

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 1:00 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 in *Sport* magazine.

I have seen over 800 basketball games, including high school, college and professional since that 1956 year and the

sport has now become my entire lifestyle. I've seen Dr. J (Julius Irvin) go skyward with the rejuvenation of the air game in the seventies that is now so prevalent with a Michael Jordan.

But I will never see the equal of that pregame warmup slam dunk that Malone's John Jacobs did on that February night in 1956.

And when college basketball outlawed the slam dunk at the end of Lew Alcindor's (Kareem Abdul Jabbar) freshman season at UCLA in 1967, I paused long enough to remember John Jacobs and Malone in 1956.

You may wonder how the Thomas D. Bailey goal survived the Jacobs slam dunk assault. But there was no assault. He soared so high and positioned his arms and lanky fingers so well that he slammed the basketball through the net without ever touching the rim. Perfection! Just like 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 what ever happened to John Jacobs?