

☆☆☆ Basketball Team Honored at Banquet ☆☆☆

By Jon Spencer
Sports Editor

Last Sunday evening, a large gathering of people united in the Accent Room of the Convocation Center to fondly gaze back on the winter months which have just passed.

Crazy people?

Not really. Not if you remember that amid one of the most grueling winters in history played what is now one of the most successful basketball teams in AC history.

Which explains why the coaches, players and their families, local boosters and sports writers were assembled on Sunday . . . to honor the 20-6 Eagles at the annual awards banquet.

Local radio personality and voice of the Eagles, John James, acted as toastmaster for the occasion, and when he said he believed the Eagles fell three points short of a national championship, he pretty well summed up this extraordinary team.

Of course, James was referring to the 69-67 loss suffered at the buzzer to eventual national champs, Wittenberg, in the Great Lakes Regional Championship.

In getting to the regionals Ashland had to overcome a sluggish start to the season, some individual slumps, and an energy crisis which kept AC out of its own gymnasium for awhile.

In the end analysis, the Eagles, indeed, came a long way.

"There were some tremendous highlights on the season," said head coach Joe Gottfried to those in attendance. "The games with Youngstown State, Muskingum and Wittenberg (all nail-biters) at the end of the season were three of the most enjoyable ballgames I've ever been associated with as a coach.

"The last couple of years have been two of my most enjoyable as a coach, and that stems from the individuals I've been working with."

Receiving letters were Randy Weston, Fred Graham, Brian Miller, Tom Kramb, Dave Heck, Scott Hamlin, Monty Wicks, Rob VanEssen, Joe Vitez, Dick Steineman, Darrell Calloway, and JoJo McRae.

Gottfried pointed out the support he received from senior manager Jeff Calame, and was lavish in his praise for assistant Rob Spivery.

"In the 14 years I've been connected with coaching, Rob has been one of the finest assistant coaches I've been associated with," admitted Gottfried. "I've been blessed with 'a' top assistant."

Spivery returned the compliment. "I can't ask for a better person to work with," he said.

Gottfried has now concluded his fourth year as head coach of the Eagles, three of them ending in winning campaigns. "The four years have gone so fast when I think of Dick and Darrell coming in," he said in retrospect, Steineman and Calloway being the only players remaining from his first year in the top position.

Steineman and McRae are two of the more celebrated Eagles to graduate in recent years (McRae scholastically has two semesters to go), and Gottfried acknowledged this in speaking on them.

"Two years ago we were looking for a certain type of individual to ignite us, not only in ability, but he also had to blend in attitude-wise. Some players with his individual talent might have a tendency to lay back, but from day one, there has not been a day that JoJo has not worked hard for us. I look at him and realize he is a great reason why we have had 20-win seasons back-to-back.

"Dick has progressed so far, not only in ability but also in maturity. He's had two tremendous years. Along with JoJo, he's been the type of leader who has performed from his leadership on the court."

Trophies were handed out at the banquet to special award winners. Top Freshman went to Fred Graham, Most Improved was Rob VanEssen, Aggressive Club Leaders were VanEssen and McRae, Top Rebounder went to Steineman, and Top Defensive Player and MVP went to McRae. The ace back-courter was also given his Basketball Weekly award for being named as a first-team All-American by the publication.

Joe Vitez, the other departing senior, was presented with a t-shirt proclaiming him (in red lettering) as "Head AC Rat." Joe then passed out "Rat" shirts to the rest of the members of the Rat Patrol, the nicknamed on the Eagle bench brigade.

"Freddy (Graham) was always saying I look like a rat," said Vitez, in explaining how the nickname came about. "I've been called worse."

Gottfried mentioned how he had layed out eight goals for his teams to achieve back when he gained the reins of head coach. Five have been accomplished, including a 20-win season and a berth in a post-season tournament.

Three goals remain: to play before packed houses, to make the program self-supporting (which really goes hand-in-hand with packed houses), and to win the NCAA championship.

"All three are reasonable goals and ones which I will again talk to the players about next year," said Gottfried.

Next year . . . who can wait?

From the Sports Desk

I guess now is as good a time as any to start thinking about a sports staff for

next year's paper. Better early than never . . . isn't that how the saying goes?

Anyhow, it is my conviction that most of you students on campus have a keen interest in sports. I sense this because at one time or another some of you have come up to me and in a friendly way hinted at the possibility of more coverage for such and such a sport.

Fine, I would love nothing more than to accommodate everyone by filling the eight pages printed with sports, and I sincerely mean that. But because the paper is only eight pages, and what with other things happening on campus, this is impossible.

Plus, I welcome and need your help in covering the various athletic activities on campus during the school year. If you are interested in sports, and think you have a flair for writing (especially feature or human interest stories) contact me either by phone, or by leaving a note at the Collegian office informing me of any such desires.

Jon Spencer
Sports Editor





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