Toppers’ Smith Signs Pact With Milwaukee

Western’s Greg Smith has signed a professional basketball contract with Milwaukee of the National Basketball Association, the team announced last night. Smith was one of the top rebounders in the Ohio Valley Conference during his career with the Hilltoppers.

Tops’ Smith Is Drafted By ABA Colonels

Western’s Greg Smith and University of Kentucky’s Thad Jarnz have been drafted by the Louisville Colonels of the American Basketball Association. Smith has not signed with the Colonels, yet, however. Western’s Wayne Chapman had signed with the Colonels earlier.
Greg Smith, formerly of Western Kentucky University, but now a fixture on the Milwaukee Bucks' men basketball team of the National Basketball Association, and Mike Blanton of the New York Knicks returned recently to a tour of Vietnam military bases.

Smith ran into a lot of folks with whom he had been in basic training and several from cities in Princeton, Ky., and a lack of Kentuckians.

"There is no real front any more," said Smith. "The action is now scattered that you never know when you might run into trouble. For example, part of Saigon was attacked three weeks ago and we had been there two weeks before.

"We flew everywhere in helicopters. We went over one place just 10 minutes ahead of a helicopter that was shot down. Mike looked at me and said, 'Man, they mean business over here.'"

"The last night we were there was pretty rough. All night in the morning we heard shells exploding near us. We couldn't sleep and the building was shaking. Finally, a shoot went off. It turned out that the Viet Cong was sending up rockets and bombing us. We had to go to a bunker for about 45 minutes until it stopped.

The biggest scare of all, according to Smith, was when we had to land on the top of a mountain that had been rocked the night before. Just landing on a mountain was bad enough.

When enough men could be found, Smith and Blanton staggered with the soldiers.

"We usually played three on three, although sometimes we had enough players for a full-scale game. Originally, we visited with the men and tried to boost their morale. As professional basketball players we had been in most of the cities they were from and were able to talk about their home cities with them."

Despite the risks, Smith said he would like to go back again because the men were so appreciative. "You must be crazy to volunteer to come over here," said one.

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Greg Smith finds 'no real front' in Vietnam

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Greg Smith, Retired NBA player, faces up for fun and charity

By Chip Hutcheson

Greg Smith, Retired NBA player, faces up for fun and charity

Wednesday, July 14, 2004

Forty years ago, Greg Smith played a crucial role in helping Caldwell County win its only regional boys' basketball championship in school history. Today he still laces them up and hits the hardwood — but these days it's for fun and charity in Portland, Ore.

In addition to a successful sales career in radio, he teams up with a group of former NBA players for the (Portland) Trail Blazers Alumni Team, which takes the floor at various high school courts for fundraising games. The contests are waged against high school alumni groups or various community-generated teams with proceeds from their games going to benefit a wide array of charities and community organizations. Their play is termed "pseudo-Globetrotter," but the list of players joining Smith makes for a formidable opponent. Joining him on the team are former Kansas All-American Darrell Valentine, who had a 10-year NBA career; Larry Steele, former UK All-American; 65-year-old Darrell Imhoff, who played on a U.S. gold medal team in the Olympics and played five years in the NBA; Kevin Duckworth and Leroy Ellis, Sr.

"We've raised about $2.2 million," noted Smith, son of Henry and Pearl Smith of Princeton, while in town recently to attend the 1964 Caldwell County High class reunion. A tenacious rebounder — he was credited with 34 rebounds in one game — he led the Tigers to the 2nd Region title, then went on to
have a standout collegiate career at Western Kentucky University. He then went on to a seven-year NBA career, which included winning the NBA championship in 1971 as a starting 6-foot-5 forward with the Milwaukee Bucks.

"In the last five or six years the Blazers have adopted us (alumni team) into their system," he said. "They pick up our medical in the event someone gets injured. We are all working and have careers, so their insurance supplements ours."

The fun and hijinks often involve Shaler Halimon, a first round draft pick of the '76ers in 1968. He tends to wear his pants pretty high, so sometimes the rest of the team members pull their pants up pretty high, too. The charity games often feature halftime auctions of donations, some of them past and present Trail Blazers team gear.

The Class of '64 holds a reunion every five years. That class was a special one in the school history — that was the first year of integration in Caldwell County, and Smith and his black classmates from Princeton Dotson left that school for their senior year to attend Caldwell County High.

Across the country this year newspapers have recounted events that resulted from the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education suit which integrated schools. The process could not have gone any smoother anywhere than it did in Caldwell County.

Smith believes that relationships which already existed played a role in the harmony that existed here during that time period.

"It goes back to my dad's generation of friends — those were people who had played together. There was no TV and pressures that created controversy."

Also, he credited the leadership in the school with making a difference. "Dotson taught us to be better and to follow a curriculum. You always need a leader. Coach Giordano and Coach Clayton had a system. Caldwell County got good athletes (from Dotson), but we had to buy into the system."

Smith recalled that he wanted to play football, and was allowed to play enough "just to get my uniform dirty." He said the basketball coach, George Perry, agreed for him to play football, but one of Perry's stipulations was that Smith would not get in a situation where he could get injured and hinder his basketball career.

The current state of affairs in the NBA is being lamented by many nationwide, and Smith shares that sentiment.

"I think it's about like the prisoners running the prison. People have given way to spoiled athletes."

Smith said that mixed signals are being sent when an average person is arrested for violating the law and punished, then a high-profile athlete is arrested for the same offense and doesn't suffer any consequences. "You are compromising the system that
works so well,” he said. “People have to be held accountable.”

He also is among those who believe the practice of drafting players straight out of high school into the NBA is not a wise practice. 

“Players are coming out so young — they don’t get an education. They don’t read the newspaper past the sports section. Some guys don’t know how to catch a plane or fill out an application because everything has been done for them.

“When they are drafted, they are taken out of the area they grew up in and the neighborhood they grew up in and they have a hard time adjusting. College is the middle ground where they assimilate and meet some different people.

“But they are offered millions of dollars — a great deal of money. Now the people they associate with don’t have that. The people they want to hang out with are at work, so who are they going to hang with, what are they going to do? They can practice, watch film and hang out with the other guys. But the veterans have families, so the young player has nothing to do. That is a gray area the NBA doesn’t understand.

“The assimilation for young athletes is critical. The next thing (the NBA does) is throw money at it — get a program, get a counselor. It’s a very difficult situation; sometimes the parents move out where the player in playing.”

Smith said the blame extends past just the league itself. “The owners have allowed themselves to become so infatuated with what a coach or general manager says, not knowing what chemistry a player brings to the club. You need a sense of balance to every club.”

As an example, he says that in this year’s NBA championship series many make the claim that the Lakers “blew up.” But he said all the Lakers’ energies were directed at their disruptions. He cited programs where key players embraced the system of the coach, resulting in success — such as Maurice Lucas embracing Jack Ramsey’s program; Larry Byrd embracing the program at Boston, Akeem Olajuwon embracing Rudy Tomjanovich’s program at Houston, and Tim Duncan and David Robinson doing the same at San Antonio. But as Sports Illustrated recently pointed out with L.A., the Bryant was calling the shots and directing team policy.

Abdul-Jabbar’s praise of WKU includes Smiths

Times Leader Staff Report staff@timesleader.net

Saturday, April 12, 2008

The accolades for Western Kentucky University’s basketball program keep pouring in.

The Hilltoppers’ run to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament and Ty Rogers’ buzzer-beater against Drake have reinvigorated one of the most storied programs in the history of college basketball.

Now, one of the best basketball players ever is singing the praises of WKU.

Writing in his blog at the Los Angeles Times website, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar gives Western Kentucky high marks, not just for its recent success but for its efforts in integrating college basketball 40 years ago. He also recalls a pair of former Princeton standouts — Dwight and Greg Smith.

Abdul-Jabbar was a teammate of Greg’s on the Milwaukee Bucks’ NBA championship squad. The former Lew Alcindor is probably best known for his college days at UCLA and his pro run with the Los Angeles Lakers.

Abdul-Jabbar gave WKU high marks “because Western Kentucky did an exceptional job in speeding up the integration of college basketball and hasn’t been given a lot of credit for it. Although I’m a Bruin in heart and soul, I was rather torn while watching this game. Western Kentucky is my oldest son, Kareem Jr.’s, alma
mater.

"Another connection I have to WKU is alumni Greg Smith, who was my teammate on the Milwaukee Bucks for two years and the starting forward on our 1970-71 World Championship team. Greg was also a really good friend and my buddy on road trips, where we got to indulge our movie addiction.

"But my feelings for Western Kentucky go back even further," Abdul-Jabbar added. "Western Kentucky was the forefront of the fight to integrate college basketball in the 1960s and early '70s. While head coach at WKU, Coach John Oldham (who took over for previous head coach E.A. Diddle in 1964) dealt with some very ugly situations while the transition took place, and he has not been recognized for his courageous stand.

"For his part, Coach Diddle had recruited Clem Haskins and Dwight Smith in 1963. Coach Oldham continued that legacy, recruiting black players and eventually starting five African Americans on the WKU team — and staying the course in spite of criticism from some of the fans and faculty. Along the way, he coached his team to four NCAA appearances and probably would have made it to the finals in 1966 if a very controversial call hadn't cost them ... in the NCAA Tournament. In 1967, Clem Haskins broke his wrist, which kept WKU from being at full strength for the season.

"Nonetheless, college peeps owe WKU a tip of the hat for the positive changes it helped to promote."
“Greg Is A Winner!”

Ex-Topper G. Smith
In Solid At Houston

By BERN BORRONE

Daily News Sports Editor

Remember Greg Smith, the peeping Negro all-court star who played for Western just a few years ago.

Well, as you may recall, he did a very sound all-around job with Milwaukee for several years and then was traded to Houston earlier this season.

What Smith has meant to the Rockets is evaluated by Houston Post sportswriter Russ Wood in a feature on the player earlier this week.

Wood wrote in part:

"In Smith, the Rockets have obtained a player who is worth two Curtie Perry's and two first-round draft choices."

"It is not just coincidental that the Rockets had a 6-28 record when Smith arrived and then won seven of their first eight games, with the forward on their side.

"Smith brought with him a winning spirit. It can be seen in the tension every muscle awaiting the opening tipoff.

"It can be seen in the reckless, hurt his body after every bounce, as he defies an enemy pass and starts a Rocket fastbreak - something that was non-existent before his arrival.

"It can be seen in the leaps over the mid-court and receive a larger opposite for a defensive camera plaque and a thunderous standing ovation from the capacity crowd.

"As Rocket vice president Pete D'Amato pointed out the other day, Greg is just 24 years old; as his peak is yet ahead of him."

GREG SMITH, above, former Western Kentucky star, was traded by the Milwaukee Bucks yesterday to the Houston Rockets for forward Curtie Perry and Houston's No. 1 1972 draft pick.
Greg Smith

Basketball
1965-68

Greg Smith was an important component on some of the most successful Hilltopper basketball teams ever. The three-year letter winner twice earned All-OVC honors (1966 & '67) while leading the squads to a pair of NCAA tournament appearances. Western teams accumulated 66 wins in 79 games during those two seasons while Smith posted five 20-plus rebounding outings and averaged 11.8 rebounds per game for his career (6th best in WKU record books). The 6-5 forward continued his success on the hardwood after college, playing for eight years in the NBA, first with the Milwaukee Bucks (1968-72), followed by stints with the Houston Rockets (1971-72) and the Portland Trail Blazers (1972-76). The Bucks won an NBA championship during Smith's tenure there. Smith currently lives in the Portland, Oregon area.

1998 Athletic Hall of Fame
Professional Basketball—
Greg Smith Recalls Playing Days In NBA

By JOEY RANDOLPH
Times Sports Writer

To some of you younger readers, the name Greg Smith might not be important. In fact, it may not even ring a bell.

However, to the majority of people in our area, the name Greg Smith probably brings to mind some memories of the finest basketball player to ever come out of Caldwell County.

As a senior at Caldwell Co. High School, Smith was the leader of the only Tiger team to ever reach the state tournament. If that alone isn't enough to qualify him for the local hall of fame, his basketball career after he graduated surely is.

Immediately after high school, Smith went to Western Kentucky University where he starred with his brother, Dwight, as part of the first pair of brothers to play simultaneously at Western. From Western, he went on to the NBA when he was drafted by the Milwaukee Bucks (Dwight too was drafted but lost his life in a tragic auto accident).

Smith made a name for himself quickly as a strong power forward as he helped the Bucks to the World Championship in 1970. Also on that NBA champion team was a center everyone has heard of, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Recently, in an interview with Larry Whiteside of The Boston Globe, Jabbar spoke of that championship team.

"We had one guy who was the key to that team, Greg Smith, a 6-5 power forward. Nobody could understand it, but Greg could rebound with the 6-9 guys and run with the guards. He was as fast as, or faster than, the guards, and it was a unique combination that gave everybody fits. Guys like Gus Johnson and Dave DeBusschere used to hate to see Greg come into the gym. After we lost him, we lost that advantage." In 1971 Smith was traded to the Houston Rockets, and in 1972 he went to the Portland Trail Blazers.

"It's funny," Smith said about Jabbar's remarks, "when Kareem was here (Portland) to play, we went out to eat afterwards, and he didn't say anything about it. But somebody called me to tell me they had read it in a California paper. Kareem never said anything like that when I was active, it means more to me now. I want to get a copy of it and put it in a frame."

"What he says I take in total humbleness." Smith adds, "It was one of the nicest things anyone ever said about me because it summarizes my whole effort as a pro. I always was a support player, which was my role on the championship team."

After retiring from the NBA, Smith remained in Portland, where he is now an ad salesman for KGW radio. Smith also plays for the ex-Blazers, who play benefit basketball games in several Oregon communities.

Greg is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Smith, North Harrison Street, Princeton.