

## **Grinnell's Hot Shots**

GRINNELL, Iowa (AP) – Grinnell College basketball revolves around one premise.

Shoot first – and don't bother asking questions. Get the ball back quickly so you can shoot it again, even if it means letting the other team score.

Grinnell basketball scoffs at everything taught by Bob Knight, Dean Smith and all those other lords of the game. At Grinnell, the best defense is offense. If you outshoot and outscore your opponent, you can't lose.

This freewheeling, let-it-fly approach, which incorporates mass substitutions nearly every minute, has made Grinnell the highest-scoring NCAA Division III team in the country for 10 straight years. It also has brought national attention to the school, which holds its 1,500 students to strict academic standards on a tree-studded campus 50 miles east of Des Moines.

Television executives have noticed, too. ESPN2 will carry Grinnell's game with Midwest Conference rival Beloit on Feb. 3.

Then again, when a team averages an all-division record 126.2 points a game, which Grinnell did last season, or puts up 86 3-point shots in a game, which the Pioneers did against Pillsbury in 1999, how could anyone not notice?

"It is so out of the ordinary in terms of traditional college basketball competition," said Burke Magnus, the ESPN executive who was behind the telecast. "It's amazing to see how they split up their minutes. It's almost like a hockey philosophy adapted to basketball."

The master of this madness is coach David Arseneault, who borrowed from the system Paul Westhead installed at Loyola Marymount in the 1980s and took it to the extreme.

The idea is to shoot within 12 seconds of getting the ball, preferably a 3-pointer; crash the offensive boards to try to get second and third shots; press all over the floor after both makes and misses in hopes of forcing turnovers and encouraging the opponent to shoot quickly.

A 30-second defensive stand? Forget it. The Pioneers would rather see the opponent dunk so they can get the ball back sooner. If the shot clock went out during a Grinnell game, it's possible no one would notice.

"I saw them in eighth grade and I was shocked," said junior Paul Nordlund. "I hadn't seen anything in my life like it. At first, even I was pretty appalled by the style."

No more. Nordlund may be a 6-foot-8 center, but he can cast up 3s with the best of them \_ 128 in the team's first 15 games. Arseneault, in his 16th season at Grinnell, jokes that he has to break his freshmen of all their good habits before he can teach them his system.

He developed it so more players could get in the game – he'll often use 16 or 17– and to create interest in a program that went from 1965 until 1994 without a winning season.

Never, though, did he expect this kind of attention.

"I thought within a couple of years, I'd be fired," Arseneault said. "I figured I'd at least go down in flames trying something different. There's no way I thought we were going to win with it."

But they have. While his current team began the week 4-11, Arseneault has produced six winning seasons in the past 11 and has won three conference championships.

Critics have called the Pioneers a freak show. Others say Arseneault has corrupted the game.

Not Gary Smith, however. Smith is the coach at Redlands University, a Division III school in Southern California, and is among the dozens of coaches who have asked Arseneault for help in implementing the system.

Arseneault set up an e-mail database for interested coaches. He estimates it has 170 users at all levels.

"He is a very creative individual, one of the most creative, I think, in basketball in the last 30 years," Smith said. "It takes courage to do something like this."

Redlands is doing it so well that Grinnell's numbers pale by comparison. The Bulldogs put up 172 points in one game, 160 in another and are averaging 139. In that 160-point outburst, against Robert Morris College, Redlands heaved up 106 3-point attempts and 137 shots in all. For those keeping score at home, that's a shot every 17 1/2 seconds.

"I think it's fantastic," Arseneault said. "A, records are made to be broken. And B, it's nice to know there's another colleague out there that's putting the process and the kids first."

Arseneault put in the system after going 10-34 his first two seasons at Grinnell. He junked it after one year when his players voted to try something else. So he went to a Princeton-style slowdown offense and after the Pioneers went 10-12 in 1992-93, the players voted again.

"They just hated having lost that freedom," he said. "So they voted to go back (to running)

and then they voted never to vote again."

Working at a school where there's never any question about academics coming first, Arseneault was free to tinker.

"I had the perfect laboratory conditions because nobody really cared whether or not we succeeded," he said. "And on those nights you had to put your hard hat on because we were going 8-for-80 from the 3-point line, it was very easy for me to keep the shooters' confidence up because nobody was telling them how bad they were."

When the shots are falling, it's a blast for the Pioneers. One of their players, Jeff Clement, scored 77 points in a 1998 game. Another, Steve Diekmann, had 69 in a 1994 game. A couple of years ago, Ken Heiser played only 13 minutes against William Penn – and scored 31 points.

If the shots don't fall, it can get ugly. Opponents usually shoot a high percentage because they get so many layups. If teams using the Grinnell style don't offset that by making 3s, they're in trouble, as Redlands found out in a 181-153 loss to Cal Baptist, which shot 82 percent.

Win or lose, Arseneault's team brings out the curious. Most places the Pioneers go on the road, they're that team's biggest draw. Once when they went to Galesburg, Ill., to play Knox, the local newspaper ran a headline proclaiming "Circus Comes to Knox."

Arseneault was not offended.

"Heck, no. It IS a circus," he said. "We're entertaining. You get to see something you haven't seen."

Thursday, fans across the nation will get a chance to see for themselves. But even with all the excitement the telecast has generated, there's a drawback for the Pioneers, whose success depends partly on wearing the opponent out with their frenetic pace.

"Those TV timeouts will help the other team a lot," guard Lance Little said. "That's one thing that will hurt us."