were out of hand. I was stunned more than anything. Some people tried to rush down on me and were held up, but basically all hell broke loose."

A Day No One Would Forget

The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* recently recounted many facets of the game, which Ohio State won 50-44 when Minnesota athletic director Paul Giel effectively threw in the towel and conceded for his school.

Star Tribune staff member Dennis Brackin, who was in attendance, said, "It was a sickening skirmish, so sudden and so violent. I remember even now the wave of panic I felt when it seemed as if the stands would empty and violence would consume the arena."

As the two league unbeaten battled, the Williams Arena seats, all 14,300, were packed with frenzied fans. Hornyak recalls the school crammed another 7,000 into the adjacent hockey arena and set up a huge television screen. The school was more concerned with that record assembly leaving the area smoothly, especially with bitter cold conditions outside. That's why almost no security members were actually in the arena with the final seconds dwindling down.

But in looking back at the fracas, the subject of security measures was only a minor lesson learned. How the league handled the situation is what's still being disputed.

Wayne Duke, attending his first game after being appointed as the new Big Ten commissioner, witnessed the so-called "Minnesota Massacre." He suspended Taylor and Ron Behagen for the remainder of the season but handed down no other penalties to the school or the program.

"Obviously you hope something like this never happens again and hopefully college basketball learned a lot about the severity of prosecuting for a fight," Hornyak said. "What they did was not severe enough."

Duke planned to head to Columbus later that day to admonish OSU football coach Woody Hayes for tearing up down markers in a November game with Michigan. It turned out he had other fish to fry.



Luke Witte



COURTESY: OSU PHOTO ARCHIVES

CENTER OF CONTROVERSY — Former Buckeye center Luke Witte, pictured during his playing days, was one of the key figures in the 1972 basketball brawl at Minnesota.

Hatred Lingered

Hornyak wasn't alone in his disgust with the punishment levied. Ohio State coach Fred Taylor has gone on record saying he should have quit over the whole mess, especially since he felt then-OSU athletic director Ed Weaver didn't push for any further actions.

"Fred was a great coach and a better person and there's no doubt that game always bothered him," Minor said. "It went against everything he strived for in athletics."

Taylor is still fighting to overcome a near-fatal stroke suffered last year and was unavailable for comment. Minor and several players had lunch with him a few months ago and said he was returning to health, but the legendary coach has since suffered a relapse and reportedly is now in a nursing home.

Taylor, of course, never wanted his team to engage in histrionics on the court, but emotions were understandably high when Minnesota came to Columbus the next season (the two teams met just once in 1972).

"That following year I played with hatred," Hornyak admitted.

The fans gave Minnesota the silent treatment, not even bothering to boo during pregame introductions. But the OSU administration, it has been reported, acted cordially to its visitors and hoped only to avoid further trouble, even putting the team up in a hotel outside of town.

"For them to smile and make friends like that — no," Hornyak said of OSU's response. "I can't believe they acted that way. Then we go out and lose the game (by two points)."

But the Gophers have paid a price for their unthinkable behavior. Soon after the 1972-73 season, the NCAA investigated Minnesota's program and uncovered more than 120 rules violations during coach Bill Musselman's tenure. Musselman went on to the San Diego Sails of the ABA and embarked on a long coaching career in the professional ranks, including a successful stint as boss of the CBA's Albany



Fred Taylor

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Patrons and failed stops with the NBA's Cleveland Cavs and back in Minneapolis as the original coach of the expansion Minnesota Timberwolves.

"There's no doubt the investigation was because of the brawl," Musselman, now the coach at South Alabama, told the *Star Tribune*. "My personal opinion is that they questioned the type of people we were recruiting. But just look at what all those kids have done. Almost all of them graduated, and we didn't have bad kids."

Musselman went on to blame the officials for the fight, saying, "They let the game get out of hand." But many still believe Musselman himself fueled the situation by getting his team too charged.

"He was a fiery little guy," Minor said. "Maybe he had some sort of little-man complex going on."

Good Competition Gone Bad

During the 1971-72 season, Musselman posted a sign in the Gophers locker room that became the new team slogan: "Defeat is worse than death because you have to live with defeat."

Unfortunately, a very talented Minnesota team took it to heart.

"We can get out of hand with competition and by trying to win at all costs," Witte, now a minister at Forest Hill Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, N.C., told *BSB*. "Sports should be character-building. If we're putting kids in an environment where they aren't, then get rid of it."

Witte was coached to be a physical player, but, teammates said, he was no troublemaker. Yet he became a big and repeated target during the scrum and suffered a concussion.

Reports say that Behagen, who had fouled out of the game, came off the bench and added to the melee by throwing wild punches, as did Gopher teammate Dave Winfield, who of course went on to greater fame in Major League Baseball. Bob Nix helped perpetuate some of the bad blood at halftime by chirping right in the face of Witte, who, according to some reports, retaliated with an elbow.

"Actually," Witte told *BSB*, "I just put my hand up to say 'get out of here.' Nix had come up to me with both arms up right in my face. They scored right before halftime and he was real excited about it and obviously I wasn't."

As the game wore on, the intensity grew.

"They were chirping and mouthing pretty much the whole time," said Hornyak, the team's leading scorer that year (21.6) and now with the Belmont County engineering department in his hometown of Bellaire, Ohio. "They were getting their ass kicked and they didn't know what to do. Musselman had a lot to do with it — he was a goof."



Allan Hornyak

"To me, it was a racist act."

The three Buckeyes who were hospitalized after the game — Witte, Minor and Mark Wagar — were white. A majority of the Gopher players chiefly involved were black.

"Were there racial undertones? I don't know," Witte said.

Whatever spurred on the violence, it

didn't end until many players and their psyches were damaged.

But even with all the carnage, who could assume the brawl is still so omnipresent to fans of the sport?

"It was the most famous altercation in the history of college basketball," Corky Taylor told the *Star Tribune*, admitting the event still haunts him to this day.

"It never goes away," added Turner. "It's a permanent fixture."

Jim Brewer went on to a successful NBA career and now is an assistant coach for the Los Angeles Clippers. But even he has a hard time shaking the memory of that fateful 1972 day.

"I'd like to put the night of the brawl behind me, but it just won't go away," he said.

But while those former UM players regret the incident and being associated with the ugliness of the whole thing, none were quoted as saying they were sorry about their own actions.

Sorting It All Out

Corky Taylor, however, did send a letter to Witte several years ago and Witte followed with a friendly return phone call.

"I found the letter was a healing tool for him. I think it was pretty neat," Witte said from his home in Charlotte Jan. 26 as he prepared to watch the Super Bowl with family and friends. "We all do things that aren't very bright, especially when we're kids."

"In high school (in Alliance, Ohio), a friend and I threw pumpkins in the center of town, which looking back wasn't very bright and someone could have been hurt. "The guy that did that with me is now the police chief."

To Minor, apologies still don't erase what happened, or that the Buckeyes stood up to an extremely difficult situation by winning the game.

"I think it's one of our greatest victories," said Minor, who lives outside of Columbus in Dublin and works for DuPont Flooring Systems. "I mean, that team had unbelievable talent when you look back at it. We executed our plan and beat them pretty handily."

But OSU never recaptured their high level and had to settle for second place in the conference behind Minnesota, finishing 18-6, 10-4.

"That was the turning point," Minor said. "We lost some good players and just couldn't recover."

Witte and Wagar were too battered to play in OSU's next game, an 88-78 loss at Michigan four days later.

"That game ruined our season and it probably ruined a lot of guys' careers," Hornyak said.

"A thing like that takes a lot of wind out of your sails," Minor said. "It was an ugly, ugly thing."

When asked if Witte was deeply affected by the brawl, Hornyak said, "He never played with the same intensity. His attitude changed and he questioned a lot of things after that."

Witte, a 7-footer who went on to play professionally in the NBA and Europe for six years, said he can't discern whether the brawl took the basketball passion out of him, but he admitted it caused lots of questioning and soul-searching.

"To borrow a phrase from someone else," Witte said, "you can look back on events in your life and say 'so what' or 'so then.'"

"There probably were more negative things than positive looking at the bare facts, but I'm sure there was growth from that, too, as there was with myself. There are reasons for that event transpiring and maybe one of them was dealing with the idea of forgiveness."

OHIO STATE BASKETBALL MILESTONES

Minnesota Incident Among OSU Basketball Milestones

While 1972 was a landmark season for several reasons — the brawl most recognizable — just about every other season ending in 2 or 7 evokes clear memories for Buckeye basketball fans.

Here then is *BSB's* synopsis of seasons past in five-year increments dating back 40 years:

• **1991-92** — This is what Buckeye fans want to get back to. OSU won its second straight Big Ten title, then earned a No. 1 NCAA Tournament seed and came with-



Jim Jackson

in a hair of the Final Four. Jim Jackson led the way as the Big Ten MVP, but he got plenty of help from guards Mark Baker, Jamaal Brown and Jamie Skelton, forward Chris Jent and new center Lawrence Funderburke. Even freshmen Doug Etzler and Rickey Dudley produced when called on by coach Randy Ayers. OSU went 26-6 overall, 15-3 in league play and 15-1 at home.

• **1986-87** — First-year coach Gary Williams put some starch back in the program with his fiery courtside demeanor and request to have students moved back down near the floor. The Buckeyes responded by winning a surprising 20 games and becoming the team in the Big Ten nobody wanted to play (ask No. 1 Iowa, an 80-76 loser on its own court). But 1987 will be most linked to the outstanding career-capping season of Dennis Hopson, who fired in 29 points per game while shattering the school scoring record held by Jerry Lucas and earning Big Ten MVP honors.

• **1981-82** — The Buckeyes won 21 games and tied for second in the conference with a team led by Big Ten MVP Clark Kellogg, Larry Huggins, Granville Waiters, Tony Campbell and freshmen Troy Taylor and Ronnie Stokes. But this season is remembered most for one of OSU's most unfulfilling post-seasons — a first-round loss in the NCAA tourney to little-known James Madison.

• **1976-77** — There wasn't much to point to in this campaign as OSU finished 9-18 and dead last in the conference at 4-14. But the 1976-77 season marked the first one since 1958 that revered coach Fred Taylor wasn't

roaming the OSU sideline. Taylor resigned with a career mark of 297-158 (.653) and seven Big Ten titles, giving way to Eldon Miller, hired out of Western Michigan.

• **1971-72** — The Buckeyes licked their wounds from the Minnesota brawl for more than a month but could have earned a share of the conference title with a win at Indiana March 4. It didn't happen. As it turned out, the defending Big Ten champs couldn't reclaim that honor until 1991. Captain Mark Minor was voted team MVP and guard Allan Hornyak was named All-Big Ten.

• **1966-67** — The Buckeyes fared just 13-11 and 6-8 in the Big Ten, but the building blocks were being put in place for another Big Ten title, which OSU captured the following season. Junior Bill Hosket played center out of need and earned all-conference recognition with averages of 19.6 points and 12.6 rebounds. Captain Ron Sepic helped lead the charge.

• **1961-62** — The final season for what was recognized as the greatest group of players ever in school history. Center Jerry Lucas won Big Ten player of the year honor for the third straight year — the only one to do it — and left as the school's all-time leading

scorer, rebounder and field goal shooter. Other outstanding seniors that season included John Havlicek (also All-American), Mel Nowell and Bob Knight. The Buckeyes were



Jerry Lucas

26-2 and 13-1 in the Big Ten, winning the third of five straight titles, but lost again in the NCAA title game to rival Cincinnati, 71-59.

• **1956-57** — The Buckeyes were adjusting to life without two-time All-American Robin Freeman but still had an exciting team, led by captain Gene Millard and rebounder extraordinaire Frank Howard. OSU was 14-8 and fared 9-5 in the Big Ten, good for only a tie for third place, but a new and vital facet of the program was unveiled: St. John Arena. Millard scored the first hoop and OSU posted a 10-2 mark in the new \$4 million facility.

— Jeff Rapp

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FRED TAYLOR REMEMBERED: MINNESOTA MASSACRE

Incident Remains One Of Hoops' Darkest Days

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

As hundreds of friends, fans and former players gathered Jan. 12 in Columbus to pay their final respects to Fred Taylor, many reminisced about the glory days.

After all, in the early 1960s, Taylor's team won five straight Big Ten crowns, went to three NCAA Tournament title games in a row and won the 1960 national championship.

But there also was talk about the not-so-good times, including an incident that marks its 30th anniversary Jan. 25. It is perhaps the date which will live in infamy for the Ohio State men's basketball program: the day an ugly brawl matted the end of the OSU-Minnesota game and signaled the beginning of the end of Taylor's coaching days.

Anyone with even a passing interest in the history of Ohio State basketball knows at least something about the incident. The fact that the Buckeyes won the game 59-44 has probably been forgotten in a wash of memories about what occurred with 36 seconds left.

With a capacity crowd at Williams Arena cheering him on, Minnesota player Clyde Turner committed a flagrant foul on OSU center Luke Witte, knocking the Buckeyes' 7-footer to the floor. When Turner's teammate Corky Taylor extended his hand to the prone Witte in what appeared to be an act of contrition, Taylor jerked the OSU player up and promptly kned Witte in the groin.

That act quickly led to a melee involving players, coaches, fans and others as even the Minnesota mascot bolted onto the floor and delivered a punch that knocked OSU guard Mark Minor unconscious. The so-called "Minnesota Massacre" resulted in the suspensions of Taylor and teammate Ron Behagen for the remainder of the season and hospital stays for Witte, Minor and OSU teammate Mark Wagar.

With Witte and Minor unavailable due to the injuries they had sustained at the hands of the Gophers, the Buckeyes went on to lose their next game four days later and ultimately finished the season as runners-up in the Big Ten title race to Minnesota.

Fred Taylor immediately lobbied for the conference to severely sanction the Gophers program. When the league did virtually nothing outside the two player suspensions, Taylor implored his boss — then-OSU athletic director Ed Weaver — to make some sort of public indictment of the Gophers. Weaver never did and the incident left a sour taste for Ohio State's head coach.

"Fred was a great coach but an even better person and there's no doubt that game always bothered him," Minor said. "It went against everything he strived for in athletics."

Although he remained silent at the time,

years later Taylor admitted he was extremely disappointed the Minnesota program received little more than a slap on the wrist due to the incident.

"I still kick myself for not quitting then because that's what I felt I should do when nobody really even acted as though they cared," Taylor said years later. "I just didn't have as much enthusiasm after 1972."

Three decades later, the night continues to haunt some of the participants.

Corky Taylor has admitted the incident dogs him to this day. Likewise for former Minnesota teammate Jim Brewer, who went on to a successful professional playing career before becoming an NBA assistant coach.

Still vivid, too, is the bitterness harbored by many former Buckeyes.

"Obviously you hope something like that never happens again," said former OSU All-American Allan Horniak, a junior on the 1972 team. "Hopefully, college basketball learned a lot about the severity of prosecuting for a fight because what they did back then was not severe enough. I know I played them with a lot of hatred that next year."

Perhaps the only one of the principals in the incident who seems to have left it in the distant past is the one who was injured most severely. Witte sustained a concussion along with several cuts, mostly to his head and jaw, which needed 27 stitches to close. He finished out his college career the following season and wound up trailing only Jerry Lucas and Bill Hosket in OSU career rebounding average with 11.2 per game.

But after the Minnesota game in 1972, Witte never again seemed to play the aggressive style of basketball he had shown up to that point. Originally projected as a cinch first-round NBA draft choice, he tumbled all the way to the fourth round before the Cleveland Cavaliers took him. He spent three seasons riding the Cavs' bench and another couple of years bumming around for teams in the European league before his basketball career ended.

Now a pastor at Forest Hill Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, N.C., as well as the team chaplain for the NBA's Charlotte Hornets, Witte said he remembers very few details of the incident and has never watched a tape of it. He does, however, remember the aftermath.

"I went through a lot of stages in dealing with it," Witte said. "At first, I had people telling me I should sue (then-Minnesota head coach Bill) Musselman, I should sue the University of Minnesota, I should sue somebody. But I didn't want to do that. It wasn't because of forgiveness, it was because I didn't want to relive it."

He struggled with the incident and how to deal with it for nearly 15 years until he found himself being drawn to the ministry. He also found that he discovered that he had to find it within himself to forgive the players who had attacked him as well as

Musselman, for whom he had built up a hatred over the years.

"If you're going to be serious (about Christianity), you have to forgive what has gone on," Witte said. "I'll admit that it wasn't easy, but one day God put it in my heart to start praying for Bill Musselman."

In the years after the incident, Musselman telephoned Witte frequently but never to apologize.

"He'd call at all hours, sometimes 2 in the morning," Witte said. "He was usually coaching somewhere like Reno (Nev.) or Rapid City (S.D.), and he'd want me to come play for him. I'm sure that was probably Bill's attempt at reconciliation. He wanted to do something for me."

Musselman was gone from Minnesota just two years after the 1972 game against Ohio State when the NCAA uncovered more than 120 recruiting violations associated with his program. He later coached in four different professional leagues and won several CBA championships but never stayed more than two years in a row in the same place. Musselman died in May 2000 after a battle with bone cancer. He was 59.

"My only regret is that I just wish we could have sat down and really talked it out," Witte said. "I would have liked to

have had a chance to let Bill know that I forgave him."

Though Witte has given his life over to Jesus Christ, he knows he might never have found his calling had it not been for his old college coach.

"I went from a first-team all-conference player as a sophomore to nothing," he said. "In fact, for a few games during my senior year, I lost my starting position. I remember coming off the bench in a game at St. John Arena, and the fans were all over me. I was just 21 years old and I didn't want to deal with that."

"I told Coach Taylor that I didn't want to go into the game. He said, 'If you quit now, you'll quit everything in life. I'll never forget those words.'"

"I know at the time, I really didn't appreciate Coach for how he was trying to mold us," Witte added. "He was as much a man of integrity as I have ever met. He expected honesty, loyalty, faithfulness to the team and to each other and he gave the very same back to us. Coach always spoke of conviction, discipline and humility as the characteristics he wanted us to hold onto. He wanted us to be more than ballplayers; he wanted us to be men of integrity."

"He stopped me in the middle of a conversation one time and said a man looks another man in the eyes when he talks. I continually realize now how much he was teaching us about life each and every day that we were with him. He has left a mark upon many lives and I am very thankful that one of them was mine."



Luke Witte

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