

# The Turnaround Teams

*providing a breath of fresh air in high school basketball*

By Steve Gunn  
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If there is one downside to high school sports, it's the relative predictability from one season to another.

The great teams tend to stay great, while the lesser squads tend to stay at the bottom.

But that's starting to change a little bit, at least in varsity boys basketball in the Muskegon/lakeshore area.

Perhaps the most telling example came at the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame Holiday Basketball Classic in late December.

The Reeths-Puffer boys team shined, downing powerful Holland West Ottawa, a Class A state finalist in 2018, 49-43.

That victory, and two others in early January over Grand Rapids Union and Mona Shores, gave the Rockets a 9-1 record to start the season. That's amazing, considering how bad the team was not so long ago.

In 2015-16, Coach Lance Johnson's first season, Reeths-Puffer finished with a dismal 0-20 mark. The Rockets' opponents collectively averaged almost 30 more points per game.

But the Rockets, with a bunch of developing underclassmen in the lineup, rolled up their sleeves and kept working. In 2016-17 they won three games, and last season increased that total to nine.

Now all bets are off, and the sky seems like the limit for Reeths-Puffer, which also posted an impressive win over traditionally strong Grand Haven earlier this season.

The Rockets feature a very young, balanced lineup, and everyone contributes. Six different players are averaging five or more points per game, five different players have led the team in scoring in a game, and five have scored at least 16 points in a game.

Junior Emcee Williams is the leading scorer at 13.1 points per game. Junior Josh Jordan is next at 9.7 points, sophomore Kaleb Mitchelson is averaging 9.5 points and senior Carter Fulton is at 8.6 points.

"My very first game at Reeths-Puffer, we played West Ottawa



**R-P's Kaleb Mitchelson**

REETHS-PUFFER	
2014-15:	6-15
2015-16:	0-20
2016-17:	3-18
2017-18:	9-12
2018-19:	9-1

and we lost by 40 or 50," Coach Johnson said after the Holiday Basketball Classic victory. "We've made some big strides since then."

While the Reeths-Puffer boys are the most notable turnaround team in the area, and perhaps in the state, the Rockets are not alone.

Boys teams from Orchard View, Ravenna and Hart, which have all struggled badly in recent seasons, all had winning records at the holiday break this season, and are no longer considered pushovers by any opponents.

## *Orchard View starts out 7-0!*

When Russ Doane took over as the Orchard View boys basketball coach five years ago - with his son-in-law Nick Bronsema coaching the JV squad - the program was not in very good shape.

It took some time, and a lot of hard work, to right the ship.

In two years under Doane, the Cardinals totaled five wins. In the third year, when Doane stepped aside to become an assistant and Bronsema took over the varsity squad, OV posted six victories.

Last year the Cardinals started turning the corner, collecting 10 wins and coming close to finishing at .500.

This season OV has clearly gotten over the hump, and figures to win quite a few more than 10 games.

The Cardinals started the season with a sizzling 7-0 record, including a 2-0 mark in the Lakes 8 Conference. They suffered their first loss on Jan. 4 to Western Michigan Christian in a conference game, and were 8-2 as of this writing.

Two of their more exciting wins were a 58-56 victory over neighboring rival Oakridge, and a 53-47 win over conference rival Muskegon Catholic.

So how does a team that's been losing for so long finally turn the corner?

Part of it may be Bronsema's pure enthusiasm for the game, as well as his determination and drive. Those traits have apparently rubbed off on the players, giving them the confidence to overcome the losing legacy they inherited.

Bronsema said his passion for basketball is an inherited trait,



**OV's Edmari Mitchell**

ORCHARD VIEW	
2014-15:	2-18
2015-16:	3-17
2016-17:	6-16
2017-18:	10-11
2018-19:	7-2