

Alan Robinson's Substack

John Wooden, Adolph Rupp wanted them badly, but these two “Valley Boys” stayed home in 1969

Allan Hornyak, Mike Carson jointly set scoring records that still stand — and turned down UCLA during its record title run

By Alan Robinson

Jan. 25, 2026

Allan Hornyak was a scoring machine, an unstoppable offensive force even on high school courts barren of three-point lines, one capable of outscoring entire teams by himself. Sometimes in a half. He still holds the national record for short-circuiting scoreboards.

Forty miles downstream on the opposite side of the Ohio River, Mike Carson was an offensive juggernaut, even in an era when dunks were banned — and he could dunk with minimal effort. An excellent shooter inside or outside and an intimidating defender, he collected rebounds as if they were as precious as \$100 gold coins.

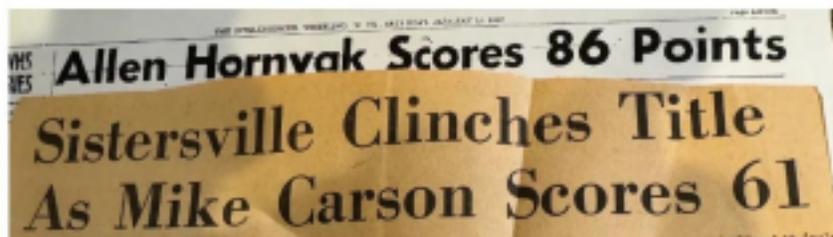
The Ohio Valley region centered in Wheeling, W.Va., has produced dozens of exceptional athletes — let's start with John Havlicek, Bill Mazerowski, the Niekro brothers and Lou Groza — but rarely if ever has it turned out two basketball players as heavily recruited as Hornyak and Carson were in 1969.

Each was pursued by more than 100 major colleges, and nearly all of the big names. North Carolina, Ohio State, Alabama and Kansas were pushing hard for Hornyak. Kentucky, West Virginia and Southern Cal made it known they badly wanted Carson. And, most of all, UCLA wanted them both. Yes, the very Bruins who were in the midst of winning seven NCAA basketball championships in a row and nine in 10 seasons under the legendary Wizard of Westwood, coach John Wooden.

The word dynasty is often overstated in the world of sports, but in the 1960s and 1970s, the Bruins were a legitimate dynasty.

And the Bruins aggressively recruited Allan Hornyak and Mike Carson, despite having to

travel 2,000-plus miles to do so.



Playing 40 miles apart along the Ohio River, Allan Hornyak and Mike Carson turned heads by combining for 4,654 points from 1965–69 ... and by turning down the great UCLA

For Hornyak, the Bruins frequently sent him telegrams from whichever locale they were playing that night. For Carson, they had NBA Hall of Fame coach-general manager Red Auerbach write a detailed, personalized letter on fancy Boston Celtics stationery, extolling the virtues of playing under Wooden and collecting championships the way his Celtics did.

But, midway through their senior seasons, neither Hornyak nor Carson had made up their minds about college.

Tom Cuppett, Carson's coach at tiny Class A Sistersville (W.Va.) High School, said one Southern school coach swore to him that Carson would start his final three college seasons. Another invited Carson, his parents and his coach to hang out with TV star Bob Hope during a weekend on campus.

"We hear from multiple Top Twenty schools every day," said Cuppett, who arrived in Sistersville before Carson's freshman season ostensibly to coach football, only to have the school's best-ever basketball prospect land in his lap. (He never coached football again, by the way.) "His recruiting mail is piling up in the corner of my office, too; it's about three feet deep currently."

The reasons for the recruiting wars were obvious. The 6-foot-1 Hornyak was the Ohio high school counterpart of college basketball's ace scorer at the time, Pistol Pete Maravich of LSU, albeit without all the showmanship and I-must-take-every-shot mentality. A long-range shooter later nicknamed the Bellaire Bomber, he averaged an incredible, state-leading 42.7 points per game as a junior — and, as we remind you, without the 3-point shot. He averaged 41.95 as a senior on a 20-2 team.

(Let's slip in an editorial comment here: If there had been a 3-point line at the time, Hornyak would have averaged 50 points per game his junior and senior seasons, which would have been a national record at the time.)

On January 10, 1969, Hornyak upped the ante even more for the schools pursuing him: He scored 86 points — EIGHTY-SIX — in a 123-63 victory against nearby Warren Consolidated High School (Mazeroski's alma mater), a quality opponent that came in with a 7-1 record.

Bellaire Bomber, indeed; Hornyak made 40 of 65 shots, including 22 of 33 in a 46-point first half, then scored 40 more in the second half — crediting teammates for passing up shots to get the ball to him. He was 6 of 11 from the foul line, but missed the front half of four 1-and-1s that, if made, would have pushed his total to nearly 90.

Afterwards, he went to an Elby's Big Boy to get a sandwich with his girlfriend, woke up the next morning and jumped in a whirlpool to alleviate some soreness, then scored 61 — SIXTY-ONE — points that night against arch-rival Bellaire High. That's 142 points in a span of about 26 hours. Again, the total could have been much higher; he was only 19-of-29 from the foul line against Bellaire.

At this point of the season, Hornyak probably was leaning towards signing with UCLA, and it's no wonder. At the time, just about every high school basketball player in the country wanted to be recruited by the Bruins, despite the fact coast-to-coast recruiting at the time wasn't nearly as extensive as it is today.

Hornyak was tempted by the sun and beaches of southern California and the talent that practiced every day inside Pauley Pavilion. He'd even been told on the sly that, while mega-talent center Lew Alcindor (who later changed his name to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar) was about to graduate, the Bruins had a potentially even better replacement lined up. (And they weren't wrong; Bill Walton signed with UCLA a year later.)

Hornyak admittedly was enamored with UCLA, even to the point of being able to name all the starters and backups.

Carson wasn't as embedded in UCLA lore as Hornyak was, but he was the envy of nearly every West Virginia high school player: He was being recruited by UCLA and Kentucky (with Bruins chief assistant coach Gary Cunningham in charge of landing him, as he was with Hornyak).

Cunningham certainly had a lot to offer. UCLA won the national championship in 1964 and 1965 before missing the NCAA tournament in 1966, but then began a string of seven consecutive national championships from 1967–73. During the time that Hornyak and Carson would have been eligible (freshmen couldn't play varsity at the time), the Bruins were 89-1 with three national titles. The Bruins were upset by North Carolina State in overtime in the 1974 Final Four, but rebounded to win again in 1975.

No wonder everyone wanted to go to UCLA back then. Well, almost everybody.

Carson was listed at 6-foot-8 (he would be measured in college at 6-7) and while he wasn't as prolific a scorer as Hornyak was, he was more dominating as a rebounder (averaging 20 per game as a junior and senior) and a defender. And unlike many inside players of the day, he could score beyond the blocks; as a junior, he was 21-for-21 from the foul line in a game against Parkersburg Catholic amid a streak of 33 in a row over multiple games.

Carson averaged 31 points as a junior on a 20-4 team and 29.95 as a senior on a 22-3 team that was ranked as high as No. 5 statewide in the UPI all-classes poll. He didn't have an 86-point game like Hornyak did, but also had a 61-point game (against Wirt County, the same team he'd scored 54 against as a sophomore).

(Sistersville, a Class A school in a town of about 2,000, or 5,000 fewer than Bellaire's population, repeatedly picked on poor Wirt County in basketball. Eight years after Carson's 61-point outburst, Sistersville shooting guard Richard Summers scored a school-record 74 against Wirt to cap his senior season.)

Hornyak and Carson each received national attention and made multiple All-America teams; Hornyak was chosen for the Roundball Classic in Pittsburgh, the only national all-star game at the time, but passed it up in order to preserve his baseball season eligibility. (A three-sport star, he made the All-Ohio Valley Athletic Conference football team as a quarterback.) Hornyak ended his career with 2,385 points against incrementally better competition that Carson faced; Carson, who benefitted from starting most of four seasons, had 2,269 points.

“I wonder if I'll look back and say, ‘Gee, if I had gone here or maybe there, this wouldn't have happened. Why did I pick this school in the first place? More than anything else, the thought of a wrong decision scares me the

most.” — Allan Hornyak

Now, looking back a half-century later, Hornyak almost certainly made the right choice. While UCLA seemed to be the front-runner, and he almost chose the Bruins, Hornyak ultimately chose to stay close to home and picked Ohio State, which was only a two-hour drive away in Columbus.

Hornyak was a big hit as a Buckeye, leading the team in scoring in 1970–71 (22.5 points per game), 1971–72 (21.6) and 1972–73 (24.0) while making All-Big Ten all three seasons and finishing with 1,572 points. He was a second-team UPI All-American in 1972 and third-team in 1973. He was drafted by the Cleveland Cavaliers (NBA) and Indiana Pacers (ABA) but, no doubt hurt by his lack of size, never played a game in the NBA despite having a strong training camp with the Cavs in 1973.

A basketball junkie for sure, Hornyak kept playing for years in various summer leagues and a thriving independent circuit in Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia (sometimes playing on the very Sistersville court where Carson played). After his senior season, for example, he played in an East-West all-star game in Dayton on April 1, 1973, then flew back to Wheeling to play in an independent tournament that night and the next afternoon — then immediately flew to Philadelphia for another college all-star game. The day after that, he went to Hawaii for a three-day tournament.

Hornyak, by the way, did get to play in Pauley Pavilion, but it wasn't one of his college highlights. He was held to 10 points as then-No. 1 UCLA beat then-No. 6 Ohio State 79-53 on Dec. 30, 1971; he had four shots blocked by the great Bill Walton and went 0-for-8 in the first half while being guarded by future NBA guard Henry Bibby. UCLA would go on to finish 30-0 that season. (That first half, by the way, can be found on YouTube.)

(Another personal aside: I still think Hornyak could have made an impact in the NBA given the right team and right coach. He was the purest shooter the Ohio Valley ever produced and a natural scorer, and would have thrived shooting behind the NBA three-point line. To me, he's the greatest *high school* basketball player in Ohio Valley history; others have had great pro careers (Havlicek, for one), but in high school ball, nobody was better than Hornyak. It's almost non-debatable.)

Mike Carson, unfortunately, ended up with neither the right school nor the right coach. He visited Kentucky and was very impressed, especially by legendary coach Adolph Rupp. But a Valley Boy through and through just like Hornyak, he also chose his home-state university, West

Virginia, after being recruited heavily by then-Mountaineers coach Bucky Waters.

“I’ve always wanted to attend WVU,” Carson said the night he signed his letter of intent. “It just has a certain air about it.”

Waters, however, took off abruptly for Duke in March 1969. Carson by then had pretty much decided on West Virginia and didn’t change his mind even after the Mountaineers, rather than searching nationally for a replacement, unwisely elevated assistant coach Sonny Moran to replace Waters.

It was the wrong call. Moran was a small college coach at the major college level and it showed with records of 11-15, 13-12, 13-11, 10-15 and 10-15. (The Mountaineers, by the way, also missed on their next hire, Joedy Gardner, but got it right with the next three: Gale Catlett, John Beilein and Bob Huggins.)

Carson was hurt by the quality of coaching at WVU — he would have gotten A-level coaching at Kentucky, a staff that included Catlett at the time — and the transition from playing on Sistersville’s 60-foot floor to the 94-foot major college court. But he was VERY coachable, and very well could have blossomed in a program with upper-tier coaching.

Carson averaged 11 points on the freshman team before red-shirting the following season. In 1971–72, he lettered as the top front line backup in what was a tragic season for the team. Standout forward Larry Harris was declared ineligible at midseason and then died shortly thereafter in a car accident that also badly injured starting forward Sam Oglesby, who was averaging 14 points per game but never played again.

The following season, Carson badly injured an ankle, an injury that effectively ended a career that was disappointing in its results but certainly didn’t adversely affect the even-tempered, patient and unassuming person he was.

After that, Carson was content to play summer league and independent basketball, sometimes in the same tournaments Hornyak played in. He married Anna Flesher Carson, the love of his life, and raised two sons that remain his pride and joy — well, along with his four grandkids. And his beloved hunting, of course; he never left his native Tyler County, and why should he? It was home.

What did Mike Carson miss out on by passing up Kentucky? Records of 26-2, 22-6, 21-7 and 20-8, with three teams reaching the Elite 8 and another making the Sweet 16. He would have been

in elite company, too; three of his would-be teammates were Parade All-Americans and three were drafted by NBA teams; 6-foot-11 center Jim Andrews was a first-team UPI All-American.

At UCLA, Wooden, who often preferred to stay on campus to recruit, was disappointed at missing out on multiple prospects in 1969, most notably Hornyak, Carson and 6-10 Mike Fink of Redding, Calif., and took to the road to personally recruit two high school All-Americans, Tommy Curtis of Tallahassee, Fla., and Larry Farmer of Denver. (Farmer averaged 12 points per game as a Bruin senior, Curtis averaged 8.)

Not that the Bruins were lacking in talent. Hornyak and Carson potentially could have played alongside Curtis Rowe, Sidney Wicks, Henry Bibby, John Vallely, Keith “Silk” Wilkes, Swen Nater, Greg Lee and, oh yes, Walton. All played in the NBA; Walton retired as one of the game’s all-time greats.

“If I had to do it all over again, I wouldn’t go to WVU,” Carson told me recently in an e-mail. “In hindsight, Kentucky would have been a better choice. Rupp was a great coach. I didn’t think it through like I should (have).”

Today, that wouldn’t be an issue; he’d enter the transfer portal and be eligible somewhere else the following season. Back in the 1970s, changing schools meant sitting out a full year.

He might have traded schools, but I doubt if he’d trade his life for anyone’s. Only last summer, he was inducted into the Legends of the Ohio Valley by the Ohio Valley Athletic Conference, the nation’s largest athletic conference. Here is the biographical sketch from the program that night:

***MIKE CARSON (Sistersville, Class of 1969)** — The 6-foot-7 Tiger basketball center was a four-year prolific scorer and rebounder with school career records in both categories. He finished career with 2,269 points — 3rd best in Ohio Valley history at the time (now fourth best).*

A three-time 1st Team Class A all-state honoree, and captain as junior and senior, he also was 1st Team all-class “Big” All-State two years and 3rd team as a sophomore. He also was 1st Team All-Valley “Small School” captain the 1st team years of selections in 1968 and 1969 when the Tigers went 22-3 and 20-4.

As a freshman, he anchored Tigers to sectional and regional titles and a berth in state Class A tournament in Huntington. He averaged over 30 points a game in final two seasons and 22.4 rebounds a game as a senior. He set a sophomore OV and state record 54 points vs. Wirt County and also tallied 61

points vs. Wirt as a senior. All-America status from Scholastic Coach, Cage Scope and Basketball Yearbook, among others.

He earned a scholarship to West Virginia U. where he was a starter on the freshman team as the second leading rebounder while averaging 10.9 points. A chronic ankle injury limited his varsity play including missing one season. He lettered on the 1972 varsity.

He resides in Tyler County.

Hornyak also is an OVAC Hall of Fame member but, sadly, passed away on Aug. 25, 2025 at the age of 74 in Cincinnati, where he had moved to be near his daughter; he spent nearly all of his adult life in the Bellaire area. Like Mike Carson, he enjoyed hunting and was described by friends as down to earth, caring, unassuming and a good person who never once bragged about his basketball success.

In other words, both Allan Hornyak and Mike Carson were All-Americans in life, just as they were on the basketball court. And they didn't need a letterman's jacket from UCLA or Kentucky to prove it.

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