

Former Saginaw Arthur Hill coach produces book on 'greatest basketball rivalry'

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Former Arthur Hill basketball coach Dave Slaggert wrote a book documenting more than 100 years of the Saginaw High-Arthur Hill boys basketball rivalry, which ends this season. Hugh Bernreuter | MLive.com

SAGINAW, MI – When the Saginaw High Trojans and Arthur Hill Lumberjacks play their final regular-season game, Dave Slaggert expects to have a lump in his throat.

It is similar to the lump in his throat while trying to document the oldest high school basketball rivalry, one that Slaggert contends is the greatest rivalry in the state.

"That last game will be emotional, bittersweet," Slaggert said. "I love the rivalry. I was blessed to have coached in the rivalry, coached in those big games. That last game will be exciting, but it will be tough to think that there will never be another 'Sweet, Sweet Black and Gold', never the pomp and ceremony that these games had, never the electricity and passion that the fans had.

"I'm also hopeful and have a good spot in my heart for Saginaw United, and the hope that comes with that. But as far as Saginaw High playing Arthur Hill after this season ... never again."

So Slaggert, who grew up a Saginaw High fan and became the Arthur Hill boys basketball coach, set about compiling, documenting and researching more than 100 years of basketball, bringing together a rivalry that ends this season with the merger of the two boys basketball teams with the opening of Saginaw United.

"The whole premise of the book is to keep that story alive and pass it down to future generations so that tomorrow's kids a 100 years from now will know about this wonderful rivalry, these great players, the iconic coaches and the epic games," Slagger said. "I researched it back to the beginning of the rivalry, back to 1910. I put my heart and soul into it and interviewed as many coaches and players that I could."

The book "Remember the Trojans & the Lumberjacks" can be pre-ordered, with the final chapter waiting to be written after the final regular-season game on Friday, Feb. 16, at the Dow Event Center. There is the potential for the teams to meet in the regional tournament if both win their district titles.

Slaggert listed every all-state player in the history of the two programs, along with the teams that reached the quarterfinals and beyond since the Michigan high school playoffs began in 1917.

"I wanted to give something back to the community because I felt like I was part of the whole story," Slaggert said. "I grew up watching the great ones. My dad took me to every Saginaw High game. I saw every one of Ernie Thompson's games his senior season, including the state championship game. I saw Craig Dill in his heyday. I had heroes like Gary Lee and Webster Kirksey.

"I've been immersed in the rivalry my whole life. I grew up on the East Side on Glenwood. As older people, we value and want to celebrate history. You just want all of this to be remembered. I wanted this to be a composite picture showing the eras of unbelievable success."

After doing the research, Slaggert contends the Saginaw High-Arthur Hill rivalry is the greatest in the history of Michigan high school basketball. Slaggert was the Arthur Hill junior varsity boys basketball coach from 1973 through 1978 and the head coach from 1996 through 2001.

"I'm probably biased, but you show me two schools from the same town that have to play each other in districts almost every year but still get to the quarterfinals 47 times," Slaggert said. "So there have been 107 years of playoffs, taking away two for Covid and the war in 1943. That's 47 quarterfinals in 105 years ... almost half."

The teams have reached the semifinals 36 times, with 18 appearances in the finals. Saginaw High has won six state titles, Arthur Hill two.

"It's a town with just two major high schools accomplishing that with players like Jason Richardson, Draymond Green, Anthony Roberson, not to mention people who distinguished themselves like Bob Devaney, LaMarr Woodley, Bill Frieder, Curt Young ... all those people played a part in the rivalry.

"I contend it's the greatest basketball rivalry in Michigan high school history, and I could have a good debate with anyone in the state, especially when you add the electricity and passion of the community when it came to these two programs."

The book is 672 pages long and costs \$40 if picked up at the Saginaw Community Foundation office. Shipping costs an extra \$12. It can be pre-ordered at [Saginawfoundation.org](https://www.saginawfoundation.org). Any money beyond the cost of publication will go toward a scholarship at the Saginaw Community Foundation.

"I just wanted to pass this story on, let it be a source of community pride so people can look back and remember these great players, remember these great games," Slagger said. "People 20 or 30 years from now can look back with a smile on their faces and a sense of pride. It's been a labor of love.

"It's a lot of pages, but the print is big for challenged eyes like mine, plus there's almost 800 historic pictures from as far back as 1905. It's not just text. It's a ton of pictures ... a scrapbook of the great players, coaches and games.

"It's a big story, an important story."

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