

the edge

SUMMER SPORTS EDITION JULY

HOOPS HEAVEN

Former and current high school basketball standouts make their way to this weekend's Oberlin Outdoor Basketball Festival | Page 4

Past meets present with an added flavor

Oberlin's outdoor basketball festival serves as a meeting spot for former area standouts

By **MATT GOUL**
Morning Journal Writer

Legends Night

The festivities begin tonight with a Legends Game 7 p.m. at Langston Middle School in Oberlin. Any former players interested can still sign up this morning by calling the Oberlin Recreation Department at (440) 775-7254.

THE past meets the present in a basketball fantasy tournament that becomes reality every July in Oberlin. That annual reality starts tonight with a legends tournament and continues through Sunday at the Park Street Park, where former area high school standouts take to the blacktop for the 26th annual Oberlin Outdoor Basketball Festival. Not since their playing days have they felt nerves like this.

The tournament, which director Connie Ponder said was renamed to a festival because it's more than a tournament, has a pick-up game feel with five-on-five rules. Names that were prominent with high school basketball around Oberlin, Sandusky and Avon reappear like apparitions for a weekend. Even some players from farther

away, like Sandusky, make their way to the two outdoor full courts in Oberlin.

Remember DeMar Moore?

He not only was a standout at Sandusky High School in the mid-1990s, he also played three seasons at Bowling Green.

His presence is felt, as are a few more recent Blue Streak notables, like Kelsey Williams and Cole Prophet.

Not impressed?

The list of those who've played in the Oberlin tournament include former Bowling Green standout and current Washington Wizard Antonio Daniels. Former Midview star Anthony Stacey and Oberlin product Luther Clay, who played on Jim Harrick's Rhode Island team that advanced to the Elite Eight, also have been a presence.

This year, players with overseas experience and one who played in the NBADL will make their way to Oberlin.

"It's a lot of competition," Moore



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Oberlin High School senior Morgan Jones defends former Oberlin standout Jeff Chambers at the Park Street Park in Oberlin. Both will play on The Big O, a team of Oberlin and Sandusky players, at this weekend's 26th Annual Oberlin Outdoor Basketball Festival.

said, "especially Oberlin. It's one of the best ones."

When they arrive, they likely will be

greeted by a former Oberlin point guard named Jeff Chambers. For four

years, until 1998, he crossed over

countless opponents in high school and does it once more for a summer-

time treat. So does Morgan Jones, who

will be a senior this fall at Oberlin. Like Chambers, Jones is a point guard and

will earn his fourth varsity letter in

basketball.

That's where past meets present.

IF making the high school team was tough enough 10 years ago, try cracking Mike Young's roster.

Young was a senior when Chambers was a freshman at Oberlin. Thirteen years ago, they'd call that team loaded, but it could be argued their high school squad had nothing on what they'll step on the court with this weekend. Young and Chambers are joined by Moore and a handful of former standouts from Sandusky. The team that combines Oberlin talent with Sandusky talent is called The Big O, bearing the nickname of its sponsor, NFL All-Pro Orlando Pace. The Big O has been a presence at the Oberlin tournament for the entire decade. The Pace-sponsored team brings talent together, which is what the tournament does.

Without it, many players wouldn't get a sniff of the court in the way they once did. Chambers suffered a knee injury in 2000 that derailed his efforts of playing in college, but he hopes to catch on with a semipro team. Others are out of college, but many have seen their last days of playing organized basketball.

"This is it," said Greg Thomas, an Oberlin High player in the mid-'90s whose been playing in the summer tournament ever since.

The tournament champion for the last three years has been Hotcards.com, a Cleveland-based team sponsored by Columbus

Woodruff II. Like most of the teams that enter from outside of Lorain County, Woodruff's team has a few players with overseas experience, but his secret is a pool of talent from Cleveland Heights.

That pool includes Aaron Nixon, who was the Big West Player of the Year at Long Beach State as a senior in 2007, and Darren Jones, who is currently at West Virginia State. Eric Smith, who played in the NBADL, is also on Woodruff's team, which plays in five summer tournaments per year.

"The Oberlin tournament is probably one of the biggest ones," said Woodruff, whose team just won the Sandusky tournament.

The last team to beat Hotcards in Oberlin was The Big O.

EACH year, Ponder just hopes it doesn't rain. Ponder, the director of the Oberlin Recreation Department, has run the summer basketball tournament since 1990. She's been a part of it, in some way, since the tournament began.

She and Ian Yarber, a former Oberlin High basketball player in the '80s, are the organizers behind the scenes. They've been responsible for the festival's growth, to the point last year that a legends game was added for Friday night before the tournament begins.

"I think what stepped the tournament up was using certified officials," Ponder said.

Who's playing?

A look at confirmed former and current high school basketball players who will participate in this weekend's Oberlin Outdoor Basketball Festival:

- AVON**
- Steve Vega — 1998
- ELYRIA**
- Danny Martin — 1997
- OBERLIN**
- Jeff Chambers — 1998
- Aaron Gibbs — 2007 (moved to North Carolina)
- Morgan Jones — 2008
- Chris Reynolds — 2002
- Mark Robinson — 1993
- R.C. Robinson — 2004
- Greg Thomas — 1995
- Mike Young — 1995
- SANDUSKY**
- DeMar Moore — 1995
- Cole Prophet — 2008
- Jason Prophet — 2003
- Issian Redding — 2002
- Quinn Redding — 1998
- Kelsey Williams — 2007
- Greg Garrett — 2005
- ST. MARY**
- Patrick Phillips — 2002
- Players who played last year and may play in this year's tournament:*
- ADMIRAL KING**
- Danny Hoskins — 2006
- Doug Taylor — 1997
- CLEARVIEW**
- Eric Gilbert — 1997
- Kenny Gilbert — 2000
- ELYRIA**
- Robert Nelson — 2003
- OBERLIN**
- Andrew Gibbs — 2001
- SOUTHVIEW**
- Adriene Rodriguez — 2006

* Note: Rosters are not final until they are submitted before the first game.

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For the first few years, they weren't in place and trash talking elevated because of it. In 1989, the year before Ponder took over organization, she made contacts with high school and college officials. Since then, the tournament has used them.

"Not everybody can ref streetball,"

Ponder said cautiously.

But that's what the tournament brings, she said. It's a blend of streetball and organized basketball. For a few years, the event was sanctioned by the NCAA, which allowed college athletes to participate and be protected under NCAA rules.

The sanctioning lasted until 2000 and college players are now on their own when it comes to getting NCAA permission.

"It seemed like it was important,

but it was just so many hoops," Ponder said.

She has enough work in front of her.

With five days to go until the tournament begins, Ponder's desk was flooded with paper and notes. Her rolodex is one of the few remnants of stability for the week in her office.

With less than a week to go, she's still trying to confirm participation in the 16-team tournament. On many fronts, it's a thankless job, but many who take the court have their appre-

ciation — especially the Oberlin natives who otherwise wouldn't get to take the court with the feeling they've lost since graduating from high school.

Even someone like "Pop" Spencer, who moved to Louisville, Ky., when the Ford plant closed in Lorain, can't help but return each year for the tournament with a team of his players.

"I can't say no to her," Spencer said. "She's like family."

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