

From Rags to Riches

By Kevin Fritz

The Tip-Off Classic gives thousands back to the community.

The quintessential high school basketball tournament that also raises thousands of dollars for charity and scholarships didn't always enjoy such high recognition. The fledging tourney, passed around by the Sentinel Star and Burger King back in the '70s, was finally picked up by the Winter Park-based Orange County East Rotary Club in 1977 where it found a home.

"I have been a basketball junkie all my life," admits Orlando resident **Bob Harvey**, president of Central Florida Data Supply and 22-year veteran leader of the Tip-Off Classic Invitational, held at Winter Park High School.

Harvey remembers when he first started managing the tournament. He was having trouble convincing people that Florida was not just a football state. But he persevered. Then two things happened that changed the course of the event forever. First, Harvey decided to waive the admission fee if attendees brought a can of food.

"A lot of basketball fans in those days were inner-city kids," he says, realizing the admission fee was keeping many of them away. Second, along came Daytona Beach's Vince Carter from Mainland High School, who is now in his 11th NBA season and his first year with the Orlando Magic. A local legend in high school, people came from far and wide to see the next NBA superstar.

Harvey says one of this year's marquee attractions is Austin Rivers, the son of Boston Celtics Coach Doc Rivers. A junior at Winter Park High School, Austin says he will play for the Florida Gators after he graduates. High school standouts Nick Calathes (Lake Howell) and Darius Washington (Edgewater) have played in the Tip-Off Classic.

"It is said if you don't play this tournament, you won't become Florida's Mr. Basketball," Harvey jokes, referring to the highest honor bestowed on a Florida high school basketball player.

To this day, a can of food is all that is needed to see some of the finest high school basketball in Central Florida. And all that food adds up. Last year the Rotary collected 8,000 cans of food and received \$2,000 at the door. Added to the \$50,000 in advertising that was sold in the



COURTESY OF BOB HARVEY

Left-Danny Kuhl, a guard from Winter Springs, will be back on the court this year. He is being guarded by Keith Clanton, now a freshman at the University of Central Florida.

Below-Standout junior guard Austin Rivers from Winter Park High School will be playing in the Tip-Off Classic Invitational in December.

tournament's program, the showcase of talent has become a godsend for those in need. This year, the food will be donated to the Salvation Army, and half of the money raised will be distributed in \$12,000 scholarships, while the other half gets disbursed to local charities chosen by the Rotary.

And it is Harvey blankets the Central Florida area to scout basketball teams for the annual classic. He also works with Orlando Sentinel's Buddy Collings to be sure a good cross section of schools is chosen to play. This year Winter Springs, Winter Park, Evans, Oakridge, DeLand, Mt. Dora Bible, Orlando Christian Prep, and Lake Brantley high schools have been invited to play for the trophy.



Harvey's good friend, the late Stewart Colling, worked on the tournament with him for many of the

past 20-plus years. This year, Harvey has been going forward alone. Well, not exactly. "I couldn't do it without my 80-member strong support group," he says about the Orange County East Rotary Club.

Harvey says Colling and he once promised to manage the basketball tournament until it raised a total of \$1 million. That could take another 10 years. But it appears it's a decade he looks forward to, by spending time helping kids and being around the game of basketball. "It is a wonderful event," he says. "It's a lot of fun and great for the community." **L**

To get involved in the Tip-Off Classic Invitational visit CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com.