

'It's all about the team'

Written by Deb Egenberger

Thursday, 19 August 2010 13:15 - Last Updated Thursday, 19 August 2010 13:18



As a member of 1962 state championship team, Phillips has never separated life from the game.

The halls at school buzz with excitement this morning.

Even the streets of Gothenburg are alive as every conversation centers around tonight's district final basketball game in Kearney.

These Swede boys are the dream team of the state in Class B, referred to as the "Hinkle Hustlers."

Riding on tonight's matchup is the first trip to the state tournament in 13 years.

It's No. 1 against No. 2. Winner goes to Lincoln. Loser sulks at home.

There's enough community pressure and expectation to make a kid sick.

'It's all about the team'

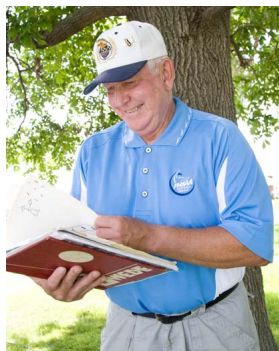
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Instead of laughing and learning at school with the other four star players of the 1962 Swede basketball team, George Phillips lays at home in bed.

His stomach ache is likely caused by a bad case of nerves.

The rivalry between Cozad and Gothenburg began long before George Phillips moved to town in the fifth grade.



It remains strong and consistent through nearly five decades since Phillips left in 1962.

A combination of that rivalry, a dedication to team and a desire to prove the No. 1 ranking drags Phillips out of bed for a basketball game.

There's no way Phillips and best friend Kenny Williams, sidelined for two games by a sprained ankle, are going to miss this one.

Cozad beat the Swedes in the eighth game of the season to take the Southwest Conference title. Players vowed to coach Herman Hinkle, their community and each other it would not happen again.

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Before a packed house in Cushing Coliseum in Kearney, the Swedes defeat the Haymakers 64-53, heading to the state tournament with a 16-1 record.

The Kearney Hub reports: "Phillips, though of chunky build, was the night's most impressive ball player. His quick hands, sudden bursts of speed and floor generalship were most impressive factors in the Swedes' victory."

Gothenburg gets past Syracuse 69-66 in the first round of the Class B state boys basketball tournament. Then the Swedes down Seward 62-58 to advance to the finals for their first shot at a state championship.

None of the five starters stands out on this team, especially during the state title game.

Blair's burly bunch towers over the Swedes but it's determination that wins in the end.

After trailing 29-28 at halftime, Jerry Tetley scores 11 of his team-high 21 points in the third period to put the Swedes up 47-46 heading into the final quarter.

Then Ron Hudson drops in nine points in the fourth period to boost Gothenburg.

Tetley and Fred Williams sink six free throws between them in the closing minutes to ice the game and secure the championship trophy.

"It's all about the team," Phillips says.

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Forty-eight years later, that state championship is nothing but a fond memory to George Phillips.

It's still all about the team, though. Someone else's team.

After a brief stint as a Loper football player at Kearney State Teachers College—now University of Nebraska at Kearney—Phillips enlists as a air crewman in the U.S. Navy.

He's an aviation electronics technician flying Blackbird reconnaissance missions in DaNang, Vietnam.

"It was a crazy time," he says. "The '60s was a crazy time."

Phillips leaves the Navy briefly after the Vietnam conflict, then returns.

He works his way through the ranks, receiving a field commission in 1979 at Andrews Air Force Base.

Fifteen years as enlisted, 13 years commissioned.

Retirement came in 1991 after reaching the rank of lieutenant commander.

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A bungalow in Titusville, FL, serves as a stationary home for Margie and George Phillips, married 16 years ago.

A comfortable motor home is their home on the road between May and October.

Although there are no relatives living in his hometown, there are dear friends and beloved team members who bring Phillips back to Gothenburg often.

"They say you can't go home," Phillips says, "but you always

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