

1960 NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

Combination Of Veterans And Youngsters Led To NCAA Title

By STEVE HELWAGEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

It was two short years ago that Ohio State was the 11th-place team in the Big Ten. That seems like light years given last year's run to the NCAA Final Four and this year's Big Ten championship.

But go back exactly four decades and you will find evidence of another of college basketball's amazing turnarounds and one of the sport's all-time greatest teams.

On March 19, Ohio State's 1959-60 basketball team will celebrate the 40th anniversary of its national championship — the school's only NCAA title in men's basketball.

Coach Fred Taylor engineered this dramatic feat in just his second season as the OSU coach. He was elevated from his position as the freshman coach in June 1958 after Floyd Stahl resigned and moved into OSU's athletic administration.

The team was a combination of veterans and youngsters, the latter group part of the college game's second-best recruiting class in the history of the game, according to a 1989 article in *The Sporting News*.

With Stahl stepping down, Taylor and assistant coach Jack Graf each had a hand in landing this class, which would go on to make college basketball history. The group included:

- Jerry Lucas, a Middletown, Ohio, product renowned as the best player in Ohio high school and OSU history;

- John Havlicek, a heady native of the Ohio Valley who would go on to become one of the greatest players in NBA history with the Boston Celtics;

- Mel Nowell, a tremendous guard from Columbus East High School;

- Gary Gearhart, who became a valuable backup at guard; and

- Bob Knight, an Orrville, Ohio, native who also served as a vital backup before embarking on a Hall-of-Fame career as a coach at Indiana.

That group melded perfectly with the returnees from a team that finished just 11-11 the year before. Notables in that group included juniors Larry Siegfried and Richie Hoyt and seniors Dick Furry and Joe Roberts.

Hopes were high that this team would put the pieces together and contend in the Big Ten, but nobody could have predicted what would happen over the course of that championship season.

Better yet, few could have seen that this group of sophomores would go on and win 78 games and three Big Ten titles during their time on the varsity.

"Naturally, I'm very proud of those guys," Taylor told BSB several years ago prior to his hospitalization after suffering a brain aneurysm in 1996. "The sophomores on that team won 78 games and lost only six during those three years. That's pretty amazing when you think about it."

"Maybe some people don't like to use it, but I do. That team is the yardstick with which we measure a standard of excellence in basketball at Ohio State."

Building A Reputation

Over the course of the championship season, these Buckeyes would outscore their opponents by over 20 points (90.4-69.7) in posting a glistening 25-3 record.

But it was two early losses — defeats at Utah and at Kentucky — that spurred this team to greatness. OSU lost to the Utes 97-92 and fell to UK 96-93. Taylor's point regarding defense got through after that.

"It took us a little time to get to the level we wanted at the defensive end of the floor," Taylor said. "We actually scored too many points. People didn't pay quite as much attention to their assignments at the other end."

"Then we go to Utah and score 92 points and lose and, two games later, go to Kentucky,



COURTESY: OSU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS

HAVLICEK REBOUNDS — OSU's John Havlicek (5) grabs a rebound during a game at St. John Arena. Havlicek, who went on to a huge NBA career with the Boston Celtics, was fourth in scoring (12.2) and second in rebounding (7.3) in 1959-60.

score 93 and lose there, too.

"After that our people really started to work at the defensive end and, frankly, I thought we were pretty good defensively."

The Buckeyes reeled off 13 straight wins and went 13-1, winning the Big Ten title and snagging the conference's only NCAA Tournament berth.

OSU actually opened Big Ten play with a 97-73 win over Illinois. But it was a game five days later on Jan. 9, 1960, that many still remember as one of the greatest in the history of St. John Arena.

Ohio State recovered from a five-point deficit in the final minute against Indiana, using a halfcourt trap to force a handful of turnovers.

Siegfried's only basket of the game lifted OSU to victory, 96-95. Nowell led the Buckeyes with 26 points in this pivotal win. Havlicek, coming off a wrist injury, had 21 points and 11 rebounds. Lucas, who missed appreciable time due to a twisted ankle, chipped in 17 points and 10 rebounds.

"Indiana was supposed to be the team to beat," Taylor said. "That win just sort of set the tempo for our season."

And it was a fast tempo.

Few teams in history have ripped through the Big Ten the way Taylor's gang did. They won 12 straight conference games to wrap up the school's first Big Ten title in 10 years.

During the course of the streak, Michigan State was the only other team to play the Buckeyes within 14 points. A Lucas dunk on an out-of-bounds play in the closing seconds helped OSU escape East Lansing with an 84-83 victory on Feb. 20.

Indiana, avenging its earlier defeat, was the only Big Ten team to get the better of the Buckeyes, winning 99-83 after OSU had already clinched the title.

"You're lucky, we should be in the NCAA," barked IU coach Branch McCracken, whose 20-4 Hoosiers ended up watching the postseason.

Charting The '60 Buckeyes

| 1959-60 Ohio State Basketball Roster | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|------|------|-----|--------------------|
| No. | Player | Pos. | Ht. | Cl. | Hometown |
| 3 | Mel Nowell | G | 6-2 | So. | Columbus, Ohio |
| 4 | Gary Gearhart | G | 6-2 | So. | New Lebanon, Ohio |
| 5 | John Havlicek | F | 6-5 | So. | Lansing, Ohio |
| 10 | John Cedargren | F | 6-5 | Sr. | Columbus, Ohio |
| 11 | Jerry Lucas | C | 6-8 | So. | Middletown, Ohio |
| 12 | Dick Furry (Capt.) | F | 6-7 | Sr. | Columbus, Ohio |
| 13 | Richie Hoyt | G | 6-4 | Jr. | Mount Vernon, Ohio |
| 14 | Joe Roberts (Capt.) | F | 6-6 | Sr. | Columbus, Ohio |
| 15 | Dave Barker | G | 6-2 | Sr. | Columbus, Ohio |
| 20 | Gary Milliken | G | 6-11 | Jr. | Waynesburg, Pa. |
| 21 | Larry Siegfried | G | 6-4 | Jr. | Shelby, Ohio |
| 22 | J.T. Landes | G | 6-0 | Jr. | Columbus, Ohio |
| 24 | Bobby Knight | F | 6-4 | So. | Orrville, Ohio |
| 25 | Nelson Miller | G | 6-3 | Jr. | Reading, Ohio |
| 30 | Jim Allen | G | 5-9 | Jr. | Columbus, Ohio |
| 31 | Howard Nourse | F | 6-7 | Sr. | Springfield, Ohio |

Head coach: Fred Taylor

Assistant coaches: Jack Graf, Frank Truitt

Trainer: Ernie Biggs

1959-60 Ohio State Basketball Results (25-3, 13-1 Big Ten)

| | | |
|----------|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Dec. 1 | WAKE FOREST | W, 77-69 |
| Dec. 3 | MEMPHIS STATE | W, 94-55 |
| Dec. 5 | PITTSBURGH | W, 94-49 |
| Dec. 7 | BUTLER | W, 99-66 |
| Dec. 10 | at St. Louis | W, 81-74 |
| Dec. 18 | at Butler | W, 96-68 |
| Dec. 21 | at Utah | L, 97-92 |
| Dec. 22 | (3) at Brigham Young | W, 91-79 |
| Dec. 28 | (3) at Kentucky (13) | L, 96-93 |
| Jan. 4 | (5) ILLINOIS (8) | W, 97-73 |
| Jan. 9 | (7) INDIANA (11) | W, 96-95 |
| Jan. 11 | (7) DELAWARE | W, 109-38 |
| Jan. 16 | (5) NORTHWESTERN | W, 81-64 |
| Jan. 23 | (5) at Purdue | W, 85-71 |
| Jan. 30 | (5) MICHIGAN STATE | W, 111-79 |
| Feb. 1 | (5) MICHIGAN | W, 99-52 |
| Feb. 6 | (4) at Northwestern | W, 77-58 |
| Feb. 8 | (4) at Wisconsin | W, 106-69 |
| Feb. 13 | (4) IOWA | W, 75-47 |
| Feb. 15 | (4) at Illinois (20) | W, 109-81 |
| Feb. 20 | (4) at Michigan State | W, 84-83 |
| Feb. 27 | (2) WISCONSIN | W, 93-68 |
| Feb. 29 | (2) at Indiana (20) | L, 99-83 |
| March 5 | (2) at Minnesota | W, 75-66 |
| March 11 | (3) Western Kentucky* | W, 98-79 |
| March 12 | (3) Georgia Tech (13)* | W, 86-69 |
| March 18 | (3) New York University (12)# | W, 76-54 |
| March 19 | (3) California (2)# | W, 75-55 |

*NCAA Midwest Regional at Louisville, Ky.; #NCAA Final Four at San Francisco.

Note: Game day AP ranking for Ohio State in parentheses before opponent; opponent's rank is after opponent's name.

Statistical Leaders

- Scoring: Jerry Lucas, 26.3 points per game; Larry Siegfried, 13.2; Mel Nowell, 13.1; John Havlicek, 12.2; Joe Roberts, 11.0.
- Rebounding: Lucas, 16.4 rebounds per game; Havlicek, 7.3; Roberts, 6.9.

- Field-Goal Percentage: Lucas, .637; Roberts, .480; Nowell, .473.
- Free-Throw Percentage: Lucas, .770; Nowell, .768; Siegfried, .750.

The Tournament Trail

Prior to the postseason, OSU football coach Woody Hayes served as the master of ceremonies for the basketball team's appreciation banquet.

Hayes predicted an NCAA championship. Taylor didn't go quite that far, but he did say, "Regardless of the outcome of future games, you will see the nicest bunch of kids in the country."

At the time, 24 teams participated in the NCAA Tournament, with the field limited to conference champions and selected independents. As the Big Ten champion, OSU received a first-round bye in the Midwest Region.

The Buckeyes tackled Western Kentucky in their opener. OSU pulled away late for a 98-79 win behind Lucas' 36 points. Knight, better known for his coaching exploits, actually hit a couple of key jumpers as the Buckeyes put WKU away.

Roberts had 19 points and nine rebounds as the Buckeyes dispatched No. 13 Georgia Tech 86-69 to advance to the Final Four at San Francisco's Cow Palace.

OSU's semifinal opponent was perennially tough New York University, which had already bounced Jerry West's West Virginia team and ACC champion Duke from the tournament. The other semifinal pitted defending champion and second-ranked California against No. 1 Cincinnati, led by dynamic Oscar Robertson.

The Buckeyes rolled to a 76-54 win over New York as Lucas scored 19 and limited future Boston Celtics star Tom "Satch" Sanders to just nine. Siegfried also had 19 in the semifinal win.

"They had a good team, but we won by 20 points," Taylor recalled. "Then we had to sit back and wait to see what happened in the other game."

The Golden Bears eliminated Cincinnati in the second game, 77-69. Cal, playing just a few miles from its Berkeley campus, was bidding to

become just the fourth team to win back-to-back NCAA titles.

And everything pointed to that happening: The game was played at midnight Eastern time, Cal's Pete Newell was the hands-down choice as coach of the year and the Cow Palace crowd of 14,500 heavily favored the Bears, who had won 45 of their last 46 games.

But the Buckeyes came out of the huddle firing, connecting on 16 of their 19 shots from the floor in the first half while building a 37-19 halftime lead. OSU succeeded in challenging Cal shot blocker Darrall Irnhoff.

The Buckeyes then hit 17 of their 27 shots in the second half to win a 75-55 laugher — the largest winning margin in title game history to that point.

"We were concerned about all of that," Taylor said, referring to the deck stacked against his team. "But those kids rose to the occasion every time. By the time the game was over, there was really no doubt which was the better team that night."

A crowd estimated at 10,000 greeted the Buckeyes upon their return to the Columbus airport. The players with remaining eligibility would come back the next two years and advance all the way to the NCAA title game before twice falling to Cincinnati.

But the focus remains on that 1960 team. "I made a remark when we came back to Columbus after those kids won that in 20 years, people would still be talking about them," Taylor said in 1990. "Here it's 30 years and people are still talking about them."

"That was a heckuva bunch of kids."

1960 NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

How Do They Stack Up?

'60 Team Compares Favorably To Today's Best, Assistant Says

By LEE CARYER
Special to Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Forty years ago Dwight D. Eisenhower was in the White House. It was one year after Buddy Holly crashed on "the day the music died" and four years before the Beatles would appear on The Ed Sullivan Show.

Season tickets for Ohio State men's basketball at St. John Arena were \$24, which included 12 games. No seat licenses were required to watch one of the best teams in the history of college basketball.

Many Ohio State fans do not remember Jim Jackson leading the Buckeyes to two Big Ten titles in 1991 and '92. Fewer know the excellence of Dennis Hopson in 1987. Counting four years of college as a generation, 1960 was 10 generations ago. How can current fans grasp the magnificence of a team from so long ago?

Players from that team are modest about their athletic achievements, preferring to discuss friendships formed and academic standards set. Though the entire team graduated, with seven adding

master's degrees and three doctorates, that was only a bit above average for Ohio State players under coach Fred Taylor. Of 102 lettermen while he was in charge, 97 wore the cap and gown.

Still, the fact that three members of the team — Dick Furry, Richie Hoyt and Jerry Lucas — won the Western Conference Scholar-Athlete Award in consecutive years is noteworthy. Selectors must have tried hard to find another school, or at least another sport.

Ask men like Pete Newell, coach of the 1959 champion California Bears, defeated by OSU in the final game in 1960, and Jerry Colangelo, a guard at Illinois then and owner of the NBA Phoenix Suns today, about that team and they focus on the class, character, intelligence and competitiveness of the players and coaches.

OK, but what about the basketball? One way to assess the legendary team is to ask knowledgeable observers of the modern game who had exposure to developments in St. John Arena in 1960. The kind of a fan who today heads over to the Fairgrounds Coliseum to watch high school games the day after returning from



COURTESY: OSU ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS

A CLASS BY ITSELF — Former OSU basketball coach Fred Taylor (standing) is pictured with three key members of the 1958 recruiting class. They are, left to right, John Havlicek, Jerry Lucas and Mel Nowell.

the Big Ten tournament, former OSU assistant Frank Truitt qualifies.

"I don't need time to think about how good that team would be today," said Truitt, the winning coach of Columbus North in the only game Jerry Lucas lost before arriving in Columbus, the 1958 state semifinal upset of Middletown. "I've been thinking about it all year.

"The players were great; they all played in the NBA," said Truitt, later head man at LSU, Kent State and (Columbus) Watterson High School. "Lucas has yet to fumble a pass, he had great hands. Nobody went after a loose ball like (John) Havlicek. When Joe Roberts got a rebound, he owned it. Mel Nowell and Gary Gearhart were quick, like Jason Singleton last year, or Derek Anderson or Mark Baker before that. (Larry) Siegfried wasn't as quick, but he had a quick first step. He was a scorer."

Havlicek said he first got excited about defense when freshman coach Truitt told the players, "You guys scored 170 points a game in high school; somebody has to play defense." I thought that could be my opportunity."

The emphasis on defense became contagious, Truitt said.

"When the papers wrote about Terry Dischinger of Purdue, the best Big Ten player not on our team, and whether or

not Havlicek could stop him, Larry Siegfried got interested in defense," recalled Truitt.

Siegfried was the defensive stopper against star guards for Western Kentucky, Georgia Tech and New York University in the tournament run.

In the finals, Lucas held future NBA stars Tom Sanders and Darrall Imhoff to eight points each. By the end of the season, the Buckeyes had superb defenders at center, forward and guard.

Beyond offense and defense, Truitt appreciates intangible ingredients that fans see in Scoonie Penn today.

"Scoonie does what the team needs, he's an unselfish team player," said Truitt, who would have voted Penn the Big Ten MVP. "When we were down against St. John's I told my wife, 'As long as Scoonie is in the game, we have a chance.' Then he hit some shots and made that block. He realizes there is enough recognition in victory to go around.

"I used to say, 'One player with confidence is a majority,' and Scoonie has confidence. You look at that '60 team, they all had that kind of confidence. Maybe they got it from each other," Truitt said.

"When they ran a fast break, they

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Squad Thought Of As One Of The 10 Best Ever

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hardly ever dribbled, just passed the ball until somebody had a layup. Today, with the three-point line, they would score even more (than their 90.4 points per game, which led the country). Lucas, Siegfried and Nowell were great outside shooters. (Bob) Knight, too. That would open up the inside, where Fred liked most of the shots."

Often praised as a scout by Taylor, Truitt forecast an Ohio State victory in the semifinal over New York by 75-60. The final score was 76-54. Asked how the 1960 team would fare against Cincinnati today, Truitt went through the match-ups: Lucas and Kenyon Martin? "No contest." Jermaine Tate and Roberts? "No contest." Pete Mickeal and Havlicek? "No contest."

Point taken. There would be no reason to bother comparing UC's freshman guards to Siegfried and Nowell.

"I've seen every NCAA champion since 1960, the great UCLA teams and all of them," said Truitt. "I compare every team to those guys and say, 'That's OK.'"

His look says, "We would beat them." Naval Academy coach Don DeVoe was one year away from OSU in the spring of 1960. That fall he and buddy Gary Bradds were freshmen, doing their best to challenge the varsity.

Since playing on three Big Ten title winners, DeVoe has led Navy, Tennessee and Virginia Tech into the NCAA tournament, served under Taylor as a grad assistant for the 1971 team that beat No. 1-ranked Marquette in the regionals and also coached at Florida.

"No question the 1960 team ranks in the top 10 college teams all-time," he said. "Lucas would be a first-team All-American today. Havlicek would be a star in any era, in any system. He didn't need the ball in his hands to be effective. Siegfried and Nowell were great scorers."

"The seniors — Joe Roberts, Dick Furry and Howie Nourse — had size and were good leaders. Fred Taylor was a great strategist who kept the team on an even keel. That team would have won at any time, with any rules."

In 1960, Dick Ricketts was a junior at tiny Belle Center High School in northwest Ohio. He would decline Kentucky's scholarship offer and battle Lucas and the others as a freshman, then team with Bradds and DeVoe on two Big Ten championship teams. As a senior captain in his final game, Ricketts scored 32 points in the upset of top-ranked Michigan. That performance ranks as one of the outstanding individual performances in St. John Arena history.

"They would be highly successful," Ricketts said in comparing the '60 team to other NCAA champions. "Their age might slow them up a little but they should still win it."

"Their athleticism would allow them to adjust to any situation," continued the practical joker and coach of 314 victories at Columbus South High School. "The competitiveness and the desire in their hearts wouldn't change, so they'd be successful now. They liked each other and did not care who scored."

"I think they could have beaten any of those great teams," concluded the man Taylor annually promoted for admission to the OSU Athletics Hall of Fame. "I'm an Ohio State guy, but I can't see anybody beating them."

Another Ohio State guy, Bill Hosket, was "watching the Bucks on the radio" as an eighth-grader in 1960. But he spent plenty of time competing with them in the NBA, as well as during summers when they returned to Columbus for a workout. Of course, he has stayed close to the game as an ESPN Regional Television analyst.

"You don't have to ask if they could have played in another era because they did it. John played 16 years in the NBA," said Hosket. Lucas played 11 years, while Siegfried stayed in the

1960 Team's Notable Achievements

An accompanying story shows the record of the 1960 Buckeyes. Here are some little-known facts to help illustrate the unique greatness of the team.

- Only 32 Division I schools have won NCAA championships, about 10 percent.
- Four members of the 1960 team are in the Basketball Hall of Fame: Fred Taylor, Jerry Lucas, John Havlicek and Bob Knight.
- Sports Illustrated recently chose Lucas as a post player beside Lew Alcindor of UCLA (Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in the NBA) on its college basketball all-century team, selecting them over Bill Russell, Bill Walton, Larry Bird and other all-time greats.

As impressive as a "double-double" is today, Lucas had 30 points and 23 rebounds in 1960 against Illinois, then ranked ninth in the country. As an upperclassman, Lucas had 30/30s against Kentucky and UCLA. In two NBA seasons he averaged a 20/20 for the year; Wilt Chamberlain is the only other player to do that more than once.

Joe Roberts has said, "It all started with Lucas. He did not want to be a star, so we had the perfect team approach."

- In 1989, The Sporting News published a book titled "College Basketball's 25 Greatest Teams." The 1960 Buckeyes were ranked sixth, behind the UCLA teams of Alcindor (1) and Walton (3), Indiana's undefeated 1976 team (2), Russell's San Francisco teams in 1955 and 1956 (4) and the 1954 Kentucky team of Cliff Hagan and Frank Ramsey (5).

• Three schools have had two members of the NBA 50 Greatest Players enrolled in the same season: Clyde Drexler and Hakeem Olajuwon of Houston; Michael Jordan and James Worthy of North Carolina; and Lucas and Havlicek.

- Two NCAA championship teams have sent their entire starting lineups to the NBA, the 1960 Buckeyes and Indiana in 1976. Due to expansion from nine teams to 29 and an increase in roster positions per team from 11 to 12, there are 3-1/2 times as many NBA jobs today as there were in the summer of 1962 when the Lucas/Havlicek class became eligible for the NBA.

• Only one NCAA champion, the 1960 Ohio State Buckeyes, went through the tournament with a margin of victory of at least 17 points in every game.

league for nine.

"They were athletic and competitive. Jerry and John were among the best to ever play, and I'm not sure Ohio State has ever had a better guard than Larry. If somebody told me they couldn't play today, I would reply, 'Don't tell me, tell them.'"

"They were so quick from the neck up," Hosket maintained. "They had an extraordinary knowledge of the game and played with some of the smartest teams in NBA history, Jerry with the Red Holtzman Knicks and John and Larry with the Red Auerbach Celtics."

"Then you add NBA players Mel Nowell and Joe Roberts, guys who would have been stars on good college teams ... it was a great team."

In fact, it's widely known that when Bill Russell replaced Auerbach as coach of the Celtics, Havlicek and Siegfried

were relied on as almost assistant coaches.

From his hospital bed, Coach Taylor is asked about challenging the best teams in NCAA history. Would he be interested in coaching the 1960 Buckeyes?

His daughter Nikki suggests an aggressive reply, which draws a frown. Not appropriate.

He settles for a wry smile and a wink. The gleam in his eye suggests he is relishing the opportunity and considering calling assistants Truitt and Jack Graf to plan strategy.

Lee Caryl authored the 1991 book "The Golden Age of Ohio State Basketball," which chronicled the 12-year period from 1960-71 when the Buckeyes won seven Big Ten championships.

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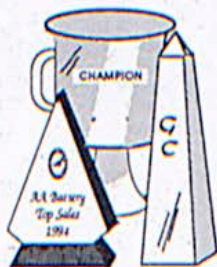
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