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LARRY MCCORMACK / STAFF

Former Tennessee Tech coach John Oldham can only shrug his shoulders when asked about Tech's NCAA-record loss to Loyola-Chicago.

The Bummer of '63

That year, Tech lost by NCAA tourney-record 69 points

By PAUL KUHARSKY
Staff Writer

John Oldham knows a lot about basketball extremes.

And since he turns 82 in June, he has a lot of experience answering questions about his two tie-ins to basketball history.

In 1963, he coached Tennessee Tech to the NCAA Tournament, where it suffered a 111-42 loss in Evanston, Ill., to eventual champion Loyola-Chicago, the worst defeat in the history of the tournament.

Given his choice, however, he'd rather talk about his role in the lowest-scoring game in NBA history. On Nov. 22, 1950, he played for the Fort Wayne Pistons against the Minneapolis Lakers in a game won by Fort Wayne 19-18.

With five points, Oldham ranked as the high scorer for the Pistons in a game that helped prompt the installation of the 24-second shot clock four years later.

"I love to talk about that one," said Oldham, who has sold more than $1 million worth of lawnmowers working for Hartland Equipment in Bowling Green, Ky., in the last two years.

Inevitably in the spring, however, the questions he fields are about Tennessee Tech.

Champions of the Ohio Valley Conference in 1963 thanks to a playoff win over Morehead State,

▶ Please see **NCAA, 5C**

NCAA: Time has healed Oldham's pains of a 69-point thumping

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the Golden Eagles drew Loyola-Chicago. When Oldham learned of the matchup, he said he sought advice from a friend familiar with the Ramblers.

"Think of your worst enemy in the coaching profession," the coaching friend advised him, "and ask him to substitute for you."

Oldham talks good-naturedly about the game, but doesn't recall all the details.

"I remember we led 2-0," Oldham said, crediting Frank Cardwell with the game's opening basket. "The next nine minutes we didn't cross the 10-second line. They were that good. They were a lot better than we were. They had speed and quickness. We didn't have either one of them."

"We were in trouble right after the national anthem," said Cardwell, 64, principal at Beech High School in Hendersonville. "... We were elated at winning the OVC. We didn't realize we were going to be playing the national champion."

The Civil Rights Act was not yet law, and Cardwell remembers playing against only one team with a black player.

Loyola-Chicago, meanwhile, was a pioneering team that featured four black starters, including two who starred at Nashville's Pearl High School, Les Hunter and Vic Rouse.

"We were completely outclassed, we had nowhere near their talent level," Cardwell said. "Coach Oldham should have gotten national coach of the year for getting us to the tournament. We were not that good. We were slow. We were small. There was not a person on our team that could have played for Loyola, obviously."

Neither school could provide a box score for the game.

By Cardwell's account, he started at forward along with Bobby Young of Adolphus, Ky. Tech started Eddie Mason of West Point, Ky., and Tom Rychener of Pettiville, Ohio, as its guards, and 6-foot-9 John Adams of Chicago at center.

The team's official 1962-63 roster also included four Tennessean: Landon Sexton of Paint Rock, Robert Nunnery of Murfreesboro, James Nichols of Maryville and Roy Wright of Lenoir City.

Hunter, who now lives in Overland Park, Kan., said he remembers each of the Ramblers scoring 15 or 16 points.

"Tennessee Tech turned the ball over a lot right at the start," he said. "They seemed a little bit timid, a little bit scared. That's got to be intimidating playing somebody leading the nation in scoring."

Oldham expected Loyola to utilize its full-court press, and instructed Cardwell to come back to help the guards advance the ball.

Cardwell said the first time he did so, the Ramblers' Ron Miller caught the ball before his first dribble hit the court. Cardwell chased him and knocked him to the floor as he converted a lay-up, then Miller completed the three-point play from the foul line.

Hunter said he believes the Ramblers were up by 30 just 10 minutes into the game. Cardwell remembers a halftime score in the neighborhood of 62-19.

When the long day finally came to an end, Oldham said there must have been "50 writers in my dressing room" and he asked them why they were all on Tech's side instead of Loyola's.

Only then did he learn that his team had set a record — one that has survived for 41 years.

"I said, 'The next time you see us play, the team doctor, the statistician, the two managers, the two trainers and all three coaches will have coats and ties on so nobody will know for sure who's coaching the ballgame,' " he said.

Oldham said he rooted for Loyola-Chicago and was glad to see the Ramblers go on to win the title in an upset of Cincinnati

The next year he moved to the job coaching his alma mater, Western Kentucky.

He said he felt he exacted a small amount of revenge on March 7, 1966, when the Hilltoppers knocked Loyola-Chicago out of the NCAAs in Kent, Ohio, with a 105-86 win.

"It was a different ball club," he said. "But they were still ranked, I think."

After Tech suffered the blowout in Evanston, Cardwell said he remembered the discussion between Oldham and Tennessee Tech's athletic director, Hooper Eblen, in the locker room.

"We were accustomed to the athletic director giving us a couple of bucks for a burger, fries and a Coke after the game," Cardwell said. "Hooper said, 'You think a dollar and a half will be enough?' And Coach Oldham said, 'Let's go ahead and give them $3.' The way we played, they probably should have started at a quarter."

Now Cardwell said he looks back on the experience as a great memory. He'd never been to a city like Chicago, and there was a lot to take in, including a message from a fan he figured had at least one beer too many.

"As we were walking off the floor, an old drunk leaned over the rail," Cardwell said. "I heard him say, 'Any questions boys?' " ■

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Oldham's college coaching career

▶ 1955-63: Tennessee Tech, 118-83
▶ 1964-71: Western Kentucky, 146-41
▶ Inducted into the Kentucky Athletic Hall of Fame (1988), the Ohio Valley Conference Hall of Fame (1989), the Kentucky High School Hall of Fame (1990), the Tennessee Tech Sports Hall of Fame (1990) and the Western Kentucky University Hall of Fame (1991).

Biggest wins

Largest winning margins in NCAA men's basketball tournament history:
▶ **69:** Loyola-Chicago 111, Tennessee Tech 42, first round, March 11, 1963
▶ **58:** Kansas 110, Prairie View 52, first round, March 13, 1998
▶ **49:** UCLA 109, Wyoming 60, regional semifinal, March 17, 1967
▶ **49:** Syracuse 101, Brown 52, first round, March 14, 1986