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MIZZOU

It Was the Best of Times

The 1993–94 basketball Tigers will be honored during a special game at the Hearnest Center.



Missouri teammates crowd around Jevon Crudup as they celebrate an undefeated Big Eight Conference season. The 1993–94 Tigers had big losses to Arkansas and Notre Dame but secured an NCAA No. 1 seed after 15 consecutive conference wins.

Story by Marcus Wilkins

Photos by Rob Hill

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There are teams fondly remembered among the best in a school's history, and there are dismal performances a fan base would just as soon exile from its collective memory. For the 1993–94 Missouri men's basketball team, its unblemished and unmatched 14–0 record in Big Eight Conference play might not have happened without a history-making loss in Fayetteville, Ark.

The Tigers opened the season at Arkansas Dec. 2, 1993, to take on Coach Nolan Richardson's "40 Minutes of Hell" team that went on to win the NCAA championship. The No. 2 Razorbacks were dedicating the newly constructed Bud Walton Arena, and they came out as red-hot as the court's crimson highlights.

"They could have beaten the Lakers that night," says former guard Jed Frost of Columbia. "That's not an excuse, but that was just a buzz saw."

Melvin Booker

Melvin Booker exits the Hearnes Center after leading the Tigers over Nebraska in the final Big Eight Conference game of the 1993–94 season.

The Tigers' story starts with the 120–68 defeat — a record loss at the time — because its prevailing theme is resilience. Rather than sulk, Mizzou bounced back Dec. 22 in the annual Braggin' Rights Game against Illinois in St. Louis and won a triple-overtime thriller,

108–107.

“The sum total of that group was so much greater than the individual parts,” says former MU Coach Norm Stewart, BS Ed ’56, M Ed ’60. “They maximized their individual abilities together probably as well as any team I ever had.”

The 1993–94 Tigers will be honored at an exhibition “throwback” game against Oklahoma City University to be played at 7 p.m. Friday, Oct. 25, 2013, at the Hearn Center. The current Mizzou squad will wear uniforms inspired by those worn 20 years ago.

Led by All-American and Big Eight Player of the Year Melvin Booker, as well as big man Jevon Crudup, Bus ’94; freshman sensation Kelly Thames, BS ’98; and junior college transfer Paul O’Liney, Mizzou won its conference opener Jan. 8, 1994 against Kansas State only to lose Jan. 12 at Notre Dame. The Tigers then reeled off 15 consecutive victories and wouldn’t lose again until March 12 against Nebraska at the Big Eight Tournament in Kansas City.

Norm Stewart

Missouri Coach Norm Stewart finishes cutting the net from the rim after the Tigers swept the Big Eight Conference in March 1994.

That season, Mizzou earned its first No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament and made it to the regional final for the first time since 1976. The 1993–94 Big Eight champions finished 28–4.

“That team was very similar to Frank Haith’s first [2011–12] team here at Mizzou,” says Stewart of the squad that posted a 30–5 record. “Small in stature and they could shoot it.”

Haith remembered calling the Missouri coaching legend during a successful run in 2011.

“He said, ‘What in the hell are you doing? You’re winning games. Why are you calling me? Don’t jinx yourself,’ ” recalls Haith.

“Did you win the next game?” asks Stewart.

“No, I did not.”

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