

2-14-1943

A Towel Comes Out of the Air, Lands on Spectator, And Diddle Has Made a Friend

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Recommended Citation

Royal, Chip, "A Towel Comes Out of the Air, Lands on Spectator, And Diddle Has Made a Friend" (1943). *WKU History*. Paper 28.
http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_wku_hist/28

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NEW YORK – A towel came flying down out of the air at Madison Square Garden and landed on a spectator's head – and another basketball fan met Ed Diddle, the colorful Western Kentucky State coach.

Ed is the greatest towel manipulator the sports world has ever seen. Down in Bowling Green, Kentucky, his tossing and waving of the drying cloth is as well known as is his 21-year record for having speedy-wide-awake basketball teams.

For the records, Western Kentucky has won 339 out of 443 games under Diddle and up to mid-February, the Red and White was one of the three undefeated major college teams in the country. The other two are Denver and Indiana Universities.

As good as the undefeated Hilltop cagers are out there on the hardwood floor, it is difficult to keep your eyes off the veteran mentor and the other night was no exception. Ed stole the show with his Turkish rag. He did everything but cry on it.

The eyes of the 15,120 spectators followed Diddle's every move from the time he appeared on the floor with the white object slung over his shoulder. When the game started, off came his coat, and then that towel went from one hand to another, across his brow up to his mouth, and higher in the air every time Western Kentucky scored.

On the bench it was a case of ducking the towel and keeping out of the way of Ed's arms as he bounced around on his chair, drawled exclamations at his players, and answered questions about basketball in general.

"Come on, Buck, turn on the heat," yelled Ed. "That's a pretty ball boy," he continued only in those softer Southern tones "Did you notice how that slid into the basket?" he asked. "It had just the right English needed on those glass backboards.

"That's one thing we should do soon," the steel gray-haired coach continued. "Make all the backboards uniform. I don't care what they are, but they should be standardized. I think you will see the day soon when they will all be made of glass."

Just then he leaped up and away that towel went about 25 feet up in the air and he almost fell over backwards trying to catch it.

"Let's dig now. Get on him, Dero," Ed drawled as he wiped his brow once more.

Favors Rubber Ball

"I'll tell you another thing I think we'll have some day," he went on, "a white molded rubber ball. That is the only way we can get a perfectly shaped ball with balanced inserts. You fellows up here don't like it, but you would if you tried it awhile."

Here Ed decided it was time to make a substitution. Up jumped Diddle and out went his hand to the player coming off the court, the way he has greeted every player since he first started coaching in 1921.

Back went the towel up to his chin, but it didn't stay there long. One of his boys shot a long one and the dryer went shooting up near the Garden's first balcony.

"I don't care where they shoot them as long as they sink them," he exclaimed. "If they feel like they can hit that basket, I've told them all to fire away at it. Get the points! And it takes three to beat two."

Not So Cautious

Asked why his team's scoring average was higher this year than last, Ed exclaimed: "We're not as cautious a ball club. We're making more mistakes but we've been averaging 65 points a game and our opponents about 30, so long as we get them, we can afford to lose them."

"People want to see offensive basketball. They don't care about those tricky defenses. That's why I think the rules committee should eliminate all restricted areas on the court. As it is now with the restriction in the foul-shooting zone, we have to use a one-sided offense. It would be a better game if we could balance that attack."

Here the whistle blew, ending the game and Diddle's observations. As he walked off with his team, a fan started to go between the coach and one of his boys. Ed stopped short, reached around and pulled the player near him, exclaiming:

"Boy, do you want to jinx us?"