

*Hondo Vital Cog In OSU's March To Title***Havlicek Cites Defense For Longevity**

By Brent LaLonde

Although he averaged about 30 points a game in high school and 20.8 per game over a 16-year NBA career with the Boston Celtics, John Havlicek's role on the 1960 national championship team at Ohio State was to play defense.

Nothing more and definitely nothing less.

"I was just one of those guys who had a good high school career," Havlicek said. "And Coach (Fred) Taylor expressed the fact that he needed some defensive players.

"Back then, you could have been the leading scorer in the country, but if you couldn't guard anybody, you were out."

According to Havlicek, everybody had a role to play on the 1960 edition of the Buckeyes and everybody executed his role. The results were wins.

"If you didn't adhere, you were not doing the job properly," he said. "We all relished in getting the job done.

"I averaged over 30 points a game for two years in high school. But I just worked within my framework. I was a defensive player, but I had no qualms about that when I was playing with those type of people."

Those type of people included Jerry Lucas, Joe Roberts, Larry Siegfried, Mel Nowell and Bobby Knight — the foundation that would help Ohio State make three consecutive appearances in the NCAA Final Four.

Havlicek did manage to average 12.2 points per game during his sophomore year, but a majority of the scoring load was handled by another sophomore starter, Lucas, who averaged 26.3 points per game.

"Jerry Lucas put Ohio State on the map," Havlicek said simply.

Although Ohio State had three sophomores, one junior and one senior in the starting lineup that year, the man whose nickname was "Hondo" said he knew the Buckeyes would have a formidable team that year based on its promising sophomore class, which included him as well as Lucas and Nowell.

All the hype started the previous year when the three were playing on the freshman team. Freshmen were not eligible at the time for varsity competition.

"As freshmen, we beat the varsity twice," Havlicek said. "They would have a full house when the junior varsity played because people would come to see the freshmen. And then they would leave before the varsity game started."

So the expectations were fairly high for the 1960 team, but it was also something new for the basketball Buckeyes.

"We were excited," Havlicek said. "We didn't know how good we were, but we knew we were beatable. We just wanted to go as far as we could go."

The Buckeyes won the Big Ten that year with a 13-1 record, losing only to Indiana after the title was clinched and finishing the regular season with a 21-3 record.

After defeating Western Kentucky and Georgia Tech in the regional tournament, the Buckeyes advanced to play in the Final Four at the Cow Palace in San Francisco.

But Havlicek cut two fingers on his shooting hand in a dormitory restroom accident shortly before leaving for San

Francisco.

"It was a pretty serious injury. We were worried about it," he said.

Havlicek did miss a few shots at the Final Four, but the Buckeyes had no problem in disposing of New York University 76-54 in the semifinal and California 75-55 in the final.

"We got off to a quick start and won pretty easy," he said.

In the first half of the final, according to Havlicek, the Buckeyes "shot something like 17 of 21 from the field and I missed two or three of those shots."

Havlicek remembers being greeted warmly by Columbus upon the Buckeyes' return from California.

"We were the new kid on the block," he said. "So it was all pretty new for us. But there were a lot of people at the airport when we got back and I think we even had a parade downtown."

It also marked the first time that the basketball team was able to take center stage over the football team, which went 3-5-1 the year before.

"The focus was on basketball for the first time," Havlicek said. "When people think of Ohio State they think of football first and basketball second."

Although it was the Buckeyes' first trip to the Final Four, it was not Havlicek's.

"I had gone to the Final Four the year before with my high school coach," he said. "Maybe that should have told me something."

Havlicek has fond memories of all his teammates at Ohio State, including Lucas and Knight.

"Lucas was everybody's All-American," he said. "He was just a great shooter and rebounder.

"What I remember most about Bobby is that when he fouled you, it wasn't cheap. It was always a good foul, but you knew you were fouled."

After helping Ohio State reach the NCAA finals the following two years — the Buckeyes lost to Cincinnati both times — Havlicek took his show to Boston, where he would play on eight NBA championship teams in 16 years.

But Havlicek never dreamed of playing in the NBA while playing high school basketball in Bridgeport, Ohio.

"I never even thought about that type of thing," he said. "I never even saw a professional game until I was drafted by the Boston Celtics.

"I had played with a lot of the players during the summer, but I never saw a game until I was drafted."

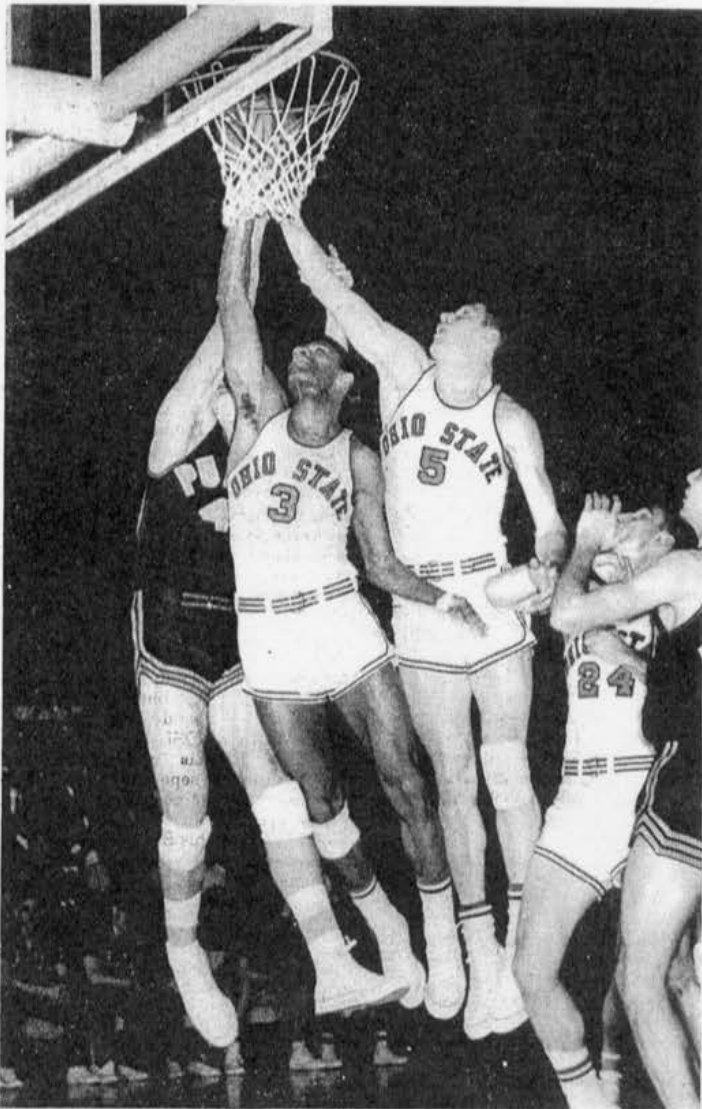
He averaged 14.3 points per game during his rookie season in 1962-63 and would go on to become one of the all-time NBA greats before landing in the Hall of Fame in 1983.

Havlicek said the pro game came pretty easily to him.

"The transition was not as difficult for me as a lot of other people," he said. "One of the things the pros look for is people who are able to play defense. If you can play defense, you are assured a spot in the pros."

Havlicek, who was also drafted by the Cleveland Browns as a wide receiver and probably could have played professional baseball as well, credits Taylor for teaching him how to play fundamental defense.

"Fred was well prepared and



Ohio State sophomores Mel Nowell (3) and John Havlicek (5) go up for a rebound during a 1960 game against Purdue. As first-year players, Nowell and Havlicek were two important cogs in the Buckeyes' drive to the national championship.

organized," he said. "He taught me more about the game of basketball than anybody else.

"And then I went to the Celtics and played with guys like Bill Russell and K.C. Jones. Those guys could play some

defense." Havlicek, who retired from the NBA in 1978, is currently a businessman in the Boston area and occasionally does some television work as a color commentator.

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BSB'S BEST OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Clutch Havlicek One Of NBA's All-Time Greats

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It's hard to imagine someone who actually hates John Havlicek. Sure, there are plenty of former opponents who no doubt muttered a thing or two while he was besting them on the basketball court.

But the whole package was there: smart, clean-cut, humble, great shooter, keen passer, relentless defender, willing rebounder, coachable, competitor, winner. Even a hardcore Indiana Hoosiers or L.A. Lakers fan can appreciate what Havlicek is all about.

And because Havlicek, a Hall of Fame hoopster at Ohio State and in the NBA, was the consummate team player and professional, his truly outstanding athletic ability is still a bit overlooked to this day.

However, Havlicek's place in OSU history is secure — he rounds out the top five in BSB's Best of the 20th Century poll.

"I don't have any idea how many All-Americans have been at Ohio State, but I'd like to see the list and compare it to other schools," Havlicek told BSB when told of his standing.

"I wouldn't have any idea where I'd rank because there are so many great athletes and it goes back so many years. I'm surprised people were able to come up with a list like that and I'm happy to be No. 5, if you say so."

Recognized as one of the NBA's 50 Greatest, Havlicek also would rank very high on an all-time basketball list. His No. 17 hangs from the rafters of the FleetCenter in Boston which the Celtics now call home. Of course, it was first aloft at the now-defunct Boston Garden, where Havlicek

staged many of his clutch performances and helped the Celtics capture eight NBA titles.

In his 16 pro seasons, Havlicek was a career 20-point scorer who made 13 NBA All-Star games, was an All-NBA first-teamer four times and an All-Defensive first-teamer five times.

But he had only hinted at such ability at Bridgeport (Ohio) High School, where he was all-state in baseball and football as well as basketball.

At 6-5 and 205 pounds, Havlicek was a prime prospect for all three and nearly played for Woody Hayes instead of fellow legend Fred Taylor at OSU. He decided, of course, on hoops but only after conferring with fellow Ohio stars Jerry Lucas and Mel Nowell, who convinced him they could help make the Buckeyes a force on the hardwood.

"When I came out of high school I could have signed a baseball contract and I visited Ohio State more for football than basketball," Havlicek said. "Woody really pursued me a great deal."

"But the sport I liked the most was basketball and after having played in some high school all-star games with some of these guys it became quite clear as to where I was going to go because I thought we had the nucleus of a great team.

"As it turned out, I couldn't have picked it or planned it any better."

When his outstanding three-year run at OSU was over — or 78 college wins, three Final Fours and an NCAA title later — the football bug bit again. Havlicek was selected in the seventh round of the 1962 NFL draft by the Cleveland Browns and was the last receiver cut, mostly because Gary Collins, the team's top pick out of Maryland, had a no-cut contract.

"They asked me back the next six years, but I

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BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN
Best Of The 20th Century



COURTESY: OSU PHOTO ARCHIVES

HONDO AND THE COACH — John Havlicek (left) is pictured with former OSU basketball coach Fred Taylor. Havlicek was voted No. 5 in BSB's Best of the 20th Century survey.

thought the good Lord was trying to tell me something when I got cut that first time," he said.

But you get the feeling Havlicek, now a successful businessman, would have made a name for himself in another sport if he had gravitated toward something else. The late Richard Larkins, a longtime OSU athletic director, once called Havlicek the greatest athlete in school history.

His all-around ability was the perfect fit for Taylor's teams of 1960-62, which featured the unstoppable Lucas in the pivot and called for others to play unselfishly.

"Nobody shot all that much besides Jerry," Taylor told the Lantern, OSU's student newspaper, in 1988. "We passed it around to him. That's why Havlicek decided to make this club on the defensive end of the floor, which he did."

"We usually put him on the toughest corner assignment but there were times we moved him into the backcourt. The neat thing about it was you could give John a particular assignment knowing his opponent's output was pretty much going to be sliced in half."

Former OSU teammate Bob Knight, now an authority on team basketball as Indiana coach, said Havlicek "was the best defensive player in college basketball."

With his constant motor, Havlicek soon became known as "Hondo." When he wasn't hitting a clutch shot or ripping a big rebound, it seemed he was doing something else that led to victory. He was a low-post player in high school who often cleaned up his own misses on sheer hustle and toughness.

At OSU, he worked diligently on his offense. His 341 points in 1959-60 were fourth-best on the team and he improved to 407 as a junior (third) and 475 as a senior (second). His sophomore averages of 12.2 points and 7.3 rebounds improved

All-Century Comments

Here are survey comments on John Havlicek:

- "A good rebounder, but he was better on defense. He had a better pro career." — Neal Kasper of Akron, Ohio.
- "The Buckeyes' defensive stopper became the Celtics' scoring machine." — Scott Laidig of Gulf Breeze, Fla.
- "A totally dedicated athlete." — former OSU sports information director Marv Homan.

steadily to 17.0 and 9.7 in 1961-62, when he was named a first-team All-American.

"I would say of all the players I've ever seen, he analyzed himself better and used himself better, or at least as well, as any player I've ever known," Knight said.

Havlicek left OSU as a career 50.8 percent field-goal shooter, yet there was some debate as to how he would fit in in the pros.

"I chose John because I looked at him as a swingman and we needed a guy who could play two positions," longtime Celtics coach and executive Red Auerbach once said. "He was well-coached and fundamentally sound. But to be honest, I was surprised at all the things he could do. For one thing, we didn't know he could shoot that well."

Auerbach low-balled Havlicek and offered him \$9,500 out of college. Havlicek had some leverage, though. Not only was he mulling an offer from the Browns, he also was being courted by George Steinbrenner, who at the time owned a fledgling ABA team called the Cleveland Pipers. Steinbrenner also was working on signing Lucas and was offering relative big bucks.

The rest, of course, is history. After talking the Celtics into a \$15,000 deal, Havlicek gave them their money's worth and then some with 26,395 career points, which is 20.8 per game despite coming off the bench for a large chunk of games. Havlicek, who stayed in the Boston area after retiring in 1978 and remains a town favorite, was elected to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 1983.

Havlicek, who had a hand in bringing good friend Jim O'Brien to OSU as the new basketball coach in 1997, will turn 60 in April, but he doesn't look it. He also doesn't resemble the unsophisticated kid who arrived from eastern Ohio more than 40 years ago.

"We were all real naive," said Larry Siegfried, Havlicek's teammate with the Buckeyes and Celtics. "None of us ever dated so we just hung out in Baker Hall with the other athletes. John, like the rest of us, came from a little town in Ohio. People used to think we thought we were too good for anybody because we only associated with each other, but that wasn't the case at all. It was just our backwardness."

"And John was probably more raw-boned than I was."

Havlicek added, "The thing about our team was, we were student-athletes first. Everyone graduated, everyone was a great student. One of the most amazing things about the group, I realized in '95 when we had the last banquet, I there were nine master's degrees, two Ph.D.s and one or two M.D.s, and it's indicative of the kind of student-athletes we had back then."

"Maybe that was one reason why we were so well-received."

Especially John J. Havlicek.

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