

## **Basketball Madness**

*2nd in the Keepsakes Series, originally published April 10, 2006.*

With “March Madness” and bracket dreams turning into April sadness and upset screams (for some) in the NCAA championship, it is appropriate for this edition of K-State Keepsakes to provide a glimpse of the rich basketball tradition at Kansas State University!

Women’s basketball at K-State can be traced to the spring of 1901 when two groups of female students from calisthenics classes played each other outdoors with the “Purples” defeating the



**1910 Women's Basketball Team**

“Reds,” 9-2. Several hundred students watched the contest making it the first public basketball game at K-State according to Julius Willard, long time college historian. As women’s basketball grew in popularity on the intramural level, college administrators required that all games be played in the women’s gymnasium, now known as Holtz Hall. As early as 1902, women students requested the faculty to allow intercollegiate games but they refused “on a close vote.” Nonetheless, women continued to compete among themselves in such venues as

physical education courses and in games between classes.

Despite the interest and popularity, it wasn’t until the 1968-1969 season that women’s basketball was added as an intercollegiate sport with Judy Akers becoming the University’s first coach. It is interesting to note that the Wildcats were selected to play in the [Women’s National Invitation Tournament](#) (WNIT) at the end of their first season! K-State won its first Big 8 title in 1975-76. Akers fought for entitlements under [Title IX](#) that mandated equality in women and men’s athletics. She eventually lost her job but remains as the school’s winningest coach with a record of 206-94. Lynn Hickey became the second coach in 1978-79 and K-State made its first trip to the NCAA tournament in 1981-82, advancing to the Elite Eight. The next year Pricilla Gary became KSU’s first Kodak All-American. In 1983-84 the Wildcats made their third straight appearance in the NCAA tourney and K-State received its first top 10 ranking at 7th in the nation. Following a series of coaching changes, Deb Patterson took over as K-State’s eighth coach in 1996-97, the year the Big 12 conference was created. The Cats made it to the NCAA tournament at the end of that season for the first time in 10 years and in 2003-04 were co-champions of the Big 12. To date, the two most celebrated players during Patterson’s tenure have been Nichole Ohlde (Big 12 Player of the Year in 2003 and 2004, and two time first team All-American) and Kendra Wecker (Big 12 Player of the Year in 2005, and a consensus All-American). Ohlde and Wecker became the 3rd and 4th Wildcats drafted into the Women’s National Basketball Association, with Wecker being the program’s highest draft selection at number 4 in 2005. Both were selected to the Big 12 Women’s Basketball 10th

Anniversary Team making K-State the only school with multiple selections. Shown here conducting research in the University Archives during her senior year, Wecker excelled in the classroom as well as on the basketball court.

In 2005-2006, the Wildcats continued K-State's tradition as one of the outstanding teams in the country by winning the Women's National Invitation Tournament, defeating Marquette, 77-65!

The first men's game at the college took place in 1902 with K-State losing to Haskell, 60-7! There were "chaperons" rather than coaches until W. W. Melick became K-State's first coach in 1905, the year the team won its first game by defeating Minneapolis High School! In 1911 the team moved into its first permanent home, Nichols Gym, the same year that Mike Ahearn, K-State's second coach, retired after five seasons (he also coached football and baseball and held several faculty positions during his years at K-State).

Although the team had outstanding teams and players during the early years, it was not until 1948 that K-State made its first appearance in the NCAA tournament. Coached by [Jack Gardner](#), the team reached the final four where it lost to Baylor. The small capacity of Nichols Gym, combined with the success of the team, led to the construction of Ahearn Field House where the first game was played on Dec. 9, 1950 (a victory over Utah State). In 1951 the Wildcats fell to Kentucky in the finals of the NCAA championship. [Tex Winter](#) replaced Gardner in 1954 and the Wildcats reached the Final Four on two occasions, 1958 and 1964, while Winter was at the helm. Led by All-American Bob Boozer, the Cats ended the 1959 season ranked number one in the country only to lose to Cincinnati and Oscar Robertson in the regional finals. Tex Winter became known for his "triple-post offense, which he implemented in the professional ranks when he became an assistant coach for Phil Jackson and the Chicago Bulls (Michael Jordan) and later the Los Angeles Lakers (Kobe Bryant). Winter's offense became so popular that he wrote the book, [The Triple-Post Offense](#), published in 1962 by Prentice-Hall. The copy in University Archives is inscribed by Winter and includes the comment, "It has been a real pleasure for me to coach at Kansas State—A great school." Cotton Fitzsimmons replaced Winter in 1969, leading the Cats to a Big 8 title in 1970 before taking over as coach of the Kansas City Kings in the NBA.

During the 1970-86 seasons Jack Hartman became K-State's winningest coach with a record of 295-169 that included three Big 8 titles and nine post-season appearances. The University Archives received the personal papers of Coach Hartman in 2006 and a [description of his collection](#) is available.

Lon Kruger succeeded Hartman and led the Cats to four consecutive trips to the NCAA tournament (1986-1990). The last game in Ahearn Field House took place in the spring of 1988, a victory over Missouri, and the men and women's team began playing games in Bramlage Coliseum during the



**Jack Hartman and Players**

1988-89 season. Dana Altman replaced Kruger and took K-State to the NCAA tournament during the 1992-93 season followed by another appearance in 1996 when the team was coached by Tom Asbury. Jim Woolridge coached the Wildcats for six years before he was replaced by Bob Huggins on March 24, 2006 to become K-State's 21st head coach. The Wildcats have taken 22 trips to the NCAA tournament where they reached the Final Four on four occasions.

We hope that you've enjoyed this trip through K-State's basketball past. Go Cats!

=====

*Sources in the University Archives used for this issue of K-State Keepsakes include the following: Women's and Men's basketball media guides and programs, Manhattan Mercury, Kansas State Collegian, records of KSU Sports Information and Intercollegiate Athletics, Jack Hartman Papers, Photograph Collection, and Vertical Files.*