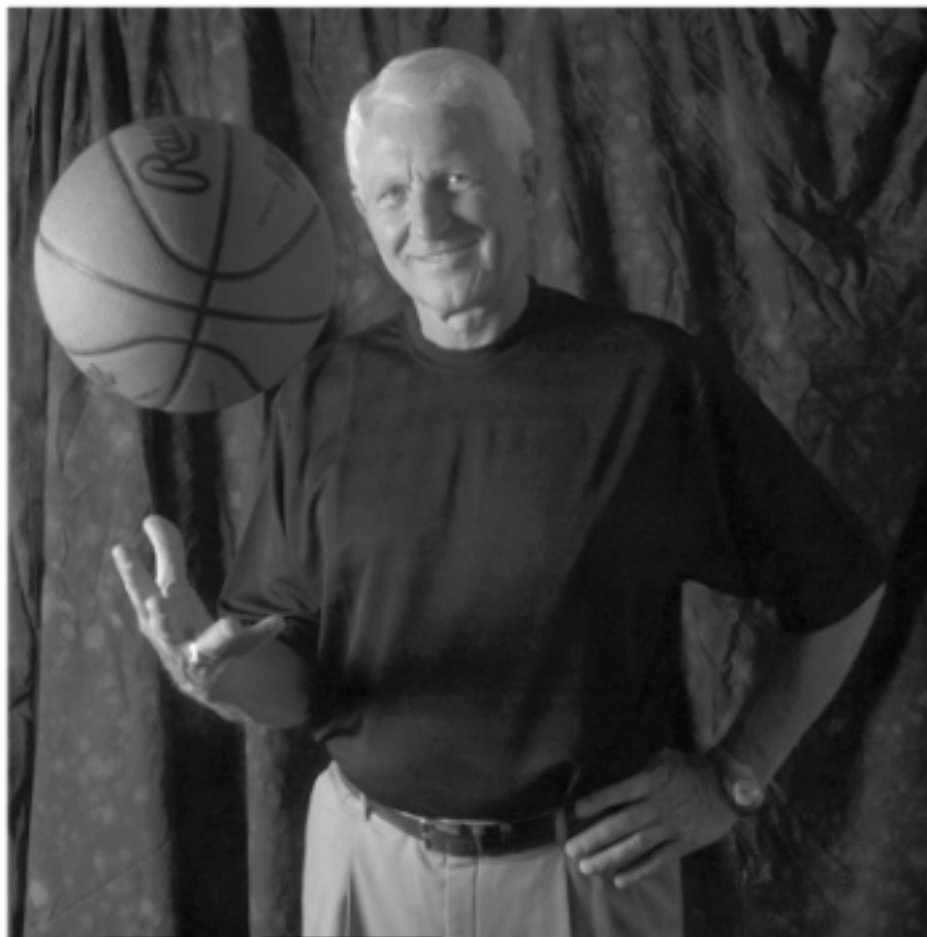


# 20 Years... 20 Memories



When Lute Olson was announced as the new Arizona head coach, few would have thought that any coach could have an impact in Tucson.

In 20 years, Olson has transformed Arizona basketball into one of the nation's finest. In that time frame, Olson and his charges have won 471 games, nine Pacific-10 Conference championships, and a national championship. The Wildcats have been the winningest program in the country for the last 15 seasons and have become a fixture in the NCAA Tournament with 18 consecutive appearances.

Individually, 25 All-Americans have worn the Cardinal and Navy under Olson, 42 have earned all-Pac-10 honors, and 26 have been selected in the NBA Draft. But more important than individual awards, it has always been a team concept that has worked for Olson. That is also the key reason the following 20 moments are indeed so memorable.

(photo by David Sanders, *Arizona Daily Star*)

nine Pacific-10 Conference Championships

25 All-Americans

Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame - Class of 2002

26 NBA Draftees

18 consecutive NCAA appearances

the 1997 National Championship

**wins**

"Being elected is the crowning achievement of a career," Olson said. "In coaching, this type of honor is something that fully completes a career. A lot of people don't have the opportunity to be elected before they retire, so I feel very fortunate, humbled and honored."



## Hall of Fame Enshrinement

September 27, 2002

LOS ANGELES – After being nominated the previous two years, Lute Olson was selected for enshrinement into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame on June 5, 2002. He joined four other individuals and one team to comprise the Class of 2002.

The honor was announced at a luncheon in downtown Los Angeles, where Olson discussed his pride in receiving the recognition.

"Being elected is the crowning achievement of a career," Olson said. "In coaching, this type of honor is something that fully completes a career. A lot of people don't have the opportunity to be elected before they retire, so I feel very fortunate, humbled and honored."

Clearly deserving of the accolade, Olson sports a resume that includes winning seasons in 26 of his 29 years of coaching on the NCAA Division I level. He has compiled a 767-255 (.750) overall record at Long Beach (Calif.) City College, Long Beach State University, the University of Iowa and the University of Arizona. Olson, who is the seventh winningest active Division I coach, holds the distinction of being one of eight coaches in college history to coach in five or more Final Fours and is one of 11 coaches who have taken two different teams to the Final Four. His 23 NCAA Tournament appearances are third most among active

coaches. A master of player development, he has produced 44 NBA draft picks, including 25 at Arizona.

"This is definitely one of the special things that has happened in my career," he said announcing his selection. "I am very thankful for the recognition and opportunity for enshrinement."

As he has done throughout his career, Olson deflected some of the praise showered upon him toward his late wife, Bobbi.

"I want to thank Bobbi and my family for their sacrifices in addition to the former assistant coaches and former players who share in this honor as well," he said.

At the luncheon announcing the electees, he again mentioned his wife, referring to her endless support for him.

"There have been a lot of tough times," he admitted as he grew teary-eyed. "But I'm sure today she had a front-row seat. Typical of wives, she couldn't understand why I wasn't elected (on the previous ballots). I tried to explain to her that a lot of people who get nominated don't get elected, but it was hard for her to understand."

His selection after his third appearance on the ballot pleased many who were growing impatient that it had taken so long for the man everyone even remotely related to the Arizona program knew was of Hall of Fame-caliber.

"I'm so happy for Lute," said Jerry Colangelo, chairman of the Phoenix Suns and also a 2002 nominee for Hall of Fame election. "When you talk about an individual running a program and representing college basketball and the University of Arizona, and how he conducts his business—the whole persona—I think of a guy with tremendous class."

Former adversary Bill Frieder acknowledged Olson's selection was well-deserved.

"What really pops out about Lute, though, is his consistency," said Frieder, the former Michigan and Arizona State coach. "It doesn't matter whether he's at Long Beach State, Iowa or Arizona, whether he has five starters back or a brand-new team. Nobody has been so good for so long at so many places, no matter what the circumstances."

Perhaps it was Steve Kerr who put it best when describing why Olson fits as a Hall of Famer.

"Obviously, he's been one of the great coaches in terms of success," Kerr told Dan Bickley of *The Arizona Republic*. "But it goes way beyond that with Lute. Look at all the lives he's influenced. To me, that's what a Hall of Fame coach should be all about."

No. 2

# 1997 National Championship

March 31, 1997 - Arizona 84, Kentucky 79

**"In a month of captivating madness," wrote Greg Hansen of *The Arizona Daily Star*, "Arizona's remarkable run to the Final Four couldn't be described any better than Simon's (statement), 'We've earned it.'"**

INDIANAPOLIS – A season, a six-game run through the NCAA Tournament, a final matchup against some other Wildcats, it all came down to one blessed five-minute overtime period. But what resulted will last forever. The memories are still as vivid as the day the Arizona basketball faithful watched them unfold right before their very eyes.

Miles Simon squeezing the game ball as time expired. Bennett Davison mussing the typically-perfect hair of Lute Olson. The coach and wife Bobbi waving proudly to fans.

Three simple weeks in the NCAA Tournament led to one final game that needed five extra minutes, but in the process transformed the Arizona basketball season as well as the entire

University and captivated fans across the country. The Arizona Wildcats defeated the Kentucky Wildcats, 84-79, on March 31, 1997, to claim the school's first basketball national championship.

"This is the most unbelievable thing I've ever done," said Miles Simon, the Final Four's Most Outstanding Player with 54 points in the two games.

Through the most improbable of circumstances and the most unconventional of paths, Arizona etched itself into the memories of all basketball followers as one of the most remarkable champions in NCAA history.

"I'm still having difficulty believing this is happening," Olson noted following the win.

Knocking off the three most successful teams in the history of college basketball and rising above the specter of a fifth-place finish in the Pac-10, Arizona accomplished its ultimate goal when none expected even a sliver of the success they earned. A hallmark of nearly every Olson-coached team, the 1997 squad continued to improve every game, which was evidenced oh-so-exquisitely by the team's postseason success.

"This will go down as one of the special championship teams in college basketball history," said Arizona assistant coach Phil Johnson. "We beat three great programs along the way. This is something they'll talk about years from now."

And it was definitely something that got people talking right from the get-go. Over 40,000 people crowded into Arizona Stadium to welcome home the newly-minted champions.

"In a month of captivating madness," wrote Greg Hansen of *The Arizona Daily Star*, "Arizona's remarkable run to the Final Four couldn't be described any better than Simon's (statement), 'We've earned it.'"

The title showdown, with 16 ties and 18 lead changes, proved to be one of the most exciting championship games in history. The teams traded baskets for 40 minutes, including a frantic final half-minute that kept the crowd of 47,028 on its feet and gasping with every bounce of the ball. Freshman Mike Bibby found an open Bennett Davison under the basket for an easy layup with 18.9 seconds remaining to give Arizona a 74-71 lead. Kentucky's Anthony Epps produced one



## The Arizona Wildcats defeated the Kentucky Wildcats, 84-79, on March 31, 1997, to claim the school's first basketball national championship.

of the most clutch shots in NCAA finals history as he nailed a three-pointer with 12 seconds on the clock to send the contest to bonus basketball.

In the extra stanza, Arizona scored all 10 of its points from the free throw line and built a 79-74 lead when Kentucky failed to score on its first four possessions. The team never looked back from that point and the victory remained only a matter of time as the clock ran down to 0:00. Simon clenched the ball and fell to his knees in ecstasy over the school's first national title.

"For the excitement, for effort, for tremendous defense, this game had everything a national championship game should have," Olson said afterwards.

Praise for the Arizona head coach came in droves from his players, colleagues and even the media. Most of Olson's players expressed more joy in Olson's satisfaction than in their own personal accomplishment. The team had afforded the legendary coach the opportunity to finally look out on the college basketball world from its ultimate pinnacle.

"We're all so happy for him," said center A.J. Bramlett. "Coach never got the credit he deserved. People don't look at what he has done. But they'll have to now."

Forward Donnell Harris added this: "I think Coach was bound to win one, and I'm just glad we were the ones that won it for him. Coach has helped us achieve our dreams, and I'm sure this is one of his dreams."

Cedric Dempsey, the man responsible for bringing Olson to the Sonoran Desert in 1983, offered this assessment. "When I hired Lute, we talked about the opportunity to win the national championship one day. Did I really think it could be done? Sure, that's why I hired him. I really did."

Steve Bisheff of the *Orange County Register* recognized Olson's effect on West Coast basketball as a result of the 1997 title. "Lute Olson is the reason the Pac-10 has made such a basketball comeback in recent years. Olson's over-

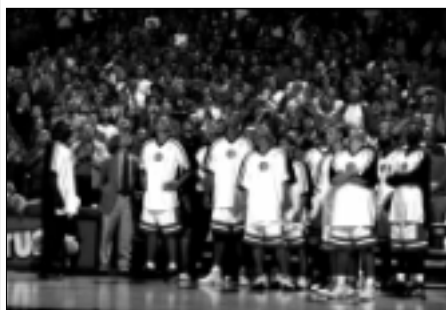
whelming success at Arizona has prompted the UCLAs and the Cals and the Stanfords to work that much harder to keep up."

But on that fateful night in America's heartland, no one could keep up with Olson—not even the Kentuckys, North Carolinas or Kansases.

The team that bubbled with character and perseverance offered the CBS broadcasters plenty of material to immortalize the contest. "Indy-scribable from Indianapolis," "A Miles-stone victory," "Simon Says Championship" and perhaps most fitting, "Don't show me the money, show me the Lute."

In a career as legendary as Olson's, chock full of glorious accomplishments, it would seem difficult for one moment to define that career so well. But the 1997 national title, the crown jewel of Olson's accomplishments, captures the essence of that very career.

Wrote columnist Corky Simpson of the *Tucson Citizen* on April 1, 1997: "One moment in time came to Lute Olson last night, defining the man's extraordinary career as a basketball coach and his class as a human being."





No. 3

# First Pac-10 Title

March 3, 1986 - Arizona 88, UCLA 76

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**"I've been in basketball for 30 years, and there are certain moments you cherish," Olson said after the title-clinching victory. "This will be among the special moments I remember most."**

**WESTWOOD, Calif.** – It proved only fitting that Arizona's rise of Hollywood-sized proportions to the top of the Pac-10 Conference title culminated in, well, Hollywood. Olson and the Wildcats topped perennial powerhouse UCLA, 88-76, on March 3, 1986, in Pauley Pavilion to claim a share of the conference championship – only three years after the University had won just one Pac-10 game.

In addition to giving Arizona its first-ever Pac-10 title, the win marked the first time Arizona had won in Westwood since 1923. Sean Elliott led all Wildcats with 28 points and also snared five rebounds to outperform UCLA star Reggie Miller individually and, more importantly, to lead his team to the victory.

Most overwhelming was the fashion in which Olson's bunch earned the victory. In a building that traditionally featured a tremendously

rambunctious and hostile Bruin crowd, Wildcat fans made their presence felt throughout the game and particularly afterward. Following the win, the Arizona faithful celebrated its newfound status as the cream of the Pacific-10 crop inside Pauley Pavilion and on the streets of Westwood.

"It was as if the UA had taken over enemy territory; occupation of Westwood was complete," wrote Greg Hansen of *The Arizona Daily Star*.

Arizona's historic win ushered in a new era in West Coast basketball as the Olson-coached Wildcats would win the conference championship six times in the next eight years. The team also noticed a changing of the guard with the significance-laden win.

Said guard Steve Kerr: "(Pauley Pavilion) used to be the toughest place to play. UCLA

used to be the toughest team in the league. Now the toughest place to play is in Tucson, and the toughest team to play is in Tucson."

The win vindicated Olson's selection as Pac-10 Conference Coach of the Year, announced the day prior to the victory over UCLA. Further sweetening the victory was the fact that Olson's peers had picked Arizona to finish eighth in the coaches preseason poll.

"I've been in basketball for 30 years, and there are certain moments you cherish," Olson said after the title-clinching victory. "This will be among the special moments I remember most."

No. 4

# UA Defeats Three No. 1 Seeds

March 21, March 29 and March 31, 1997

MEMPHIS, Tenn./BIRMINGHAM, Ala./INDIANAPOLIS –  
Unprecedented and unmatched.

As if winning the national championship weren't a singular achievement in itself, the fact that Arizona knocked off three No. 1 seeds en route to the title in 1997 is a feat accomplished by no other program in the history of the NCAA Tournament. To make the story even

the frontline foursome of A.J. Bramlett, Bennett Davison, Eugene Edgerson and Donnell Harris that stepped up their game the most.

"I think they (Kansas' frontline duo of Raef LaFrentz and Scot Pollard) were taken aback by the way we played," Davison said. "I think they probably thought they could just push us around, and we proved them wrong."

**"History has not been kind to royalty," wrote David Teel of the *Newport News (Va.) Daily Press*. "The original Boston Patriots tossed King George III's tea into the harbor. The French lopped off Marie Antoinette's noggin. Prince Charles dissed Princess Di. But no one in college basketball has ever treated the game's royalty as rudely as Arizona, your new national champion."**

better, Lute Olson and the Wildcats knocked off college basketball's three winningest programs in its march to immortality.

What Arizona accomplished in disposing of Kansas, North Carolina and Kentucky in the 1997 NCAA Tournament was no small feat by any means. The triumvirate of wins over "the closest thing to a Murderers Row of college basketball," as Gene Wojciechowski called them, is an exploit that will remain in the memories of basketball faithful for an awfully long time.

Arizona opened its assault on basketball royalty in the Sweet Sixteen against top-ranked Kansas. The Jayhawks were an overwhelming favorite to win the NCAA crown, but failed to even reach the round of eight. Olson's Wildcats turned in their best performance of the season when it was needed most as four players scored in double figures. Mike Bibby led the way with 21 points, while Michael Dickerson contributed 20 of his own. But it was

A rematch with North Carolina, coached by the hallowed Dean Smith, would provide the next chapter of the storied NCAA title run. Arizona upended the East region's top-seeded Tar Heels in the national semifinals at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis by a score of 66-58. The final obstacle to the most celebrated sporting accomplishment in university history was the University of Kentucky. A thrilling overtime game ended with Arizona making 10 free throws in the extra frame to put themselves in front and clinch the title before 47,028 fans.

Gene Wojciechowski of the *Chicago Tribune* wrote: "Olson's team became the first to beat three No. 1 seeds on the way to a Final Four title. In retrospect, it shouldn't have come as a complete surprise, considering Arizona's regular-season schedule. It beat North Carolina, Utah, Texas, Stanford and California. It also played UCLA twice, as well as New Mexico and Michigan, losing those games by a combined 17 points."



The refusal to bow down before the aura and past success of these programs captured the essence of the 1997 Wildcat team. A refusal to quit or lose characterized the squad throughout a season full of ups-and-downs.

"History has not been kind to royalty," wrote David Teel of the *Newport News (Va.) Daily Press*. "The original Boston Patriots tossed King George III's tea into the harbor. The French lopped off Marie Antoinette's noggin. Prince Charles dissed Princess Di. But no one in college basketball has ever treated the game's royalty as rudely as Arizona, your new national champion."

No. 5

# 1986 World Basketball Championships

July 1986 - USA 87, USSR 85

MADRID, Spain – Upon receiving a gold medal from Spain's Prince Felipe at the 1986 World Basketball Championships, Lute Olson asked, "It looks pretty good, doesn't it?"

The medal definitely did sparkle and shine, but it was the outstanding coaching performance of Olson and the on-court performances of his 12 collegians that shined brightest.

Taking a summer away from his University of Arizona duties to lead the nation's team in the international competition, Olson guided the United States to the gold medal while accumulating a record of nine wins and one loss over the course of the tournament. The 1986 team was the last American squad to win a gold medal at the top level of international competition until the 1992 Olympics and the last American team to win a gold medal with a roster consisting of only collegiate players.

The team given to Olson may have read like an NCAA all-star team, but was considered an underdog and a dark horse by international observers. Among the players on the team were Arizona guards Sean Elliott and Steve Kerr, North Carolina's Kenny Smith, Navy's David Robinson, Duke's Tommy Amaker,

Muggsy Bogues of Wake Forest, Brian Shaw of UC-Santa Barbara and Pittsburgh's Charles D. Smith.

The United States team accomplished its mission as it closed the tournament with an 87-85 win over the Soviet Union on

Sunday, July 20, 1986. Kenny Smith dropped 23 points and David Robinson scored 20 to lead the Americans in the gold medal game against the Arvydas Sabonis-led Soviets.

"My general feeling is one of elation,"

Olson said after winning the gold medal. "It's been a great feeling for me to see a group of young players come together and become a team."

While Lute toiled away preparing the team for the rigors of international competition, wife Bobbi leapt at the chance to use the time in Europe for more important things.

"I've always wanted to go shopping in Europe with another woman," Bobbi Olson said about plans she and daughter Christi had made. "This is a perfect time."

The pair accomplished that goal with the help of a Eurorail pass, but returned in time to see the American team win the gold medal.

German coach Ralf Klein realized the United States would win the gold after watching it compete under Lute Olson in the tournament's opening rounds. "It always improved every game, day by day. And by the end of the tournament, they

will have the best team – maybe not the best players, but the best team and the best coach."



"For a team to get to this point is a great accomplishment," Olson said. "And for us to get to this point, our guys played really well. It's never easy when the last one is a loss, but there are a lot of people who would have loved to have been where we were."



## No. 6

# 2001: A March to the Final Four

MINNEAPOLIS – A preseason No. 1 ranking and the national championship expectations that came with it put plenty of pressure on the 2000-01 Wildcats right from the start, but nothing could prepare the team for the adversity ahead.

The team struggled through the news of the death of Lute Olson's wife, Bobbi, and was without their head coach for three weeks. Upon his return, the squad had found a new sense of purpose. Informally dedicating the season to Mrs. Olson, the team turned into one of the hottest in the nation after the return of its head coach. It closed the season on a tear, winning 18 of the final 21 games and finishing the season with a six-game winning streak, including a 76-75 win over top-ranked Stanford in Palo Alto, Calif.

The team carried that success into the NCAA Tournament where it positioned itself on the brink of the school's second national title.

"After the hellish times that this team has been through this season, winning this National Championship would be like heaven for us," said fifth-year senior Eugene Edgerson. "Of course, our first notion is to do it for Mrs. Olson, but we also want to accomplish this for our coach, who has stayed strong through the entire process."

Upon reaching Minneapolis, site of the 2001 Final Four, Wildcat fans did not have to look far to see the emotions of that weekend. Billboards around town and buttons on boosters' lapels featured the Arizona block 'A' and the message, "Four Bobbi."

The national semifinal against Michigan State saw the Wildcats play what many considered to be their best half of basketball all season long. Arizona eliminated the Spartans, 80-61, after outscoring its opponent 48-31 in the second half. All five Wildcat starters scored in double figures with Jason

Gardner topping the list at 21 points. Arizona had advanced to its second national championship game in five years.

The season and the team's goal of the national crown fell one victory short of being fulfilled as Duke topped Arizona on April 2, 2001, by a final score of 82-72. A monster game from senior center Loren Woods was not enough to lead his team past the Blue Devils. The native of St. Louis scored 22 points and grabbed 11 rebounds to lead Arizona in both categories.

"For a team to get to this point is a great accomplishment," Olson said. "And for us to get to this point, our guys played really well. It's never easy when the last one is a loss, but there are a lot of people who would have loved to have been where we were."



# No. 7

A Program Comes of Age:

# First Final Four

April 2, 1988

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – An indelible memory captured the jubilation of Arizona's record-setting season and first-ever Final Four appearance perfectly. Immediately after the Wildcats had knocked off North Carolina in the finals of the 1988 NCAA West Regional, Bobbi Olson sneaked past security onto the Kingdome floor where her husband Lute had begun celebrating. The two embraced while Lute lifted her off the floor and kissed her. Television cameras captured the emotional moment and broadcast to the national audience the intense feelings of satisfaction, accomplishment and love that were everywhere within Arizona basketball.

Arizona defeated North Carolina that day, 70-52, in Seattle, Wash., to advance to the Final Four and set up a national semifinal date against Oklahoma. The victory and the trip to Kansas City that would follow meant the team had realized its season-long goal.

"Even in preseason conditioning, these guys were talking about the Final Four," the head coach said. "Everybody was going to sacrifice whatever they had to sacrifice, but they were going to be there."

The Wildcats' first four games in the 1988 NCAA Tournament saw them produce an average margin of victory of 26 points, including the 18-point win over Dean Smith's Tar Heels. Many critics lamented the fact that Arizona had not been tested and would fall in any close game. To that, Olson responded by saying, "We've played some good teams. Is it our fault they haven't tested us?"

All the pregame hype surrounding the West Regional final focused on the supposed lack of toughness on Arizona's team that North Carolina would be able to exploit. Tom Tolbert squelched any chance of that idea becoming a reality.



He poured in 21 points and snared six rebounds against the Tar Heels' frontline. But his most memorable play came with 14 minutes remaining in the game when he flipped the ball over his head to drain a miraculous, spinning layup from the baseline as the 256-pound J.R. Reid crashed onto his back. Tolbert hit the ensuing free throw for a three-point play that gave Arizona the lead.

"And before long, the Wildcats were dancing and laughing about making their first trip to the Final Four," wrote Michael Wilbon of the *Washington Post*. "It's difficult to see why a team needs a chip on its shoulder, having won 35 games, but the Wildcats seem to have one."

Even the legendary John Wooden served notice of the tough team from Tucson, commenting on his high opinion of the Olson-coached Wildcats.

"My top choice from the very beginning was Arizona," Wooden told the *Los Angeles Times* before the Final Four. "I felt they weren't getting the deserved reputation around the country, and I don't know why when you looked at their early-season

victories against some of the top teams in the country on neutral courts. I like them because they have the qualities I really like. I think they play together as a team. Sean Elliott is tremendous, but he's not the only one. Tom Tolbert does well, so does Anthony Cook. Steve Kerr is an exceptional leader. Craig McMillan is a fine big guard, and they have some pretty decent backups."

The odyssey of the 1987-88 Wildcat basketball team featured a number of new pinnacles, but none would have been possible without the superb leadership of the team's head coach. *The Arizona Republic's* Bob Young pointed out that the 1988 Final Four had been five years in the making.

"Arizona's journey to the Final Four didn't start that November night in Alaska when the Wildcats demolished Duquesne, 133-78, to being what is now a 35-2 season," he wrote prior to the matchup against Oklahoma. "By that time, Arizona had climbed a substantial hill and was on an expressway toward Kansas City. This trip really began in 1983 when Arizona athletic director Cedric Dempsey pulled Lute Olson out of Iowa."

Arizona would fall to Oklahoma in the national semifinals, but that defeat could not diminish the success of Lute Olson's fifth Arizona team and the joy of its 35-3 season.

"They're my teammates, they're my best friends," said senior guard Steve Kerr about the members of the historic team. "It's been apparent all year that there's a lot of love on this team. It's been an unbelievable experience."

Olson himself acknowledged the importance of the contributions of this particular group of student-athletes.

"I think five years from now, people will look at our program, and they'll say this was the group that made the program what it is," Olson said in 1988. "This is the team that took us to the next step."

"He's been gone 4 ½ years," Marc Hansen of the *Des Moines (Iowa) Register* wrote. "But most Iowans still love, honor and obey this tall, dignified, immaculately groomed, highly organized, hard-working, stubborn Scandinavian."



No. 8

# Lute Returns to Iowa

December 12, 1987 - Arizona 66, Iowa 59

IOWA CITY, Iowa – The highest ranking to date in school history did not afford the Arizona basketball program a chance to rest on its laurels and relax in its new spot in the college hoops penthouse. Rather, it offered Coach Lute Olson another opportunity to add to his growing reputation as one of the game's most-respected coaches.

With a perfect 6-0 record and the championship of the Great Alaska Shootout under its collective belt, the fourth-ranked Wildcats headed to Big Ten country to face Olson's former squad, the No. 3 Iowa Hawkeyes. The return trip to Iowa City and to the fans who revered Olson would prove to be a friendly and pleasantly-satisfying rendezvous for the silver-haired Arizona mentor.

"You don't spend nine years of your life in a place where you know all those people and have all those great memories without coming back feeling a special kind of feeling," Olson admitted.

Upon entering Carver-Hawkeye Arena prior to tip-off, Olson was greeted with a standing ovation and serenaded with chants of "Lute, Lute, Lute" from the Hawkeye faithful. His success and overall appeal to the fans remained even years after he departed to assume the reins of the Arizona program.

"He's been gone 4 ½ years," Marc Hansen of the *Des Moines (Iowa) Register* wrote. "But most Iowans still love, honor and obey this tall, dignified, immaculately groomed, highly organized, hard-working, stubborn Scandinavian."

The game featured vintage Olson basketball – a skillfully constructed game-plan executed to perfection. The Wildcats downed the Hawkeyes by a final tally of 66-59, allowing Iowa's leading scorer, Jeff Moe, zero field goals and just one point.

Following the game, the Wildcats welcomed their coach to the jovial postgame locker room with a round of well-deserved applause. He told his victorious troops, "I

just want to thank you for what you gave me. I couldn't have asked for a better Christmas present."

Despite his attempts to prepare his team as if they were facing any other opponent, the Wildcats knew the game held extra significance for Olson. After the game, he admitted the team had seen right through his statements that Iowa was "just like any other game."

"(The team) knew this was an important game, maybe a game their old coach wanted to win a little more than some of the others we play," he mused.

No. 9

# 1987 Great Alaska Shootout

November 27-30, 1987

ANCHORAGE, Alaska – Lute Olson must have brought a little bit of the cactus-covered Arizona desert with him to snow-drenched Alaska when his Wildcats opened the 1987 season at the Great Alaska Shootout in Anchorage. Whatever the coach brought to Alaska, his team left quite a bit in its wake following its three-game stint there.

Arizona cruised to the title of the Great Alaska Shootout with convincing wins over Duquesne, 133-78; No. 9 Michigan, 79-64, and top-ranked Syracuse, 80-69.

The matchup against the Orangemen was a beautiful display of Lute Olson basketball; the team outplayed Syracuse in nearly every facet of the game. The Wildcats shot nearly 60 percent from the field, while holding Syracuse to 39 percent. Five Arizona players, Anthony Cook, Sean Elliott, Craig McMillan, Tom Tolbert and Joe Turner, each scored in double figures.

The three huge victories in the month of November were a precursor to the success Olson has enjoyed against top-notch competition in the first month of the season. Since taking over the program in 1983, he has compiled a 43-7 record in November.

“This is a team that’s going to be able to compete with anyone,” Olson told the *Tucson Citizen* after winning the Great Alaska Shootout. “And it’s going to get better because of its togetherness.”

Upon returning to the continental U.S., Arizona reeled off nine more consecutive wins that moved them into the top spot in the nation’s rankings. It marked the first time in school history that the Wildcats held down the No. 1 spot in the polls. Included in the string of victories were an emotional return to the



Hawkeye State where the Cats disposed of Iowa and a hard-fought win over the Duke Blue Devils in McKale Center. Olson, not one to shy away from brutal scheduling, embraced the caliber of teams that his squad faced.

“The more good teams we face, the better off we’ll be,” he said. “It’s like saying, ‘Go ahead, give us your best shot, we’ll handle it.’”

The big wins signaled the beginning of the team’s emergence as a force to be reckoned with in the college basketball world.

Greg Hansen of *The Arizona Daily Star* wrote: “Down went Michigan. Down went Syracuse. Down went Iowa. Up go the Wildcats. Now it’s a question of how high they can go.”



## First Sellout in McKale Center

February 23, 1985 - Arizona 67, Oregon State 52

TUCSON, Ariz. – Upon being named the 12<sup>th</sup> head basketball coach in University of Arizona history, Lute Olson began a grassroots campaign to sell season tickets and boost attendance in McKale Center. Crowds in the still-spanking new arena had dipped to their lowest levels, with an average of only 6,224 fans attending Wildcat home games the season prior to Olson's arrival in the Old Pueblo.

"When we first came here and we were trying to get some awareness among the people that there had been a coaching change, we spoke to every group that would listen," the newly-hired coach said. "I took this approach – get on board now and get your season tickets because in a couple of years you won't be able to get in the place."

His prophecy came to fruition on Saturday, Feb. 23, 1985, as a packed-to-the-rafters McKale crowd of 13,316 watched the Wildcats trump Ralph Miller's Oregon State Beavers, 67-52. The sellout was the first in Olson's tenure at UA and was the university's first since February 16, 1980, against eventual national runner-up UCLA.

The victory allowed Arizona to remain tied for first place with Southern California with a record of 11-4 in the Pac-10 conference and an overall record 20-7.

Olson had accomplished what many termed a miracle – transforming the University of Arizona into a 20-game winner less than two years after the embarrassment of a 4-24

season. The Wildcats would conclude their second season under Olson in the NCAA tournament, the first postseason appearance for the school since 1977.

Arizona's Eddie Smith led all scorers in the historic win over OSU, as he poured in 18 points on a 7-of-10 shooting performance. As a team, Arizona combined to shoot 66 percent from the field against the typically-staunch defense of Miller's Beavers.

"They ripped us," Miller lamented following the loss.

However the story of February 23, 1985 did not unfold on the floor of McKale Center, but rather in the stands and among the faithful and frenzied basketball fans of Tucson. The capacity crowd marked the beginning of an incredible run in which Arizona has led the Pac-10 in attendance for 17 consecutive years.

The presence of the thousands of Wildcat fanatics inside McKale Center was augmented by their raucous, vocal support.

"This," Olson commented, "was the best crowd I have ever been associated with in terms of everyone screaming and yelling and doing everything they could to help us over the hump."

Seventeen years later, opponents still acknowledge the impact of McKale's rip-roaring red-clad crowd on its performance.

"(McKale Center) is a great atmosphere and home-court advantage," said UCLA forward

Matt Barnes after a thrilling, 20-point Arizona comeback victory in January 2002. "This is the loudest place in the country."

The opening sales pitch presented by Olson on his arrival in 1983 and the success that shortly followed left two kinds of fans in Tucson.

"The ones who listened are happy with their seats," Olson said. "And the ones who scoffed are watching on TV."



"This was no fluke," said center Joseph Blair. "We're not the weak, pansy West team. We're out to kick some butt."



## No. 11

The Wildcats advanced to the national semifinals with a resounding 92-72 win over top-seeded Missouri in the West Regional Final in Los Angeles, completely disproving all who thought Arizona was unable to win the big games.

Arizona Answers Its Critics:

# 1994 Final Four

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – The 1994 Final Four allowed Lute Olson and his Arizona Wildcats to exorcise some demons and offered the head coach a sweet opportunity to silence the critics who had been doubting the prowess of the Arizona program.

The Wildcats advanced to the national semifinals with a resounding 92-72 win over top-seeded Missouri in the West Regional Final in Los Angeles, completely disproving all who thought Arizona was unable to win the big games. Rumored to be tougher and stronger because of its size, Missouri was limited to a field goal percentage of 34.9 and made only 7-of-33 three-point attempts due to Olson's successful defensive game plan. The Wildcats literally "raced" to the Final Four as the team's success was based around speed, neutralizing its lone deficiency of a small frontline.

As had proven to be the case all year long, the backcourt duo of Khalid Reeves and Damon Stoudamire shouldered quite a load against the Tigers. Reeves contributed 26 points, while Stoudamire added 27 as well as 10 rebounds. The guard duo proved that size is often no match for quickness.

"They can flat out light you up," Olson said about his guards after defeating Missouri. "And they did."

A victim of the upset bug in previous years, the Wildcats received no assistance from that ailment in the 1994 tournament. Arizona's path in the West Regional held completely to form as the Wildcats faced the highest possible seed in each round. The caliber of competition just furthered the opinion that Arizona was for real – despite critics proselytizing to the contrary all season long.

"This was no fluke," said center Joseph Blair. "We're not the weak, pansy West team. We're out to kick some butt."

Eventual national champion Arkansas spoiled the school's second trip to the Final Four as it prevailed over Arizona by a tally of 91-82 in Charlotte, N.C. Despite the loss, the Cats returned home with the satisfaction of having proved their doubters wrong and exceeding all expectations but their own.

No. 12

# The Shot:

## Eddie Smith Beats ASU...Twice

February 17, 1984 and Jan. 5, 1985



TEMPE, Ariz. – Arizona forward Eddie Smith scored nine points on Friday, February 17, 1984, against Arizona State. But it was his final bucket which splashed through the net at precisely the moment the clock read 0:00 that set off a delirious celebration led by the Wildcat most responsible for the victory, none other than head coach Lute Olson.

Smith, a junior transfer from Wichita, Kan., scored from down low inside the paint just moments after ASU had assumed a one-point lead. The team moved the ball the length of the court with only five seconds to go, setting up Smith's game-winner. The buzzer sounded as Smith's layup bounced around the rim and finally fell through, setting off an intense Wildcat celebration.

Lute Olson was the first to bolt onto the floor after Smith's shot dropped. Players, coaches, cheerleaders and fans joined Olson in celebrating on ASU's home floor at University Activity Center. The win would begin a five-game winning streak, the longest of Olson's first season, and mark the opening of a stretch in which the Wildcats

would win six of their final eight conference games. The victory gave Arizona its first season sweep over the Sun Devils since 1970 as Olson accomplished one of the most important goals for UA boosters – beat the hated in-state rivals.

As luck would have it, Smith got the better of the Sun Devils almost one year later (Jan. 5, 1985) when he drained a basket and free throw with four seconds remaining to cap a remarkable comeback in a 61-60 UA win.

With a defender draped over his back, Smith somehow managed to sink a two-handed scoop shot to tie the game and erase what was a 60-53 ASU lead with 37 seconds remaining. "I saw Bobby Thompson coming and I just tried to put the ball in the basket," explained Smith following the game.

Smith, who finished the game with 21 points and 13 rebounds, started the rally with a jumper in the lane with 26 seconds to go. He was fouled on the play and converted the free throw to cut the deficit to four.

The Cats fouled Thompson with 19 seconds remaining and he missed the ensuing front end of the one-and-one. Arizona's Morgan Taylor, who entered the game prior to Thompson's miss, drained a 20-foot jumper to cut the deficit to 60-58 with just nine seconds remaining.

After Arizona's final timeout, ASU inbounded the ball to Thompson who tried to move up the sideline. UA's Pete Williams stepped in and deflected the pass, and following a scramble, tipped the ball to Smith for what appeared to be a breakaway layup. But Thompson, in an attempt to stop the game-tying layup, came over and committed the key foul. All of which heightened Smith's heroics.

"I was very excited that I had a chance to win it," said Smith of his game-winning free throw. "I thought, 'Just go out and shoot it.'"

UA athletic director Cedric Dempsey got it right when he said, "Unbelievable...it's better than last year."

# No. 13

# Power Shift

# in the Pac-10:

February 25, 1984 - Arizona 69, Oregon State 58

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TUCSON, Ariz. – Lute Olson sat two victories away from his 200<sup>th</sup> career victory prior to his team's game against four-time defending conference champion Oregon State on Feb. 25, 1984. But it was win No. 199 that proved to be a milestone for his recently-inherited program.

The Wildcats found themselves in uncharted territory, a winning streak, as they knocked off Ralph Miller's Beavers by a tally of 69-58 to put Olson one win away from career victory No. 200. Many agreed it was the soundest whipping administered to eventual conference champion Oregon State all season.

It seemed as if the Wildcats could not miss. Connecting on 25-of-35 field goal attempts, Arizona's field goal percentage of .714 set a school record that still stands today.

Olson credited the growing confidence of his team for the game's result and acknowledged that his system had begun to take root in the once-woeful program.

"We took two freshmen, two junior college players, Brock Brunkhorst and a bunch of guys from a 1-17 team and we talked confidence to them until we were blue in the face," Olson said after defeating Oregon State, the third win in a five-game winning streak. "They started to win and now they believe."

A balanced attack was key to Arizona's success that day. Four players scored 13 points or more, while seven of the nine Wildcats that saw action contributed by scoring. Pete Williams was the star of the day on the floor as he led all players with 18 points and also added 10 rebounds.

Olson would go on to earn win No. 200 two days later against Southern California, but not before his squad had served notice that the team from Tucson would soon swing the balance of power in the league in its favor.

Arizona closed the season with wins in six of its final eight Pac-10 games.



No. 14

# "Unknown" Arizona Downs Four Ranked Teams to Open 2001-02 Season

"It's just the latest proof, as if any were needed, that Olson is the best early-season coach of all time," said the *Tucson Citizen's* Corky Simpson.

NEW YORK – Sometimes the crystal ball isn't always crystal clear. Upon assessing Arizona's chances for success in the 2001-02 season, one college basketball prognosticator wrote the following: "Arizona takes a few lumps early in the season and then the newcomers come through late for the Wildcats to get back in the NCAA Tournament and win a game." He certainly wasn't alone, as the *Associated Press* preseason poll failed to feature the Cats for the first time since 1995.

It did not take long for Olson to prove that the appearance in the 2001 national championship game was not a testament

to one year's team, but rather evidence of the caliber of the program built here in Tucson by the silver-haired basketball genius. Arizona played in the final game of the 2000-01 season and the first game of the 2001-02 college basketball season. Lute's troops, although a majority of them weren't around to witness firsthand the run to the 2001 Final Four, picked up right where they left off.

The roster of players that opened Arizona's season at the Coaches vs. Cancer IKON Classic in New York City's Madison Square Garden included only two student-athletes who participated in the 2001 Final Four. Also among that bunch were five true freshmen. A pair of wins against highly-ranked opponents set the tone for a season in which many across the nation labeled the freshmen-laden Wildcats as overachievers.

Arizona aced its first test against second-ranked Maryland, handing the eventual national champions the first of only four losses the Terrapins would suffer all year long. The second game of the classic for Arizona matched them against No. 5 Florida. Once again, Olson led his squad to victory – a 75-71 triumph over the Gators.

"It's just the latest proof, as if any were needed, that Olson is the best early-season coach of all time," said the *Tucson Citizen's* Corky Simpson.



A slew of amazing debuts highlighted the opening weekend for the Wildcats, but it was the play of junior point guard Jason Gardner that anchored the team. The third-year starter from Indianapolis, Ind., scored 23 points in each of the Coaches vs. Cancer games to earn the tournament's MVP award. Will Bynum turned in the most impressive performance of the five true freshmen on the roster when he scored 16 points in 26 minutes of action against Florida.

"I was very proud of our guys, with how competitive they were," Olson said after claiming the championship. "A lot has to do with leadership. This was a situation that would have made some young kids' knees buckle, but that didn't happen."

The dependence on the youthful members of the Arizona team was highly visible – the freshmen combined to play 194 of the team's 400 minutes against Maryland and Florida. At one time, Olson had four 18-year-olds on the floor at one time. The Kiddie Cats answered, resoundingly.

Wrote Steve Rivera of the *Tucson Citizen*: "Welcome to 'Lute's World,' where the





**Wrote Steve Rivera of the *Tucson Citizen*: “Welcome to ‘Lute’s World,’ where the 67-year-old coach with silver hair and regal, towering presence is at his best when he has a team similar to this season’s with five freshmen and no seniors.”**

67-year-old coach with silver hair and regal, towering presence is at his best when he has a team similar to this season’s with five freshmen and no seniors.”

Participating in a tournament benefitting the American Cancer Society held special meaning for Olson and his team after the passing of Bobbi Olson to cancer less than a year prior. Following the win against Maryland, the team sported blue shirts that read, “We’re here with Coach Olson” on the front and “American Cancer Society” on the back.

The next assignment for the Kiddie Cats was a true road game against Texas in the newly-expanded Erwin Special Events Center. Before a hostile crowd of 15,291 rabid Longhorn fans, Arizona dispatched its hosts 88-74. Once again, Gardner led the way with 28 points. But it was freshman Salim Stoudamire who hammered the win home as he poured in all 19 of his points in the second half. The win improved Olson’s record in the month of November as Arizona’s head coach to an astonishing 43 wins and only seven losses, further evidencing his skill as a teacher and master of game preparation.

Following a rare home loss to eventual Final Four participant Kansas, Olson once again led his team out of town for another game outside of the friendly confines of McKale Center. This time, it was against fifth-ranked Illinois at America West Arena in Phoenix. A freshmen-fueled win ensued, 87-82. The quintet consisting of Bynum, Stoudamire, Isaiah Fox, Channing Frye and Dennis Latimore logged 107 of Arizona’s 200 minutes against the Fighting Illini.

“Everyone got into the flow of the game,” Fox told Bruce Pascoe of *The Arizona Daily Star*. “Against Kansas, it was Ricky (Anderson) making the big play or Jason (Gardner) making the big play. But this time, everybody got a little piece of the pie.”

The strength of Arizona’s early-season schedule only made the accomplishments of the tremendously young team that much more improbable and fulfilling. No team in college basketball history had ever opened the season with five consecutive games against ranked opponents.

Robyn Norwood of the *Los Angeles Times* said, “With a schedule that has yet to include an unranked team, it’s almost as if that freshman class has played in an NCAA tournament before playing a conference game.”

Assistant coach Josh Pastner admitted the staff did not know what to expect from their players upon opening the season.

“We all wondered what would happen,” he said, referring to a coaching staff meeting prior to beginning the season. “Coach Olson was a little concerned if we could get ready to play all of those top teams so quickly. I don’t know if any of us in the room that day could have expected this. I mean, did you?”

**“I was very proud of our guys, with how competitive they were,” Olson said after claiming the championship. “A lot has to do with leadership. This was a situation that would have made some young kids’ knees buckle, but that didn’t happen.”**



No. 15

# First Game vs. ASU

& Assassination of Malcolm Kerr -

January 20, 1984 - Arizona 71, Arizona State 49

"It might have looked like I wasn't thinking of my dad, but I thought of him the whole time," Kerr said following the game.



TUCSON, Ariz. – It took Lute Olson just five games to earn his first Pac-10 Conference victory – after inheriting a squad that won just one league game in 18 tries the previous season. However, the significance and emotion of Friday, Jan. 20, 1984, did not lie in the Wildcats' removal from the conference cellar.

Earlier that week, Malcolm Kerr, father of Wildcat freshman Steve Kerr and the president of the American University in Beirut, Lebanon, was shot to death by anti-American terrorists as he left his office.

The Wildcats faced in-state rival Arizona State just three days after learning of the death of the elder Kerr and pulled off a decisive 71-49 win over the visiting Sun Devils.

Although not openly admitting it, the rest of the Arizona squad dedicated the game to Steve Kerr and his late father.

"You could feel the team wanted to do something for him," said assistant coach Ricky Byrdsong about the team's performance.

The McKale Center crowd also paid its respects to Kerr with a moment of silence to honor the fallen educator. Steve Kerr scored 12 points in 25 minutes of action against the Sun Devils. He left the game to a standing ovation with 1:39 remaining in the game.

"It might have looked like I wasn't thinking of my dad, but I thought of him the whole time," Kerr said following the game.

The win snapped a nine-game losing streak to ASU and began a string of five straight Arizona victories. The 22-point drubbing was a catalyst as Olson's Wildcats would win 16 of the next 17 meetings between the two schools and 19 of the next 21.

Arizona's Eddie Smith led all scorers with 19 points, while center Pete Williams contributed 15 points and 13 rebounds.

"It was like two victories for us – our first in the league and our first by that kind of blowout margin," Olson said. "We got two things done at once."



No. 16

# Cats Rout UCLA; Elliott Tops Pac-10 Scoring List

February 18, 1989 — Arizona 102, UCLA 63

TUCSON, Ariz. — Lute Olson said that Sean Elliott's performance on February 18, 1989, against UCLA was the best of his career — you could also say the rest of the team played alright too. The Wildcats demolished UCLA, handing the Bruins the worst loss in school history.

Elliott scored 35 points to pass Lew Alcindor and become the Pac-10's career scoring leader as the Wildcats annihilated UCLA 102-64. It proved only fitting that Elliott's accomplishment came against the Bruins, Alcindor's former school.

"I know Sean really wanted it in this game because he was at home and because the former record holder was a Bruin," Olson said.

Olson, responsible for devising the game plan that allowed the Wildcats to destroy UCLA, deserved as much credit as Elliott's record-setting performance for the dominating performance of his team.

"This wasn't a Pac-10 game," wrote columnist Mike Downey of the *Los Angeles Times*. "This was a Pac-Man game. Arizona had UCLA for lunch."

Breaking the record that day did not look like a sure thing for Elliott entering the game. He had

been mired in a shooting slump in which he had missed 41 of his last 65 shots. However, his 35 points were not the result of an altered game plan as Olson refused to abandon his normal team style of play. Throughout the season, Elliott was responsible for 27 percent of the team's shots, and against UCLA that day he took 31 percent.

The points that pushed the homegrown Tucson product into the top spot on the list were anti-climactic as he hit a pair of free throws with seven minutes and 10 seconds remaining in the game to give him 2,327 career points, surpassing Alcindor's 2,325. He left the game to a roaring, standing ovation immediately after the free throws.

"I was going to drive the lane for a dunk," Elliott said about how he had hoped to break the record. "But they were helping out pretty good, and I knew I couldn't do that."

The 35 points were only one facet of the senior's game that shined that day, he also chipped in seven rebounds and a career-high 11 assists. Elliott, with his coach's guidance, had authored another chapter of the amazing story that is Lute Olson and Arizona basketball on the floor of McKale Center.

Wrote Tracy Dodds of the *Los Angeles Times* on March 14, 1988: "The University of Arizona's dyed-in-the-red-wool fans donned their sweaters and flocked to McKale Center Sunday afternoon, 13,796 strong, to celebrate a basketball team. Not to celebrate a victory. That was a foregone conclusion."



No. 17

# Domination of Pac-10 Tournament

March 11-13, 1988

TUCSON, Ariz. – The 1988 Pac-10 Tournament proved to be an exercise in futility for everyone but the Arizona Wildcats. Lute Olson's squad rolled to three victories by an average of 20.7 points, nabbing the postseason tournament title to accompany the regular-season crown they had clinched with a sparkling 17-1 conference record.

The tournament, hosted at McKale Center, began with a fulfilling victory for the third-ranked Wildcats. A three-point shooting performance of 66 percent powered the team to a convincing 88-64 win over California to give the program its first postseason victory under Lute Olson. Arizona had been 0-4 in three NCAA Tournament appearances and the 1987 conference tournament since Olson took over.

Next victim: Stanford in the semifinals. Round three of the season-long battle between Arizona and the Cardinal included a touch of revenge for the Wildcats. Stanford was responsible for

handing Arizona its only conference loss of the season in February, thus preventing a perfect run for Olson's bunch. Sean Elliott was again the catalyst for the Wildcats as he dropped a season-high 32 points on the Cardinal to lead his teammates in a 97-83 win.

The championship game of the tournament witnessed Arizona pick apart a very-talented Oregon State team in a 93-67 win. Oregon State's leading scorer, Bill Sherwood, did not see action in the final due to a severely sprained ankle. But, as Olson reminded all who would listen afterwards, the Beaver's personnel issues were not the reason for Arizona's romp.

"It's tough to compete against us here even when you're at full strength," Olson said.

Tom Tolbert contributed a fine game in the matchup against the Beavers, scoring 12 points and grabbing 13 rebounds. His performances all weekend long earned him a selection to the All-Pac-10 Tournament team, along with Gary Payton of Oregon

State and Todd Lichti of Stanford. Selecting the Most Outstanding Player of the tournament was a no-brainer as Sean Elliott was chosen unanimously.

The Pac-10 Tournament was a jubilation for Arizona basketball. Olson had his team rolling, the season had been the best in school history and the fans were ecstatically in love with their Wildcats and the mastermind behind it all, Olson.

Wrote Tracy Dodds of the *Los Angeles Times* on March 14, 1988: "The University of Arizona's dyed-in-the-red-wool fans donned their sweaters and flocked to McKale Center Sunday afternoon, 13,796 strong, to celebrate a basketball team. Not to celebrate a victory. That was a foregone conclusion."

Since the start of the 1988 Pac-10 Tournament, Arizona has won 12 consecutive tournament games and four straight tournament titles.

No. 18

# Freshmen Guards Lead UA to 1999 Preseason NIT Title -

November 24 and 26, 1999

NEW YORK – Weather and mechanical difficulties forced the plane carrying Lute Olson and his Arizona basketball team to arrive in New York City a day-and-a-half later than expected before the final two games of the 1999 Preseason National Invitation Tournament. Apparently, keeping the Cats out of New York City would have been the only way to stop them from rolling to their 12<sup>th</sup> straight win in the Preseason NIT.

Olson led his youthful Arizona squad to a 76-60 win over Notre Dame in the semifinals and a 63-51 victory over Kentucky, claiming another Preseason NIT championship to accompany the titles won in 1990 and 1995.

“No matter how talented or how young, the Tucson-based Wildcats are virtually unbeatable in the NIT and just about any other game played in November,” wrote Bruce Pascoe of *The Arizona Daily Star*.

Following season-opening wins over Kansas State and New Mexico State in McKale Center, Arizona thumped Notre Dame in the semifinals at Madison Square Garden behind a trio of players making only their third appearance as Wildcats. Junior transfer Loren Woods posted his first Arizona double-double with 13 points and 10 rebounds in addition to matching a 12-year-old school record by blocking seven shots.

“Not only was he a shot-blocker and a defensive intimidator, but he broke the zone with great passes from the post,” Olson said of his 7-foot-1-inch center.



The finals featured a rematch of the 1997 NCAA title game. The result, sans overtime, was the same as that historic night in Indianapolis – an Arizona victory powered by a freshman guard. This time, however, it was freshman Gilbert Arenas assuming the starring role in this off-Broadway production of Cats. The freshman contributed 20 points, five steals and four rebounds to warrant his selection as the tournament’s most valuable player. He was accompanied by fellow freshman guard Jason Gardner on the all-tournament team as Gardner added 18 points on five three-pointers in the two games.

“We’ve had some great guards in our program,” said Olson following the championship game. “But we never had two come on in the same year that can play like these two can.”

The NIT title propelled Arizona to No. 4 in the polls and proved a harbinger of what would become a 27-7 season that saw the Cats ranked in the top five for a majority of the season.

No. 19

# Olson Court Dedications

February 26, 2000 and January 7, 2001

TUCSON, Ariz. – McKale Center may not be “The House that Lute Built,” but there is little doubt no one has had more success than he.

Athletic director Jim Livengood designated the playing surface in the arena renamed as “Lute Olson Court” to honor the accomplishments of the veteran coach. In ceremonies following yet another Arizona victory on Feb. 26, 2000, the athletic department unveiled the new logo at center court. Livengood, university president Peter Likins and former athletic director Cedric Dempsey were among those who spoke about the Olson family and its patriarch’s accomplishments.

Wrote Corky Simpson of the *Tucson Citizen*: “I’m not sure which is honored more by ‘Lute Olson Court’ – the University of Arizona basketball coach or the floor at McKale Center that now bears his name.”

Throughout the ceremony, all who spoke were adamant in pointing out that the honor was not a mere recognition of Olson’s win-loss success on the court, but rather a reflection of the positive impact the native North Dakotan has had on so many during his tenure at the University.

“He is close to perfect. He is a loyal, giving friend, leader and teacher. Lute Olson is the real deal,” said Livengood in his address to the McKale Center crowd during the ceremony renaming the arena’s playing surface.

After wife Bobbi Olson fell victim to cancer on Jan., 1, 2001, Arizona officials acted quickly to rename the court again – this time, honoring the woman considered just as integral to Wildcat basketball as her husband. In a public memorial service inside McKale Center, Livengood announced the floor would henceforth be referred to as “Lute & Bobbi Olson Court.” The tribute was perfect for the first family of Arizona basketball.

“They are always together, a perfect balancing act,” wrote *The Arizona Daily Star*’s Jon Wilner in 1993. “He is the shy husband tossed into the spotlight. She is the vibrant, outgoing wife with the calming presence.”

At the public memorial for Mrs. Olson, Livengood recalled a number of instances when her grace, generosity and her way of making everyone with whom she came in contact feel special shined through. Of Lute and Bobbi, Livengood said that day, “They’ll be together, and that’s as it should be.”



# No. 20

## First NCAA Tournament Appearance: the beginning of 18 straight

March 15, 1985  
Alabama 50,  
Arizona 41



ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – Arizona didn't have to wait until the television told them they were in. And over the course of the next 17 years, Arizona has only had to wait for the official announcement of the NCAA Tournament field in order to determine where the hotel reservations needed to be made.

June Dempsey, wife of then-athletic director Cedric Dempsey, called Lute Olson with the news of the team's selection to the 1985 NCAA basketball championship tournament before the rest of the world found out from the nationally-televised broadcast.

Olson and his Wildcats breathed a huge sigh of relief on March, 10, 1985, Selection Sunday, upon learning the University of Arizona would return to the postseason tournament after a six-year absence.

The No. 10 seed in the West Region, Arizona faced seventh-seeded Alabama of the Southeastern Conference in Albuquerque, N.M., on Friday, March 15, 1985, beginning a string of 18 years in which the Wildcats have advanced to the NCAA

Tournament. The streak is now the longest active and the second-longest in NCAA history.

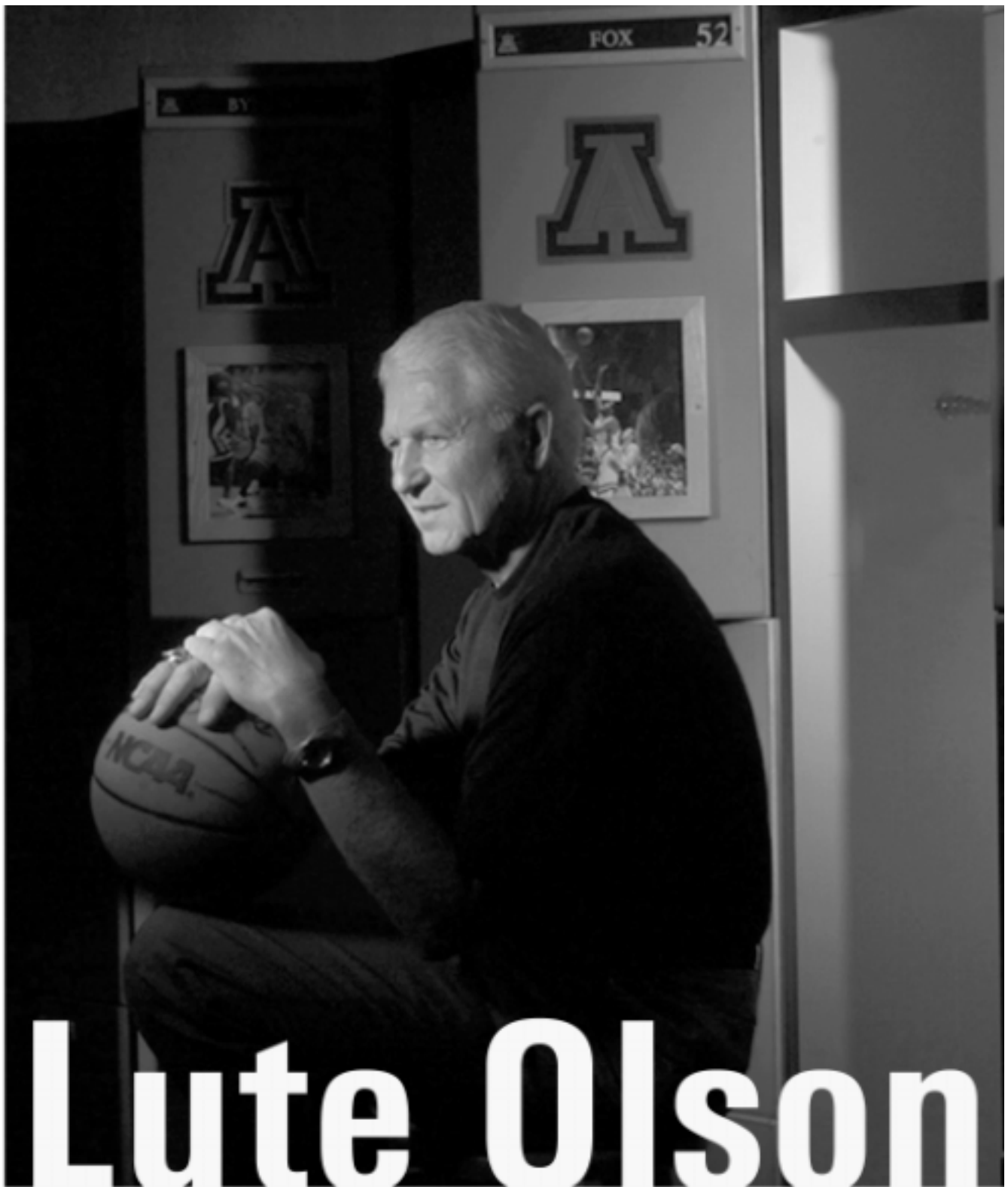
The Wildcats were one of four Pac-10 teams chosen to participate in the postseason event, Arizona closed the season tied for third in the Pac-10 with 12 wins and six losses in conference play. In two seasons, Olson had sparked the Wildcats' growth from a 4-24 team to an NCAA Tournament participant.

"Olson has been described as a miracle worker for what he has accomplished in two seasons," wrote Jack Rickard of the *Tucson Citizen*. "But this was not just emergency-room treatment. He has won quickly while building for the future."

Unfortunately, the Wildcats fell to the Crimson Tide that Friday in New Mexico. However, the significance of the tournament appearance and the future of Arizona basketball could not be ignored.

"The season is over," wrote columnist Corky Simpson of the *Tucson Citizen*. "But the program has just started."

(photo by David Sanders, Arizona Daily Star)



# Lute Olson

Naismith Memorial Hall of Fame  
Class of 2002