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The Ladies

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The

by Debbie Duerksen and Shalia Wakeman

Winning first in the nation would usually be enough for any team to accomplish; however, for the Lady Bulldogs of Southwestern Oklahoma State University, winning once was not enough. These women practiced and worked together for many hours to produce a national championship basketball team two years in a row. In 1981 - 1982 and 1982 - 1983, the SOSU Lady Bulldogs moved from the run-of-the-mill university basketball team to the number-one team in the nation.

A new coach arrived on Southwestern's campus in 1981. This new coach named John Loftin brought with him, it seemed, a winning tradition. Loftin, a native of Tulsa, TX, came to Southwestern after a successful record of 139 wins and 38 losses at Murray Oklahoma State Junior College. Loftin had led two different teams to the Oklahoma junior college championship during his stay at the junior college. Prior to his college coaching, Loftin began his coaching career in Claude, TX, where his record was 105-26. He also took his Texas teams to two Texas high-school state championships.

Along with Loftin, a new player from Thomas High School came into view, and the Lady Bulldogs were onto a winning season. Kelli Litsch from Fay remembers her first year playing for the Lady Bulldogs. "We were all apprehensive," said Litsch, "We were all new. We had a new coach and we didn't know how we'd play. But then we started winning and things just fell together."

Litsch was practically "brought up in a gym." She began playing basketball in the second grade and has since received such merits as All-American in high school and led Thomas to the State Championship finals.

After graduating from high school, Kelli was given offers to attend Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma University, and Louisiana Tech University, among others. However, she chose Southwestern over them all because, she stated, "It was close to home, I had friends here, and I always knew I'd come here."

Other freshmen also joined the Lady Bulldog squad to boost the women's team to fame. Jan Cheadle, known as "Cheese" Cheadle, came to SOSU after graduating from Carnegie High School. During her high-school years, "Cheese" received All-County, All-State, and All-Regional titles. She was also awarded the Most Valuable Player three years. Cheese decided to bring her talent to Southwestern and continue her career as a coach.

Cheese and Kelli were not the only freshmen on the 1982 championship team. Susan Pueschel also brought her talent to SOSU after completing her high-school years in Fletcher.

More experienced players rounded out the top-ranked team and led the freshmen in a winning season. Sophomores on the team included Mindy Mayfield from Yukon and Anita Foster from Dallas, TX.

Mayfield joined with the Lady Bulldogs straight from high school, and Foster came as a transfer student from Steven F. Austin College. These two were an asset to the hopeful team.

Juniors on the winning team aided the underclassmen in



83 - 84 Lady Bulldogs.

experience and skill. Mary Champion, Vickie Seal, Susan Mounts, and Pat Jacques all played for the championship in Kemper Arena in Kansas City, MO.

Mary Champion transferred to Southwestern her junior year from Conners Junior College. Mary averaged eight points a game during the regular season. Mounts was also a transfer student from Northern Junior College in Tonkawa. Seal, a junior transfer, came to Southwestern after playing at Western Oklahoma State.

In March of 1982, these girls aided by Coach John Loftin, trainer Thel Shelby, and manager Demetriss Beacham, added the perfect ending to the so-called "Cinderella" season by winning the NAIA National Championship in Kansas City and doing it with a record of 34 - 0. The most outstanding score for the season was reached as the Lady Bulldogs defeated Panhandle State University, 107 - 53.

Before the women could travel to the National Championships, they successfully won the NAIA District Nine Championship and the NAIA Area Three Championship.

After successfully attaining the NAIA National Cham-

Ladies



Deana English rejoined the team as a sophomore. Her freshman year at Southwestern, she injured her knee and therefore decided to redshirt, or sit out that year and play it again. English graduated from Elmore City. Since she had played some with the Lady Bulldogs in the 1981 - 1982 season, English had experience with the championship team.

D.D. Woodfork from Seminole joined the Lady Bulldog team as a sophomore transfer. Woodfork had played for Loftin at Murray State Junior College, and once Loftin described her as being one of the "quickest and best jumpers I have ever seen." Along with Woodfork, Mary Scarlett from Clinton joined the team as a sophomore.

Theresa Patterson, a junior from Pittsburg, joined the women's team after transferring from Eastern Junior College in Wilburton. Coach Loftin described Patterson as being "the best shooter in Oklahoma junior colleges" the previous year.

The Ladies knew it would be a tough job winning the national championship two years in a row, but confidence prevailed. Coach Loftin described the 1982 - 1983 team as being "more experienced" than the previous season's team.

Kelli Litsch mentioned that the team had to be optimistic. She said that the competition was tougher and "every time we walked out on the court, they were trying to beat us because we were the National Champions of 1982." Kelli added that the team just had to "take one

pionship title, honors were given to many of the Southwestern players. Kelli Litsch and Anita Foster were named All NAIA National Tournament Team. Kelli was named Outstanding Player for the tournament and selected for the first team NAIA All American. Chelly Belanger joined Kelli in this honor for the All-American team.

During the 1982 National Championship games, the Lady Bulldogs scored 241 points in the national tournament, averaging 80.3 points a game and outscoring their opponents by a 27.6 margin. The Ladies also scored the most field goals in the tournament, 99.

As the 1981 - 82 basketball season came to an end, most of the girls were ready for a break from the sport; however, soon it was time again for the daily practices and workouts for the 1982 - 1983 season.

New freshman players such as Carie Kephart and Joanna Freeman brought new youth to the team for the second year. Kephart traveled from Canton to play with the Lady Bulldogs, and Freeman came from Moore.

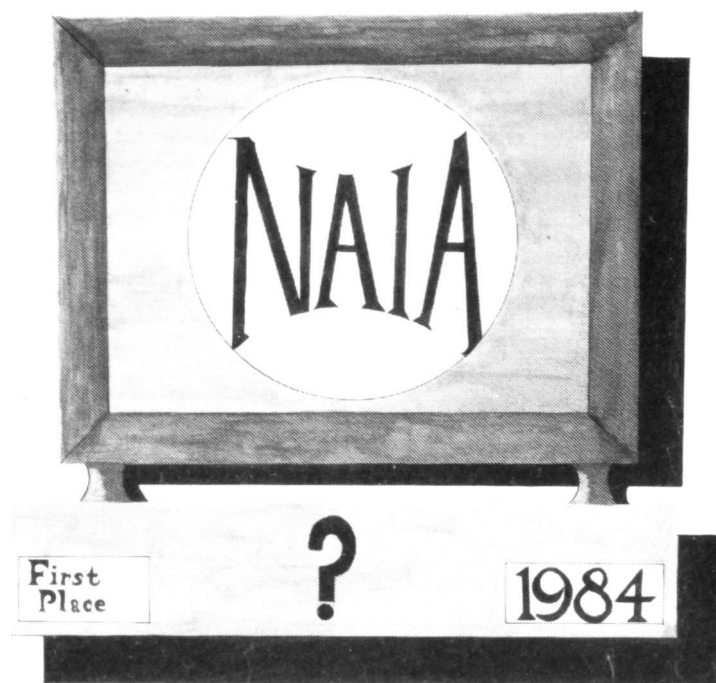


ILLUSTRATION BY: Val Humphreys

game at a time."

The girls traveled through the 1982 - 1983 season with an almost clean record of 30 - 4, again traveling to Kansas City, and they became the NAIA National Champions for the second consecutive year.

For the second consecutive year, Kelli Litsch and Anita Foster were named to the NAIA All-Tournament Team. This year, another name, Mary Champion, also was added to that list. Litsch was named the Most Valuable Player for the second year, and the team brought home the sportsmanship trophy.

Coach Loftin won Coach of the Year Awards in 1981 - 1982 and 1982 - 1983 both in NAIA District Nine and the NAIA National Tournament.

At the latter, Litsch managed to break three shooting records. By scoring 78 points in three games, she surpassed the previous record by 10 points. She broke the previous field goal record of 26 by scoring 28 goals and also broke the free throw record of 19 by scoring 22 free throws. She tied the previous record of free throws in a single game with 11.

Following the 1983 Championship, Mary Champion was asked to participate in the sixth annual East-West College All-Star Game. Litsch was named to play on the Kodak All-District Women's Basketball Team for District V of the Large College Division.

In 1984, the Lady Bulldogs are looking for yet another National Championship. Litsch said "This year's team is basically the same as last year's. We have many new players, but we know we'll be strong."

The team will be feeling the loss of Mary Champion, "Cheese" Cheadle, Deana English, and Susan Mounts in this year's quest for the title. The shoes of these players will be filled with the likes of Shorna Coffey, who is back after redshirting last season, freshmen, and transfers.

Leah Carpenter, a Butler freshman, is aiding the team with her talent, and she feels very confident about the season.



82 - 83 Lady Bulldogs.

Others who are boosting the Bulldogs toward the championships include Carri Hayes, a junior college transfer from Latta and Elissia Fountain, a Dallas, TX transfer from Odessa Junior College. Hayes feels that the biggest problem this year will be adjusting to the other players. Hayes is ready to do all she can in the way of winning the title. "I'll do whatever I have to do to help the team go back to the nationals and have another winning season."

Desree Bowers, a junior transfer student from Oklahoma City University, will also aid the team with her talents in the coming season. Kim Fennelly, a Davenport, IA senior, and Nancy Hafterson, a Sonoma, CA sophomore, will join the team in January.

Everyone concerned with the team is optimistic about the coming season and the 1984 National championship games in Kansas City, MO. Thel Shelby, Coach Loftin's assistant coach, has her eyes on the top. Shelby predicted that the Lady Bulldogs will go all the way one more time. "We have basically the same starters as the two previous years, and if everyone has a good attitude and is in the right frame of mind, we can do it all again."

Jason Maxwell will serve the Lady Bulldogs as trainer this season, and Shelly Brown and Jan "Cheese" Cheadle will take care of the statistics. Beryl Sifford will serve as manager.

Nineteen eighty four looks good for the Lady Bulldogs, and if all goes right, injuries don't get the team down, and the fans cheer the girls to victory after victory, they'll be in Kansas City to win their third consecutive NAIA National Championship.

[Editor's Note: As of December 7, 1983, the team had been reduced to eight members — Litsch, Foster, Coffey, Cheadle, Dees, Fountain, Mayfield, and Woodfork. Hayes was recovering from a knee injury, and Carpenter had left the team. But the Ladies were still 7-0 for the season.]



81 - 82 Lady Bulldogs