

Golden Oiler Memories



The University of Findlay's sports programs have created a legacy of memories and achievements in the hearts of Oilers throughout the years.

Someone who has been around to see the majority of it, Dr. James D. Houdeshell, '53, special assistant to the president and development officer, smiles and agreed. "The University of Findlay has a tremendous history," Houdeshell marveled. Holding coaching, teaching and athletic director positions since 1955, he admits, "It has been a privilege to be around and see it all happen."

The beginnings of greatness ...

Over time, rugged beginnings have evolved into accomplished honors. Houdeshell reminisced back to the unique beginning of the cross-country team. The team was born in the fall of 1967, with no more than a request from nine passionate athletes who had the will to run. The abrupt beginning left the team with neither a budget nor a schedule, so Houdeshell placed the makeshift team in open meets. Wearing borrowed jerseys from the track and field team, the nine runners left as early as 3:30 a.m. for Saturday meets. One weekend, the team competed in the conference championships at Malone College, the national cross-country powerhouse at that time. The UF underdogs beat



Dr. Houdeshell in his early coaching days

Malone that day, winning their first championship and making their mark in UF sports history.

Looking back, football was also making its mark even before championships were played. The team of 1948 won the Pheasant Bowl game and finished 9-1 on the season. Since then, the program has earned four National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) national championships, including three in the last 15 years.

Houdeshell also recalled an interesting beginning for the UF track and field team in the '30s when it suffered the loss of its field during World War II. Despite the lack of facilities, the team created its own opportunities with outstanding efforts. Houdeshell recalled impressive performances by Odell Barry, '65, who equaled the world record for the 100-yard dash, and Doris Cohens, '71, a top



Doris (Butler) Cohens '71 (above, front row, far left) and Odell Barry '65 (photo, right) are Oiler track legends.





Forces to be reckoned with throughout our history, the Oiler football and wrestling teams are no strangers to national titles.

sprinter who participated in independent meets before inter-collegiate sports were even established.

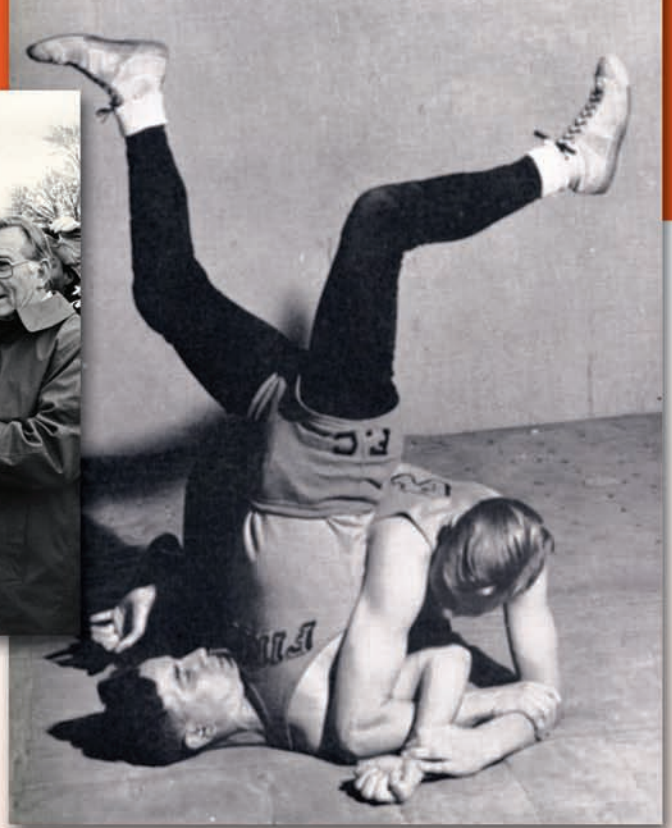
Although an outdoor facility remains absent today, the UF track team's quality performances continue. This year, in the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) championships, UF had its best men's and women's combined finish in a single conference championship meet, with the men finishing second in the team competition and the women third. The team also sent 12 individuals to compete in the 2006 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II national championships. The men's squad finished 13th, its highest placement ever at the NCAA level.

The journey of success ...

With each season serving as a foundation for the next, the longevity of the UF sports program has established a historic landscape of peaks and valleys. Every season is full of surprises, creating a "very short distance from the penthouse to the outhouse," noted men's head basketball coach, Ron Niekamp, former athletic director.

The team that has traveled that short distance most frequently is suggested to be wrestling. Houdeshell recalled the program competing at the national level in the '30s, and spotting the years with an undefeated season, an NAIA national championship and top 10 rankings, along with numerous individual championships. Today, the wrestling team is in the penthouse once again, with a UF wrestler taking first place in the past five consecutive NCAA Division II championships. Hosting the 2006 NCAA Division II wrestling championships, UF finished eighth in the tournament, earned one national individual championship, and finished with one runner-up and four all-Americans.

The penthouse also may be in sight for the Oiler basketball team, which has "gone from being good to being great," says Steve Rackley, athletic director. This year,



Niekamp won his fifth straight GLIAC South Division title, ending 25-5 on the season. He has led the Oilers to a 39-home game winning streak, the longest in the nation, and has an overall record of 261-45 inside Croy Gymnasium. Niekamp also owns two GLIAC tournament titles and has established an impressive 457-167 career record in a mere 21 years.

Through the years ...

While the spotlight is highlighting only a few sports programs, the light has shone on a majority of them over the years. Most recently, UF has earned three Intercollegiate Horse Show Association (IHSA) equestrian championships, four NCAA GLIAC volleyball championships, three NCAA GLIAC women's basketball championships, a men's soccer final four qualification, GLIAC all-academic team honors, an all-sports trophy and much more.

The four male-dominated sports programs that Findlay offered in the 1930s have evolved into 21 men's and women's intercollegiate NCAA Division II GLIAC and two IHSA sports programs today, establishing a rich tradition of athletic accomplishments and success for The University of Findlay.

However, the best may be yet to come. Rackley explained that there is a continuous effort to improve facilities, increase scholarships and assemble the best coaching staff to "create the best opportunity for students to succeed" and to continue excellence within The University of Findlay athletics.

*-Diana Musgrave
Junior, Communications Major
Arlington, Ohio*

