



Cinderella Ball: A Look Inside Small-College Basketball in West Virginia

Bob Kuska

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For most of the twentieth century, West Virginia was a college basketball hotbed. Its major programs were a success, but perhaps even more successful was the West Virginia Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, composed of fifteen schools that rarely earned headlines but set many records and became an identifiable part of small town culture and a source of state pride. This ethos exists today in small town Kentucky and Indiana but struggles to survive in West Virginia. Part of the reason is the state's population decline since the 1950s. That, author Bob Kuska argues, along with the rise of cable and satellite TV and the major college basketball empire, stole the thunder--and the crowds--from these small town communities.

And yet, these teams play on in obscurity and still find success. Against the backdrop of West Virginia's great small college history, Kuska chronicles the day-to-day struggles and triumphs of one modern school, Alderson-Broadus College in Philippi, West Virginia. What happened to that team during a rags-to-riches yearlong stretch would've been remarkable at any level, let alone at a school with very low athletic department budgets and low visibility that makes recruiting talented players almost impossible.

As he alternates between coaches and players, past and present, Kuska contrasts the fan enthusiasm of the conference's early years with the apathy that plagues the teams of the twenty-first century. If sports fans can get past the media and the madness that has made college basketball increasingly similar to professional basketball in its self-indulgence and sensationalism, they are left with leagues like the West Virginia Intercollegiate Athletic Conference--scrappy, intelligent, and spirited--and still finding ways to succeed and thrive.

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