Bob Davies, All-American

By
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Bob Davies ranks as Seton Hall’s greatest basketball player. A 6’1”, 170 pound All American forward, he led the 1939-1941 “Wonder Five” on a 43 game win streak, the sixth longest in NCAA Division I history. And he stunned fans nationwide with the first behind-the-back dribble in a college game – Bob Cousy performed the trick later. Sport magazine selected Davies one of the ten top college players of the first half of the twentieth century.

During World War II, Lieutenant Davies served on subchasers in both the Mediterranean and Pacific theaters.

Coach Davies 1946-47 Seton Hall basketball team featured six-foot Bob Wanzer, a future Naismith Basketball Hall of Famer, 6’1” Frank “Pep” Saul, later member of four NBA championship teams, and 5’11” John “Whitey” Macknowski, a three NBA season performer. “Big Ben” Pagliaroli and Dick Hammock, both standing 6’3”, provided height for “The Five Midgets.”

“It was a fun year,” recalls team captain Wanzer. “We were all vets and had a heckuva good team. Davies would sometimes have to leave to play for the Royals. When he was gone, I ran the team.”

Davies (and Wanzer’s) 24 wins and 3 losses record is the ninth best first-year coach winning percentage in NCAA Division I history. The Pirates won their first eighteen games. Tacked onto the prior team’s season-ending ten consecutive wins, the twenty-eight consecutive wins is Seton Hall’s second longest basketball win streak.

Even though Bob missed 12 Rochester Royals (now NBA Sacramento Kings) games, his floor play was so outstanding that he was named National Basketball League Most Valuable Player and received the second highest number of votes for the All-Star first team.

A Rochester Times-Union sports columnist discussed “the perplexing problem confronting the nation’s No. 1 Sports commuter, Rapid Robert Davies.” No way could he continue his “backbreaking pace.” Wife Mary, who was expecting their second child, put her foot down. “He was never home on Saturday night,” she recalls.

Economically, it made sense to concentrate on professional basketball. Bob coached the Seton Hall 1947 baseball team to a 13 wins- 3 losses record and left the South Orange campus for an outstanding NBA career.
He was elected to the 25th Anniversary NBA Top Ten team, Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame, and Seton Hall University Athletic Hall of Fame.

In a testimony to his character, author Clair Bee used Bob as the role model for the lead character *Chip Hilton* in a 23 book boy’s sports hero series.

Bob Davies died on April 22, 1990, a victim of prostate cancer.

Walk through the Walsh Gymnasium lobby toward the basketball court doors and look up. You’ll see a mural depicting Bob Davies and his Wonder Five teammates from the Golden Age of Seton Hall basketball.

(* The following essay is the first part of a proposed full-length biography on Bob Davies, the first All-American in Seton Hall University history.*)