

College team that season—a team that won 25 of 27 games and swept the Southern California and Metropolitan Conference championships.

BOYS MAKE A PLEDGE

After the defeat in the Modesto tournament the boys who would return next season, made a pledge to Coach Mel Griffin:

"We'll be back next year and we'll show 'em more basketball than they ever saw before."

It's January 1942, and Modesto again. The state junior college championship tournament is over and Long Beach has won. It has set a new one-game scoring record of 82 points and a tournament total-game scoring record.

Fans and coaches are still talking with awe and admiration about the greatest display of individual and team play that the tourney has ever seen. The Vikes had won more fancy cups than used to be displayed in an old barber shop mug case. Bob Howard, Don Cecil and Grant Denmark were unanimous choices for all-state and Denmark was declared the tournament's most valuable player. Some coaches on the committee to select the all-state team, said: "Just name the whole Long Beach team."

ALL FINE SPORTSMEN

There's another tale untold about this basketball team of modest American lads — Dick West, Dave Cohee, Denmark, Cecil and Captain Howard.

Southern California jaysee champions and now state champs, the time came for the Modesto sportsmanship award. Another team received the award, not because the Vikes didn't deserve it, but because the coaches laughingly decided that Long Beach had taken enough trophies for one tournament although they were unanimous in their acclaim of the Vikes' sportsmanship.

Many little incidents could be told about this team, but some stand out more than others.

It was on the way back from Santa Monica. The Vikes had just scored 69 points with a typical display of power for them. They had already won the state junior college championship. They had outclassed all opposition in the Southern California junior college tournament and were well on their way to a decisive triumph in the Metropolitan Conference with the loss of only one game.

COACHES BECOME IRKED

The coaches who sent teams against the Vikes got pretty irked at Mel sometimes. The ones, at least, who thought Mel was trying to "turn it on." Mel couldn't help it unless he jerked them all off the floor.

There wasn't a game that one, two or even three of the boys didn't hit baskets with the persistency of an adding machine and even when Mel put in Ed Gillian, his No. 1 reserve, big, lumbering but speedy Ed could do a spectacular job of scoring.

As Mel remarked time after time: "It's the boys' game. I've got no right to take away their glories by putting in reserves who might lose for them."

It was the last game of the season. With Santa Monica again.

The Vikes had cleaned up everything—the Southern California, the state and the conference championship.

The little Poly gym was packed, not because the fans expected to see a close game, but because they came to see a great team perform.

When Mel was reluctant to play the first team the entire game the fans yelled protests so the Vike coach turned them loose and they scored 82 points again in a great display of shot-making and teamwork to climax the greatest season of basketball Long Beach ever has seen.

SCHOOL RECORDS GO

Four of the five members of that team broke school scoring records. They shattered the game scoring mark of the school three times, hitting 82 points twice in one season. In 57 consecutive games, starting in 1941, the club averaged 52 points a game and they broke the Metropolitan Conference scoring record by hitting 713 points in 12 games for an average of 59 points per game.

Needless to say, the man who coached that team in 1941-42 will never forget it.

Mel Griffin bids good-bye to Long Beach basketball in a little while until after the war. He's now a lieutenant in the Marine Corps Reserves after coaching for 13 years at jaysee.

He refuses to name his five greatest players because "it wouldn't be fair to the players," but he doesn't hesitate to say that his combination of West, Cohee, Denmark, Cecil and Howard was his greatest.