

# THE JERSEY JOURNAL

## Book On Basketball's 'Wonder Teams' Recount Hudson History

*By Harvey Zucker, Assistant managing editor*

His high school basketball teams won 159 straight games over a five-season period. Thousands of fans would pack the stands in Hudson County and elsewhere to see his teams play.

The coach had a strict code of ethics and fairness and a reputation for playing clean that was known throughout the area. And at one point, he refused to play Hudson County teams on their home turf.

If the name of Bob Hurley, the name of the great coach of St. Anthony High School in Jersey City, comes to mind, think again.

We're talking about Prof. Ernest Blood, whose Passaic High basketball teams dominated the sport in New Jersey decades before Hurley was even born. The winning streak began in December 1919 and wasn't broken until February 1925.

The story about this forgotten great coach is documented by Chic Hess in his new book, "Prof Blood and the Wonder Teams: The True Story of Basketball's First Great Coach," published by the Newark Abbey Press.

The 455-page book is the result of 15 years of research by Hess, who also coached various levels of basketball over a 25-year period.

"I was a basketball nut who lived to play," said Hess, a Philadelphia native who now lives in Hawaii. "The history aspect fascinated me along with the incredible consecutive wins.

"When I was studying for my doctor's degree in the mid-80s, I would get sidetracked and began locating old articles on microfilms from the New York newspapers.

"The more I learned, the more I became fascinated until I know I was into information that no one else knew. After I learned that no book, thesis, or dissertation had ever been written on Prof, I decided to be the one to tell his story. I was certain that it would fascinate others as it did me."

Although Prof. Blood, as he was known, coached strictly in Passaic, the book is loaded with Hudson County history, such as the time 7,200 fans packed the Jersey City Armory in 1923 to see the "Battle of New Jersey," featuring the undefeated Passaic squad against undefeated Orange, a game won by Blood's team, 63-44.

Then there was the game against Union City's Union Hill High School at the Passaic Armory on Feb. 22, 1924, a game billed as the "Second Battle of the Century."

Hess writes: "This was the game that everyone wanted to see. The news media from the surrounding states descended on Passaic, and reporters from Indianapolis and Cincinnati also crowded in.

"It turned into a scalper's and gambler's nirvana. Only ticket holders were allowed near the armory; all precautions were taken to assure that this game would not get out of hand."

Passaic won, 34-24, for its 136<sup>th</sup> straight win.

Then there was the time in 1924 when Blood took on the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) by refusing to play Hudson county teams on their home turf.

"The unsavory reputation of Hudson County sports fans was well documented," writes Hess. "Both Prof and (Walter) Short had endured unpleasant run-ins with Hudson County fans, Hoboken's in particular....In Prof's eyes, this issue was not about winning or losing, but all about fairness and safety."

Hess delves into every game in detail, but also gives the reader a close look at the man himself and what he stood for.

"In closing, this is a book about a coach, written for coaches and fans by a coach," said Hess. "Prof has never received his just due in history, I hope this biography corrects that."