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**Jerry
Brewer**



One call may have paved 'Glory Road'

BOWLING GREEN, Ky.

John Oldham, the ultimate gentleman, just wouldn't go that far. He filled the subject to the brim -- and left it there.

Even after 40 years, even with the movie "Glory Road" reminding him of the 1966 NCAA Tournament and arguably the worst call in basketball history, the former Western Kentucky University coach chose manners over frustration.

So an old friend had to finish the thought.

"There would not be any 'Glory Road,'" said Lee Robertson, who was associated with the school for more than 50 years and earned the nickname "Mr. Western."

Robertson spun from his seat in front of us at Diddle Arena to make his declaration.

"If not for that call, there would be no movie," Robertson continued. "Western would've beaten UK."

It turns out "Glory Road" didn't capture everything about 1966. It provided wonderful insight into the tale of Texas Western starting five black players and beating the University of Kentucky's all-white team for the championship. But in this town that nurtures its hoops heritage as well as any, that year will forever be branded by a six-letter word: *robbed*.

the play

The old-time Hilltoppers know this painful story too well. The state had two top 10 programs that year, and they were expected to meet in the Midwest Regional final.

UK and WKU never had played, so a dramatic script was coming together perfectly. On March 12, 1966, in Iowa City, Iowa, the Wildcats beat Dayton 86-79 in the night's first game. Then the Hilltoppers took the court against Michigan, knowing a victory would set up a game they wanted badly.

Western led 79-78 with 16 seconds remaining. Hilltoppers guard Wayne Chapman stole a Michigan pass and was fouled two seconds later, a foul many fans believed should have been an intentional. Instead, Chapman stepped to the line and missed.

Western forward Greg Smith grabbed the rebound, but Michigan All-American Cazzie Russell tied him up. Jump ball.

Referee Steve Honzo tossed the ball in the air, and Smith tapped it to center Steve Cunningham. Then Honzo blew his whistle. Foul, Smith. On the jump ball. Western went nuts.

Russell made both free throws, and Western All-American Clem Haskins missed a 17-footer in the closing seconds. Ballgame.

Next time you think the refs are cheating your team, think this: foul on a jump ball.

"I'd never seen it called before, and I haven't seen it called since," Oldham said.

So the question lingers: Could Western have beaten Rupp's Runts?

Former Hilltoppers broadcaster Wes Strader, who covered that game, ran into one of the Runts, his good friend Larry Conley, recently and told him: "You all owe that movie to Steve Honzo."

"I think that, overall, Western was the best basketball team," Strader said.

Those Hilltoppers were probably the most athletically imposing and harmonious team in school history. Oldham went to the Final Four in 1971, but he said he overcoached that team. Of the 1966 team, Oldham said, "I couldn't overcoach them."

He didn't call practices; Haskins did. The team — known for confusing foes by switching defenses — never called out its defense. It knew where to be simply by paying attention to where 6-foot-5 point guard Dwight Smith, Greg's brother, set up on the floor.

"We were ahead of our time," Haskins said. "A once-in-a-lifetime call I think lost us the national championship or at least a chance to play for it."

It would've been integrated school versus integrated school. No dramatic movie there. Western would've happily stepped on history.

After that game 40 years ago, the disappointed Hilltoppers returned to their locker room and discovered all their valuables had been stolen. They had been robbed, again. Looted. Pillaged. Honzo-ed.

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