

observing sports

In the three-or is it four decades?—that we have been pounding the schoolboy athletic scene, it's been a distinct pleasure to meet and know hundreds of coaches.

It makes it difficult to single out one above the other, when you think back to the days you worked under the late Eddie Powers at Detroit Northern up until the modern regime hereabouts at the various Observerland schools.

But, somehow, you have to feel that there's nobody who would protest if you pointed a finger at Lofton Greene of River Rouge High and said something very special about him.

HERE'S THE MAN who has coached more state high school basketball champs than any other in Michigan. Ten to be exact.

Next Saturday morning, he'll go for No. 1 when Rouge plays Muskegon Heights in the Class B final in Crisler Arena at the University of Michigan.

No ordinary coach could have accomplished such a feat...especially in an area which has known its problems over the years.

Yet, Greene has met the challenge and he has overcome all the very obstacles.

One relished reading his answers the other day in the Sports Quiz of the Free Press when he told Joe Falls.

"A player's color makes no difference." Unfortunately, there are areas where color does make a difference...when we all know it shouldn't.

Those who know Lofton Greene simply stand and look up in awe of him.

How can any coach turn out so many powerful teams in succession? How can one man produce so many outstanding boys...many who have gone on to college fame?

The answer is pretty obvious.

LOFTON GREENE works at basketball the year around. He takes youngsters and gives them the coaching, the support, the encouragement they need.

He works with them in the summer on the hot recreation fields. You'll find him with the boys in the morning, the afternoon and in the evening, when the situation demands it.

This isn't to say that other coaches don't work as hard. They do. And that goes for coaches in our particular area.

But there has to be something special about Lofton Greene. How else would the man enjoy the success he has in a profession where many don't stick around too long.

Greene certainly has had the chance to leave coaching. For many years he was a principal in River Rouge. As Rouge athletic director now, he could cut down on his work load.

But because men like Greene stay in our schools, there has to be hope for our future.

THANKS TO GOOD FRIEND Joe Falls for devoting his column the other day to our suggestion about doubling up the final weekend program in the state basketball finals.

We can't see why it's necessary to stage four games on one day and make just about everybody basketball weary.

There's no reason why there can't be two games Friday night and then two more on Saturday.

From what we've observed over the years, the state finals weekend is the biggest thing of the year for the schoolmen.

It has afforded, too, chances for various colleges and universities to hold reunions for their grads now out in schoolboy coaching and teaching. It has provided an ideal occasion for the prep coaches themselves to hold a dinner and salute their 25-year heroes.

So, why all the necessity to stage a jam session?

A little spreading out would make it better for all concerned. Nobody would have to get up in the early a.m. and rush to a game.

There'd be time for the college reunion breakfasts...for a game in the afternoon...for the coaches' banquet...for the big "A" game in the evening, perhaps at 7:30 p.m., instead of waiting until 8:30...and then off for the ride home.

From where we sit, there's more to the state basketball tournament finals than just the games themselves.

After all, only eight schools get that far...but there are folks from 750 other schools who are interested...very interested in what's going on.

So, gentlemen, what about a minor change in the procedure for next year?

It'll make a lot of people just a little happier.



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