Note: (Well known sports writer Sonny Yates in 1982). This John Jacobs is the Great, Great Grandson of Allison Jacobs in the Bolton / Friendship documentary.

Freeport, Malone game revives memories

By SONNY YATES

An important local sports date comes up this Friday night when the Malone High Tigers pay a visit to Freeport for a District basketball matchup with the Freeport Bulldogs.

Malone. The name clearly signals tradition in the sport of basketball. And here is why I have always remembered this legendary basketball team.

I recall vividly the first time that I actually saw a basketball player slam dunk a basketball in a regular game.

Back in 1955, I had read about the exploits of Bill Russell, a junior for the national collegiate championship University of San Francisco Dons. Russell would later lead his college team to a pair of NCAA titles and then move on to the pro ranks and pace the Boston Celtics to eight straight NBA Championships.

You notice I said "read about", or rather I saw him dunk it through a Sport magazine photograph. I did not actually see Russell slam-dunk the basketball in a game for there was no television. In fact, I never saw a basketball game on television, college, or pro, until my college days of the early sixties at the University of Houston. By then I was watching in person.

You notice that I vividly recall the first time I actually saw a basketball player slam dunk a basketball in a regular game. In person, that is. Up front, and personal as I always tried to be.

It happened at the Thomas D. Bailey Gym, here is DeFuniak Springs, a place that some locals now dastardly refer to as the "Middle School Gym". Never. It should always be referred to as the Thomas D. Bailey Gym, if not for the individual who served as the Walton High principal and superintendent, then at least for its place as a facility, along the sports history trail of DeFuniak Springs.

It was late February of 1956 and Thomas D. Bailey Gymnasium was the host site of the annual Northwest Florida Conference Basketball Tournament.

Port St. Joe and Walton had good teams. But when the Orange and Black took the floor, everyone paid attention. It was Homer Duel's Malone High Tigers.

And there with about 100 left on the warmup clock before the first game in that 1956 tournament, I saw it. Ten feet away. And it rattled my every bone as I watched 6-6 Malone center John Jacobs slam dunk the basketball like I used to hit dad's trash can with a squashed piece of adding machine paper!

Ahhhhh! That was it! That's what Bill Russell had done on the pages of Sport magazine. This February 28th will mark the 35th anniversary of my first sighting of the slam dunk. I will see many before that date this year. But never one like the first one.

And when I returned to DeFuniak Springs last July 1, I asked a friend, "Who has the best basketball team in the Panhandle?" The reply: Malone. Some things never change. And I wonder whatever happened to John Jacobs?