Lawrence County brings legendary tournament to the table

By Caleb Suggs
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"You’ll never experience anything like it," "The atmosphere there is incredible." These are all things you are likely to hear when the Lawrence County basketball tournament is discussed.

Basketball around here is a lot of fun and there are several great counties that put on some competitive tournaments. The Calhoun County tournament features some of the best coaches around and the Morgan County tournament has seen a wealth of girls' basketball talent go through it including Riley Northway at Brewster, Tara Dicks at Davisville and Miranda Taylor at Hartsville.

However, while all these basketball tournaments are great and fun, there is one tournament that stands out above the rest. The Lawrence County basketball tournament is the best in the county. "I've coached in Fame coach Gary Steadman's Tuck at Danville and Moriarty at Northway at Brewer, Tara Dicks at Hartselle. I've had the best games and players to work with," said Hall-of-Fame coach Royal Carpenter.

"But he's right. He has me beat in runner ups," said Carpenter jokingly to Steadman. "He's got me second more than me." Carpenter said. "I remem- ber being win, we ended up winning in overtime." Lawrence, "But he's right. He has me beat in runner ups."

"I won it five times with Lawrence County, Hatton, East Lawrence and R.A. Hubbard. The tournament takes place every January. Next year's will take place at Hazelwood High School.

Another example was the very next game when we played Lawrence County. The Red Devils defeated the Chiefs twice during the regular season, but in that county final's game it was the Chiefs getting the convinc- ing win. "We beat them over there and then we got them again over here," Carpenter said. "But when we played them in that county champioship they ran us out of the gym."

The current format of the tournament sees four teams, both boys and girls, compete in a semifinal and final tournament. Those current four teams are East Lawrence, Lawrence County, R.A. Hubbard and Hatton. Also, recently the tournament swaps around from each of the four schools, with the excep- tion of R.A. Hubbard, who elects to have theirs at the historic Hazelwood High School gym.

However, in the past the tournament used to be twice as large. Seven teams used to compete in a week-long tournament to decid- ed who would be champi- on in Lawrence County. Along with the four current schools of Lawrence Coun- ty, East Lawrence, R.A. Hubbard and Hatton, three other schools were fea- tured with those being Ha- zelwood, Speaker and Mt. Hope. "There were seven schools," said Steadman. "We started on Monday night and went all the way to Saturday."

The tournament also used to be played at the Lawrence County Colise- um. "When I played and he played it was at Hazelwood because it was the biggest gym at the time," Carpenter said. "I know it came to Hutton once in 1966 but I don't know what happened after that." Carpenter would con- tinue. "In 1971 the tourna- ment came out here to the coliseum," Carpenter said. "And there were some very good tournaments out here for 20-25 years."

It didn't matter who you were or what your record was, because on any given night you could suffer a loss. "Let me tell you this. I can just that for a fact," Carpenter said. "I remem- ber we hadn't even won a ball game all year and we ended up winning the thing. I mean you better be ready to play."