

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 fieldhouse: men's and women's basketball, men's and women's swimming, and wrestling. Today's installment features the story of the 1988-89 season for the women's basketball team, which set a school record for most wins in a year that still stands.

The first season for women's basketball in Nelson Fieldhouse was 1977-78 when the team went 9-6. The program then hit a dry spell, with eight consecutive losing seasons. The most talented player during this period was Jean Millen, a 5'9" forward from Whitehall in Lehigh County. Playing from 1982-1986, she became a nationally-ranked player in both scoring and rebounding, although was slowed her junior and senior years by a knee injury. Millen finished her career with a school record 1,113 points and 1,032 rebounds, the first woman to reach the 1,000 milestone in either category.

Success returned thanks in large part to Theresa Lorenzi, a product of West Hazleton High School who joined the team in 1985-86, and the hiring of a new head coach, Joe Bressi, the following year. He guided the Huskies to a

record 19 victories in 1986-87, then topped that the next season with 21. Lorenzi, a scoring machine unmatched in Bloomsburg basketball history, men's or women's, reached 1,000 career points the final game of her sophomore year, early the next season passed Millen, and finished her third year with 1,621.

It was the 1988-89 season that took the Bloomsburg women's program to new heights. Most very successful teams have a number of experienced players, but the Husky team this year was an exception. Except for two players, Lorenzi being one, every member of the Bloomsburg roster was a sophomore or freshman. Included among the second-year players were Barb Hall, a 6' 1" center (Warrior Run High School) who led the team in rebounding the year before, and Becky Pigga (Dunmore High School), who was



The 1988-89 women's basketball team. Front row, left to right: assistant coach Matt Haney, Tamika Howard, Bernadette Needham, Becky Pigga, Theresa Lorenzi, Nina Alston, Elaine Wolf, assistant coach Julie Shumaker, head coach Joe Bressi. Back row, left to right: manager Monica Dobson, Kathy Maguire, Lesley Seitzinger, Sandy Herr, Donna Cooper, Barb Hall, Chris Sims, Michelle Simons, Karen DeLullo.

second with 72 assists. A talented freshman who would contribute a great deal was 5' 10" forward Michelle Simons, an all-state player from North Schuylkill High School. It was a young but talented team that took to the court that year.

The first nine games of the season before the holiday break were all victories, including six from three tournaments, and a December 7 home game with Lock Haven. Won by a score of 87-73, Lorenzi scored 24 points and Hall contributed 21, along with ten rebounds, as the Huskies pulled away in the second half. Four more wins in early-mid January gave Bloomsburg a 13-0 record going into PSAC East divisional play.



Theresa Lorenzi going up for a shot versus Lock Haven her sophomore season, February 27, 1987

The Husky steamroller showed no signs of slowing down as it concluded January with six more wins. While Lorenzi continued to be the primary scorer, others from the wealth of talent at Bressi's disposal would contribute. One was Hall, who had a double-double on the 21st against East Stroudsburg, with 22 points and 15 rebounds, then a week later 21 more in a win at West Chester. Another was Simons, who stepped in and scored a season-high 20 points when Lorenzi missed the game at Mansfield on February 1.



Barb Hall on offense in the first game with the Bald Eagles during the 1988-89 season, December 7, 1988

The only contest in the first two months of 1989 to be decided by less than seven points took place at East Stroudsburg on February 11. It was a landmark game, as Lorenzi scored the 2,000th point of her career, then with one second left in overtime took a perfect inbound pass from Pigga and scored to give Bloomsburg an 84-83 win to keep the winning streak alive.

The Huskies won their final four games that month to conclude the regular season 26-0. They had won 37 consecutive regular season games, were the only team with a perfect record in Division II, and had been ranked #1 in the country since late January. They now prepared for the PSAC tournament and with a bye did not play again until March 3. A nine-day layoff did them no favors however, when everything went wrong in a rematch with a 19-8 Lock Haven team. That night Bloomsburg shot poorly and committed 21 turnovers.

Even with the loss, based on their season the Huskies earned the right to host the Eastern Regional in the NCAA Division II tournament. After defeating Pace University by two points, it was a rematch with the Bald Eagles. Once again Barb Hall was a force as she provided the spark behind a 12-3 Bloomsburg run early in the second half, turning a six-point deficit into a three-point lead and the home team never trailed again in a 64-58 victory. Hall scored 23 points and pulled down 12 rebounds while being named the tournament MVP.

The season came to an end a week later in Massachusetts at Bentley, but it was still a tremendous year with 28 wins and Lorenzi ended her career with 2,171 points, still fourth all-time in PSAC history. Since that year the Huskies have won two conference titles, in 1992 and 2013, but no team has been more dominant for as long a period of time as the one that took the court in 1988-89.