

1978 Basketball Team – C.I.F. Champions

“First Ever in Phantom History”

Every high school athlete's dream is to win their league and be crowned CIF champs. For the hundred of schools that made that their goal each year, only one school in each division accomplishes that dream. The 1978 Varsity Basketball team of Cathedral High School achieved that dream and won the 1-A CIF Championship, the first CIF basketball championship in Cathedral High School history.

In his first coaching job at Cathedral in 1977, John Nuccio, who had transferred from La Salle High School, inherited a team of players that year that individually had great talent, but had yet to mesh as a team. They were very inexperienced and lacked consistent varsity level play, but the athleticism to compete was evident. The team was only returning four players, James Hubbard, Manuel Ayala, Estanislao and Dave Walls. Only

Hubbard and Walls had varsity experience coming into the season.

The 1977 team set the seed for their title the following year. It was a year of learning for a new coach that needed to know the caliber of his players, so he experimented with different starting line-ups during the pre-season that included mostly seniors. But by the start of league play, the coach inserted two talent sophomores in guards Ray Owsley and Chris Brussard to go along with Hubbard, Walls and Bailey. The coach created an up-tempo and a fast break style for the Phantoms. They placed third in league that year and lost in the playoffs in the first round to El Monte High School.

With a year of experience under his belt in coaching the varsity team, Coach Nuccio knew he had the talent, but his challenge was to build a strong team concept. “I toughened our summer league schedule and

our preseason tournament schedule the next year in order to prepare us for the playoffs”, stated Nuccio. The pre-season games included three tournaments, the Phantoms played 2-A, 3-A and 4-A teams that probably prepared them to their road in winning the Santa Fe League. Their pre-season record was 8 – 4, taking 3rd place in the St. Monica and Alhambra tournaments and earning the Consolation Championship in the Nogales Tournament. Many basketball high school coaches and alumni believe that those games prepared them not only to win their league, but a shot at the CIF championship.

In the preseason games, the team still needed to improve their play in defense and rebounding in order to meet their potential and reach the next level of play. “Our big four, David Walls, Eric Bailey, Ray Owsley and Chris Broussard





The Team

By the time the league started, Coach Nuccio assembled a starting line of talent that could compete with any team in the CIF and had the team playing ball with an “up tempo offensive” and a strong emphasis on defense.

Leading this all-star squad was the team’s Most Valuable Player, senior **Eric Bailey** at 6’6” that led the team in scoring and rebounding. He averaged over 20 points a game and had many games of 30 plus points. He may go down as one of the greatest basketball players Cathedral has ever produced. He had a great jump shot from any where on the court and was the go to player especially in big games. Eric Bailey made 1st team all-CIF and was selected to the All-Central Los Angeles City team. The other senior in the starting line up was **Dave Walls**, a 6’4” forward who averaged 17 points a game and a great leaper that was second on the team in rebounding. He was a great low post player and shared the offense and defense with Bailey. He usually took the best big man on defense. Walls was an all-league player and named to 2nd team All-CIF team.

Probably the most talented player on the team was junior **Ray Owsley** according to his coach. At 6’2” Ray Owsley was a great point guard, who possessed the quickness, speed, power and the ability to run the break or play the half court game. He averaged 15 points a game and could get his shot off against any guard in the city. Only a junior, his talents grew as the season progressed and became unstoppable. He made all-league and 1st team All-CIF.

all wanted to score and were uncomfortable with each other. We had excellent bench players that would have started on any division high school team and they didn’t get to much playing time”, recalls Coach Nuccio. The team was not on the same page and their play showed it as they lost to inferior teams in the preseason.

The team turned around the 1978 season with a lost to Wilson of Hacienda Heights in the first round of the Nogales Tournament. It was an embarrassing lost that led to team bickering on the court and after the game. After the game, the team and the coaches met to discuss the problems of the team and then the coaches left and the players had a team meeting. The results of the meeting led to the team winning the rest of the games in the Nogales Tournament and capturing the Consolation Championship by beating Las Vegas El Dorado, who was ranked 4th in Las Vegas and winning 20 of 21 games for the remainder of the season.

The next juniors were shooting guard **Chris Brussard**, who was all-league and probably the overall best athlete on the team besides Ray Owsley. With his speed and Owsley quickness they transformed the team into an “Up Tempo Full Court Team”. Lastly, **Sergio Garcia**, 6’3” forward who was a major role player that always guarded the toughest offensive player from the other team. He was a very smart and competitive player, who didn’t back down from a challenged. He loved getting to the rim off the dribble. He was the key to the success of the team and did all the little things that sometimes went unnoticed.

The team was only seven players deep during games unless they blew out opponents. The two reserves that came off the bench,





who made a great impact were Senior Ruben Corral, a 6'3" first guard/forward off the bench who played great defense. The next reserve was Senior Sean Colon a 6'0" second guard/forward off the bench and was aggressive on the court. Both reserves would have started on most teams. The rest of the seniors on the team were Eddie Miller, Henry Pena, Manuel Martinez, and Vincent Valenzuela. The juniors were Brian Hill and Rodney Mitchell.

The Phantoms dominated the league with their talent and team work and played like potential champions. The team had won all their games by an average of 10 points until they lost to St Monica on their home court. Phantoms had a five point lead going into the fourth quarter but a couple of Phantom traveling calls cost them two baskets and we missed key free throws down the stretch with the great Leon Wood that could not be handled (he shot 10 plus free throws in the last quarter). With that

lost, St. Monica ended Cathedral's 10 game win streak as both teams were crowned league champs. The Phantom lost assisted the team to play flawlessly for the remainder of the season.

Playoffs

In the first round of the playoff the Phantoms routed Tehachapi High school 70 – 50. Their scoring machine continued in the second round as they once again won by 20 points against Carpenteria. In the quarter finals, they faced a tough Imperial High team, but nothing was going to stop the Phantoms as they won 74 – 51 to set up the semi-final game against # 1 seeded Banning of Indio.

After beating Banning 67-58 and stopping their 19 game win streak, the Phantoms finally reached the CIF finals. The Phantoms played arch rival St Monica in the 1-A Championship game with a chance for redemption and avenge their only league lost. The game against St. Monica would be a game to remember in the history of Phantom athletics.

The 1978 CIF Championship Game

The CIF 1-A championship game was played at the Long Beach Sports Area that featured the four seeded Phantoms against the Santa Fe League Co-Champions, St. Monica. This match-up was widely anticipated by basketball fans throughout Southern California. It would feature two of the finest high school basketball players in Southern California history in Eric "Flash" Bailey from Cathedral and CIF Division One "Player of the

Year" and future NBA basketball player and NBA referee, Leon Wood.

After defeating Banning in the semi-finals, the Phantom entered the championship game nervous, but confident. The team knew that if they could handle the talent level of Banning, they could easily take care of St. Monica. The Phantoms played one of their finest games of the season as they dominated St. Monica throughout the game in spite of Leon Wood's 37 points. Eric Bailey scored 35 points and had 15 rebounds as he was named MVP of the game. David Walls had 21 points as Ray Oswley and Chris Broussard both had double figures while Sergio Garcia kept Woods under his scoring average of 42 points. Cathedral won 84 –73 to become the first Basketball I-A C.I.F. Champion in the history of the school. GO PHANTOMS!

