

50 Years of Nelson Fieldhouse

Robert Dunkelberger, 2005H and Ed Coar, 1978



Throughout the 2022-23 basketball season, program inserts for each conference game will mark the 50th anniversary of the opening of the E. H. Nelson Fieldhouse. These inserts will feature various aspects of the histories of the five longest running sports housed by the field house: men's and women's basketball, men's and women's swimming, and wrestling. Today's installment features a history of women's basketball at Bloomsburg and the first game played by the women in Nelson Fieldhouse.

Basketball at the Bloomsburg State Normal School (BSNS) began in 1894 for the men and just three years later women were also given an opportunity to compete in the sport. Although it was not on the same terms as the men, who played exclusively against teams from other institutions, it was a chance for the Normal School's women to express their athleticism in a sport other than tennis.



The 1912 Women's Class Basketball Champions

With a few exceptions, the Bloomsburg women primarily played against each other in class teams and from 1911 to 1923 were awarded a trophy. When they did compete with an off-campus opponent, it was usually a high school such as Wilkes-Barre or another Normal School, often times East Stroudsburg, and the Bloomsburg women would win more often than they lost.

What really set the women's games apart from the men's, however, was the fact that the spectators were only other women. Men, who could watch women play tennis on the outdoor courts, had been forbidden from the start to see them play basketball. The sport was deemed too physical and unladylike, so it was unseemly for men to be in the gymnasium, although they could stand outside the door and

receive updates on the score. What the ban did was to make the male students even more determined to see what they were missing. For one game, in fact, two men dressed in women's clothing in order to get into the gym. Finally, in January 1914, the ban was lifted and the women could play in front of a diverse crowd of enthusiastic supporters.

Women's athletics took a different turn in 1926 when Lucy McCammon was hired. She established an intramural program called the "B Club," where female students could earn points for athletic accomplishments in various sports and earn letters. This program unfortunately ended formal basketball teams and games with other schools. When McCammon retired in 1958, she was replaced by Eleanor Wray, who firmly believed that women should have the same opportunities in sports as men.

In 1961, Wray and other women's physical education instructors began a fight to create an intercollegiate program for women. Resistance to this was based primarily on potential cost, but finally in January 1962, after Wray had submitted a ten-page justification for women's athletics, did college president Harvey Andruss relent. A field hockey team under Wray began play that fall, then on February 1, 1963, the first game of the newly instituted women's basketball



Joanne McComb, first coach of the women's varsity program

program was played, a 35-27 victory at Lock Haven, with Joanne McComb as coach.

Unfortunately there was little coverage of these early seasons and no official records were saved. This would not happen until the 1970s, when the 1970-71 team, with a 7-2 record and McComb still the coach, became the first listed in the program's official records. Greater support for women's sports did not come until after the passage of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Title IX, which stated educational programs receiving federal aid could not discriminate on the basis of sex.

While the women's basketball team remained successful, they did not move to Nelson Fieldhouse when it opened in 1972 and instead continued to play in the cozier confines of Centennial Gymnasium. The 1973-74 squad went undefeated at 8-0, while the next two teams each won 11 games and were a combined 22-5. Then, still in Centennial, the 1976-77 team compiled a record of 10-4 and senior Ellen French concluded her career with a school record 559 points.

The 1977-78 team was Sue Hibbs first as head coach and she had veteran leadership with senior forwards and co-captains Julie Ludroff and Mary Balaban. Ludroff was an offensive weapon, having set three school records as a

sophomore with 222 points, a 17.0 per game average, and 174 rebounds. The schedule this year was a difficult one, especially with the first seven games on the road. After going 4-3 in those contests, the Huskies were ready for their first home game. And finally, it would be in Nelson. The players were very much in favor of the move and it was time.

The inaugural game for the women in Nelson Fieldhouse took place on February 2, 1978, against the Golden Bears of Kutztown. Bloomsburg played a solid game and won 73-61. The top two scorers for the Huskies were both from Allentown: Ludroff with 17 and guard Jayne Yurasits with 15. Ludroff pulled down 22 rebounds, which would be the high on the year for a single game. The team would go on to a 5-1 record on the new court, losing only to LaSalle by six points, and conclude the year with a record of 9-6. Balaban, from Camp Hill, led the team in scoring with 15.3 a game, rebounding at 10.5 a contest, and set a school single game scoring record with 29 points against Bucknell. Ludroff concluded her career with 585 points, breaking French's record, and a record 469 rebounds. While success would elude the Huskies for the next nine seasons, the Bloomsburg women now had, as the men had enjoyed since 1972, Nelson Fieldhouse as their home court.



Nelson Fieldhouse's first women's varsity basketball team, 1977-78. Left to right, kneeling: Sue McKeegan, Anne D'Ignazio, Jayne Yurasits, Donna Santa Maria, and Karen Yefko. Left to right, standing: Manager Lisa Mangione, Patty Lyons, Mary Balaban, Terry Mangino, Julie Ludroff, Sally Houser, and Coach Sue Hibbs.