

## Quinn Bucker: Southland Athlete

### One word to describe Quinn Buckner: Incomparable

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"Come all without, come all within. You'll not see nothing like the mighty Quinn."



Thornridge High School basketball star

Quinn Buckner holds the state championship trophy in 1971.

"The Mighty Quinn," a song by Bob Dylan Quinn Buckner. The greatest athlete in the history of the Southland. Let me tell you why "The Mighty Quinn" is holding a royal flush, compared to Lou Boudreau's straight flush and Antwaan Randle El's full house.

Thirty-seven years after he led Thornridge's basketball team to a perfect 33-0 season, culminating with a 104-69 destruction of Quincy in the Class AA championship game at Champaign's Assembly Hall, the mention of Buckner's name still brings so much respect from the people who watched him perform at the Dolton school from 1968 to '72.

As athletes have gotten bigger, faster and stronger through the years, Buckner's standard of excellence has gotten brighter.

Today's athletes think they are really good.

Buckner, who will turn 55 on Thursday, would have "schooled" the best of them. It wouldn't be pretty.

On the basketball court, Buckner averaged 21 points per game for Thornridge teams that won back-to-back state titles and went a combined 64-1 in 1970-71 and 1971-72. In the latter 33-0 season, no team lost to the Falcons by fewer than 13 points. Imagine that, 13 points! Buckner was named a Prep All-American.

Scoring points, however, wasn't what separated Buckner from the rest.

Buckner knew the importance of rebounding and getting every teammate involved in what was going on. He understood the big picture. He was mature beyond his years. He was the absolute boss on the court, following coach Ron Ferguson's orders to perfection.

And no one played better defense than Buckner. He made all of the sacrifices. He exhibited the mental toughness. He made sure his teammates followed the same game plan. He mastered the basics of the game.

Buckner was in total control. He put fear into opponents and his own teammates. When Indiana University coach Bobby Knight was recruiting Buckner, he said, "Quinn Buckner is a college kid who's still in high school."

All of these qualities are why Buckner found even more success at Indiana, in the 1976 Olympics and during a 10-year pro career.

The late Bloom basketball coach Wes Mason summed up best just how dominating Buckner and Thornridge really were.

"When Quinn Buckner and Thornridge put on a full-court press, our five players AND the basketball had a tough time getting across the center court line in 10 seconds," the Hall of Fame coach said.

At Indiana, Buckner was a four-year starter and three-year captain, directing Knight's teams to four straight Big Ten championships. In 1976, Indiana won the NCAA title with a perfect 32-0 record.

Before 1976 was over, Buckner was taken by the Milwaukee Bucks as the seventh overall selection in the NBA draft.

At the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal, Buckner's work at guard helped the United States win the gold medal.

In 1984, Buckner came off the bench for the Boston Celtics to add defense and discipline, the end result being an NBA championship.

As a result, Buckner became one of three individuals, along with Magic Johnson and Jerry Lucas, to have ever won titles in high school, college, the Olympics and the pros.

Right now, the members of the Quinn Buckner Fan Club are screaming, "Make sure you write about Buckner the football player."

Ah, yes, that's the ace in Buckner's royal flush and what pushes him another notch above the rest.

You see, Buckner was a Prep All-American defensive back on Thornridge's 1970 team that finished with a 9-0 record and was regarded as the state's No. 1 team in the days before a playoff certified as much.

Buckner was so good in football that, though he played just two years at Indiana before choosing to concentrate just on basketball, he was taken in the 14th round of the 1976 NFL draft by the Washington Redskins.

Yes, Boudreau was a living sports legend at Thornton, the University of Illinois and with the Cleveland Indians.

Yes, Randle El was All-State in three sports (football, basketball, baseball) at Thornton, was drafted by the Cubs, set all kinds of offensive records as a quarterback and even played some basketball at Indiana, and helped the Pittsburgh Steelers win Super Bowl XL as a wide receiver.

But when you put all the cards on the table, the "Mighty Quinn" is in a Southland class by himself.

We probably won't see another athlete like him ever again.