

NCAA TOURNAMENT

## Iconic venue gets another star turn

Indianapolis' Hinkle Fieldhouse, featured in 'Hoosiers,' will host Loyola's 1st-round game



Hinkle Fieldhouse, one of six venues hosting NCAA Tournament games later this week, is shown in the second half of a 2014 game between Butler and Marquette. Michael Conroy/AP

BY PAUL SULLIVAN CHICAGO TRIBUNE

One of the great scenes in the beloved basketball film "Hoosiers" takes place when the Hickory High School team enters iconic Hinkle Fieldhouse for its first practice before the state championship game.

Coach Norman Dale, played by Gene Hackman, has his players use a tape measure to determine the distance from the free-throw line to the backboard and from the floor to the rim, pointing out it's exactly the same as in their own small gym.

But as he walks off the court behind his team, Dale smiles and says, "It is big."

Hinkle Fieldhouse, the site of Loyola's first-round game against Georgia Tech on Friday, is one of the most famous basketball venues in the United States and one of six sites the NCAA is employing for the 2021 tournament, hosting first- and second-round games.

It opened in 1928 on the Butler University campus as the Butler Fieldhouse and was renamed after longtime Bulldogs coach and athletic director Paul "Tony" Hinkle in 1966.

Its original capacity was 15,000, making Hinkle at the time the largest basketball arena in the country outside of Madison Square Garden in New York. But it has been renovated three times over the last three decades, and capacity was reduced to 9,100. The old wooden-plank bleachers surrounding the court were replaced with seat-back chairs seven years ago in a nod to modern fans' comfort zones.

Because of COVID-19 restrictions, a limited number of fans will be allowed in for the NCAA Tournament. Total capacity will be 2,500, including 225 staff and volunteers.

Hinkle was designated a U.S. Historical Landmark in 1987 and often is referred to as "Indiana's basketball cathedral." It's large glass windows let in the late-winter sun for afternoon games, giving Hinkle a nostalgic feel that's difficult to replicate in most modern-day arenas.

"I used to say it's as great empty as it is full," Boston Celtics coach Brad Stevens, who formerly coached at Butler, recently told Alabama radio station WNSP-FM. "And it is special full. With the sun shining through those windows, you can feel the tradition of that building when you walk into it and think back to all the high school games, pro games and college games.

"With all the things that happen in that building, you just know you're in a special place."

Perhaps the most famous game in the Fieldhouse's long history was the Indiana state championship game between Muncie Central and tiny Milan High School in 1954. Milan's Bobby Plump hit the game-winning shot in one of the biggest upsets in Indiana high school basketball history, providing the inspiration for "Hoosiers," with the Jimmy Chitwood character in the Plump role.

The NCAA long ago moved tournament sites to larger arenas for financial reasons, but when Hinkle Fieldhouse was announced in January as one of the venues in the "Hoosier Bubble" for the NCAA Tournament, Jim Nantz, the voice of college basketball for CBS, told Indianapolis TV sports director Anthony Calhoun it would be "a dream" to call a tournament game there.

Nantz will get that wish Friday with first-round action, including Loyola's return to the tournament for the first time since its 2018 Final Four run.