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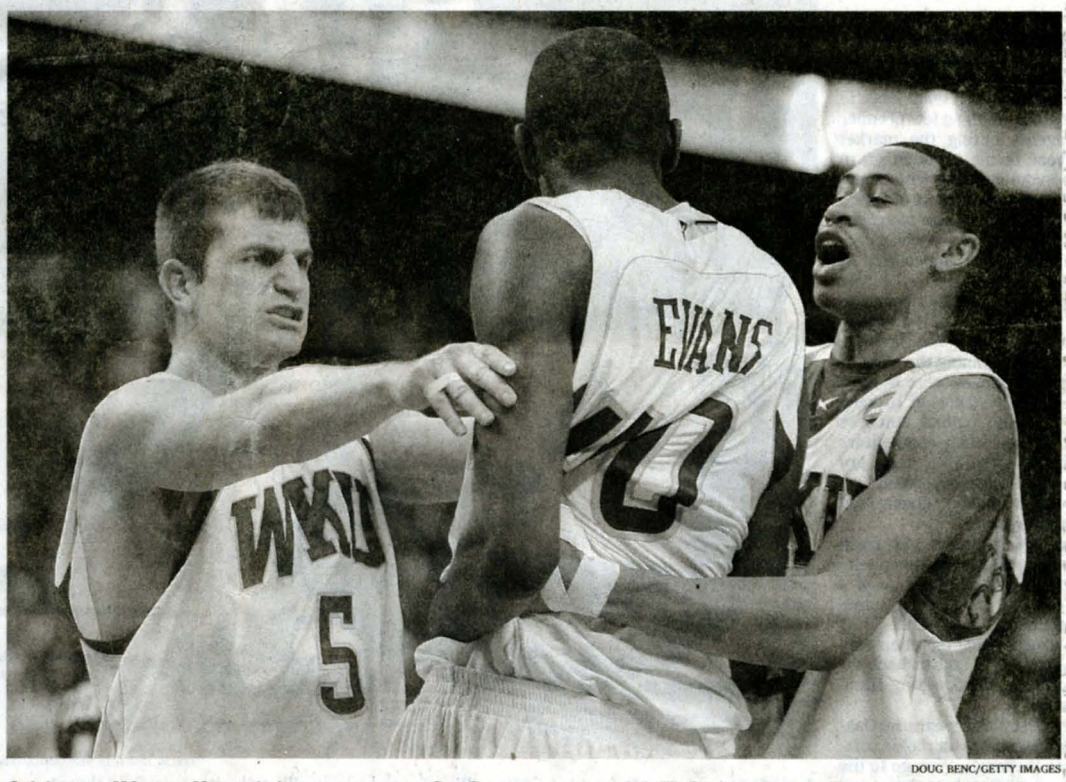
N.C.A.A. TOURNAMENT ROUND OF 16 THURSDAY'S GAMES

3 **Xavier** (29-6)
7 **West Virginia** (26-10)
West Region,
7:10 p.m. Eastern

1 **U.C.L.A.** (33-3)
12 **Western Kentucky** (29-6)
West Region,
30 minutes after first game

1 **North Carolina** (34-2)
4 **Washington St.** (24-8)
East Region,
7:27 p.m. Eastern

2 **Tennessee** (31-4)
3 **Louisville** (26-8)
East Region,
30 minutes after first game

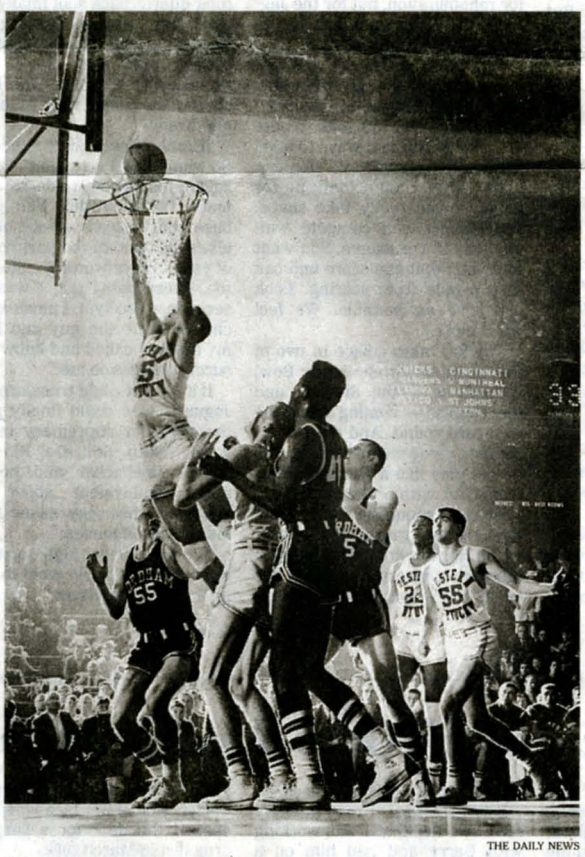


DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

Celebrating Western Kentucky's success against San Diego were, from left, Ty Rogers, Jeremy Evans and A. J. Slaughter.

Recalling Forward Thinking

Western Kentucky Broke Racial Barriers Amid Threats



THE DAILY NEWS

Clem Haskins, second from right, was a member of an integrated 1964-65 Western Kentucky team that played Fordham in the N.I.T. at the Garden. Haskins later coached at Western Kentucky.

By PETE THAMEL

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. — With 20 N.C.A.A. tournament appearances, a Final Four berth and a spot among the top 10 in victories by a Division I program, Western Kentucky has an unusually strong résumé for a team regarded as a tournament darling.

The No. 12 Hilltoppers play No. 1 U.C.L.A. in a West Regional semifinal Thursday night, a matchup of two of the most storied programs in college basketball.

While U.C.L.A.'s history with John Wooden, Lew Alcindor and 11 national titles is often romanticized, memories of Western Kentucky's run of dominance in the 1960s seem to have faded with the set shot and canvas sneakers. In part, the run came about because of Western Kentucky's willingness to integrate its team at a time when such a policy was still taboo in the South. Those involved with Western Kentucky still take great pride in the university's breaking of racial barriers.

"There's so much that people don't know," said the former Western star Clem Haskins, who went on to coach at the university. "Western was out there, just like everyone in the country is captivated now with North Carolina and Duke."

But memories of the 1971 Final Four, deep runs in the National Invitation Tournament and high national rankings come with raw memories of overcoming the thick racial tension in the South.

Haskins, who along with Dwight Smith in 1963 were the first African-Americans to play basketball for the university, recalled not being able to eat in segregated restaurants and watching movies from the balconies of theaters because seats in the lower sections were reserved for whites. Jim McDaniels, went to Western Kentucky in 1967 and recalled the former Kentucky Coach Adolph Rupp's halfhearted recruitment of him, which included not showing him the campus and spending just 15 awkward minutes with Rupp in the six days he spent in Lexington. The Southeastern Conference did not integrate until 1966, and Kentucky did not integrate until 1969.

The Western Kentucky coach at that time, John Oldham, had a police officer check his car at times in

Continued on Page C16

Recalling Western Kentucky's Forward Thinking

From First Sports Page

1970 because of threats directed at him after he began starting five black players.

"So much of what we deal with right now is stuff that's absolutely trivial," said the current Western Kentucky coach, Darrin Horn, who played at Western in the early 1990s. "Coach Oldham and the players from that era, they were dealing with serious issues. That's one of the reasons that I have so much respect for them."

Oldham, 84, still lives in Bowling Green and works as a salesman at a John Deere dealership. Some of the scars from his time at Western Kentucky as coach and later as athletic director can be found in the tattered and frayed letters he keeps in a two-inch-thick manila folder labeled "Criticism" in his desk at the dealership.

The letters offer a window into the racial attitudes at the time.

"Why don't you join the Black Panthers?" read one.

A note that arrived with a $25 donation said, "Given in thankfulness that Coach Oldham retires."

Another read, "I prayed for the worst for you, your children and your grandchildren." And yet another: "I whole heartedly disagree with your philosophy of using five Negro starters."

"I think you are sacrificing Western and Bowling Green's image for your own personal glory," another letter said in reference to his decision to start five black players.

And finally: "I can also tell you that Western will never advance to any high finish in the upcoming N.C.A.A. tournament simply because you can't win the big games with five Negro players. They don't possess the intelligence nor stability to meet such a challenge."

Despite the criticism, including a phone call and a letter threatening his life, Oldham and his team went to the Final Four, where they lost to Villanova in double overtime. But it was not easy.

Oldham said not long after, an influential member of the university's board of regents approached him and coarsely asked if he was going to start five black players.

When Oldham confirmed he was, the board member said he would stop going to games.

"We've come a long way, haven't we?" he said with a smile in an interview at his desk at the dealership.

Oldham, who had a 146-41 record at Western that included four N.C.A.A. tournament appearances, never wavered. "I never thought much of it," he said. "Like any coach, I was just trying to play the best guys."

Western's storied history goes beyond Oldham's coaching tenure from 1964 to 1971. His predecessor, E. A. Diddle, ranks among the top 20 winningest coaches in college basketball history. He went 759-302 in a 42-season tenure that ended in 1964. Diddle's legacy includes his recruitment of Haskins and Smith in 1963.

Haskins credits the university's forward thinking and said that he never encountered any resistance on campus.

"I was never abused on campus," he said. "People treated me very kindly."

Haskins earned all-American honors all three of his seasons at Western; players only had three seasons of eligibility then. His final two seasons ended in disappointment. Haskins broke his wrist in his senior season of 1966-67, when he considered Western the most talented team in the country. The 1965-66 season ended when a controversial foul call on a jump ball — considered one of the worst calls in N.C.A.A. tournament history — foiled Western's lead in an 80-79 loss to Cazzie Russell and Michigan. Still frames show Russell not jumping on the play and then leaning in to make contact.

JOHN ANDERSON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

John Oldham, 84, a former Western Kentucky coach, received threats in 1970 after he began starting five black players.

That 1966 N.C.A.A. tournament ended with Texas-El Paso beating Kentucky in a game known as the Brown v. Board of Education of college basketball, as U.T.E.P.'s five African-American starters beat Kentucky's five white starters. The game has been romanticized in both a book and movie entitled "Glory Road."

"There should have been no 'Glory Road,'" Haskins said. "We'd have played Kentucky in the next game and beat them and there wouldn't have been a 'Glory Road.'"

Jim McDaniels, who was a three-time all-American from 1969 to 1971, credited Haskins and Smith, who died in a car accident after his senior season, for blazing a trail and making Western a safe place for African-Americans.

McDaniels said he did not encounter many problems on campus or on the road, but added that when he returned home to Scottsville, Ky., with some teammates he got a pistol pulled on him while trying to shoot pool at a local pool hall that had not been integrated.

"It was pretty embarrassing," McDaniels said. "I got caught in that in-between period breaking down the racism door. Thank God it started to change."

McDaniels avenged Kentucky's halfhearted recruitment by leading a 107-83 rout of Kentucky in the 1971 tournament. That was Kentucky's first season with an African-American player. It took Kentucky 30 years, its great 1996 national championship team, to start five African-Americans for an entire season.

"He was way behind E. A. Diddle and Western Kentucky," McDaniels said of Rupp. "We were a leader in that time of integration."

And that forward thinking is just part of a strong legacy revived by this current Western run.

ONLINE: THE VALUE OF A GAME

The Knicks had a chance to show whether they were more interested in draft lottery Ping Pong balls or this season's record when they played the Miami Heat on Wednesday night at the Garden.

nytimes.com/basketball