

# A Century of OILER Basketball

By Brian Lester and David Buck

The men's basketball program, which began during 1904, and eventually became an NAIA power under legendary coaches Donald Renninger '40 and Dr. James D. Houdeshell '53, celebrated its 100th season of hoops in 2007. The Oilers' success in the NAIA continued when current head coach Ron Niekamp took the helm in 1985.

It is only appropriate to look back at the rich history of a program that has had only 27 losing seasons in 100 years, and none since 1981-82. The birth of the tradition began on Jan. 29, 1904, with a 14-12 win over Ohio Northern. There was no coach at the time, and there would not be one until 1910.

Harry Barnhart '13, who coached from 1910-18 and again from 1927-32, went 4-7 during his first season, getting his first win in a 35-10 victory over Ashland, which has become one of the Oilers' biggest rivals. Renninger took over the reins during the 1947-48 campaign and led five of his teams to at least 15 wins. He also coached the Oilers to five Mid-Ohio Conference championships and two appearances in the NAIA national tourney.

Findlay played in its first NAIA tournament in 1952 and was fueled by standout Harold Wolfe '54, a former NAIA All-American who played from 1950-54. He still ranks seventh all-time in points with 1,733 and has the highest points per game average in a career at 24.8. He also set a school record with 61 points in a game and still holds career records for most field goals (25) and rebounds (33), and single-season records in scoring average (30.5 ppg) and field goal percentage (62 percent).

During Wolfe's time with Findlay, the Oilers won three Mid-Ohio championships and appeared in the NAIA District 22 playoffs three times, reaching the national tournament twice.

Houdeshell made his debut with the Oilers in 1955 when he wrapped up his first season with a 12-9 record, marking the first of 23 winning seasons. Under his guidance, the Oilers made 16 trips to the NAIA district playoffs and reached the national tourney three times. During 30 years of coaching, Houdeshell rolled up 430 wins.



1907 Oiler Basketball Team

Houdeshell was blessed with a wealth of talented players during his 30-year career, including Jim Carder '68, Jerry Carder '68 and Randy Kortokrax '89.

Twins Jim and Jerry Carder are the second- and third-leading scorers in UF history, scoring 2,079 points and 1,953 points, respectively. They both were NAIA District 22 selections and All-Americans, and they were inducted into the NAIA Hall of Fame in March 2007.

Kortokrax, who played for both Houdeshell and Niekamp, is the program's all-time leading scorer with 2,575 points. He was named an NAIA All-American three times, including a first-team selection as a senior with 22.8 points per outing and 10.9 rebounds per game. He was also the NAIA District 22 MVP as a junior and senior, and still holds 14 school records.

Ron Niekamp was named coach after Houdeshell's retirement in 1985. Niekamp has never had a losing season in 22 years. During 16 of those seasons he won 20 or more games.

During the NAIA years, Niekamp led UF to a pair of District 22 championships, two Mid-Ohio Conference crowns and two Great Lakes Sectional titles. The Oilers went to the NAIA national tourney six times under Niekamp.

In seven full years of eligibility at the NCAA Division II level, Niekamp has guided the Oilers to the third-best winning percentage of all teams at .810 (174-41). They are the first team in league history to win six consecutive South Division titles. Overall, the Oilers have won seven division titles and have the second-longest streak (six consecutive years) of appearances in the NCAA Division II Great Lakes Regional tournament.

UF won a pair of GLIAC tourney championships in 2004 and 2005. No game was more memorable, though, than the 2005 Great Lakes Regional championship tilt against Ferris State that catapulted UF into the Elite Eight with a 94-73 victory.

With a 486-169 record, Niekamp also has had a cast of talented players over the years.

As a three-year starter running the point, Dustin Pfeifer was named a D-II All-American as a senior and finished his career ninth all-time in points (1,590) and the career leader in assists (561) and steals (328), which ranks sixth.

Aaron Roth '89, now the head coach at McComb and the former 1990 NAIA District 22 Player of the Year, finished his career with 1,823 points, while Greg Denecker '94, who scored 1,854 points in his career, was a GTE second team Academic All-American.

Kyle Hunt '02 scored 1,840 points in his career and Marc Bishop '99, a two-time All-American and the 1999 NAIA Great Lakes Player of the Year, finished with 1,658 points.

And while each player is unique in his own right, all players, past and present, share a common bond.

