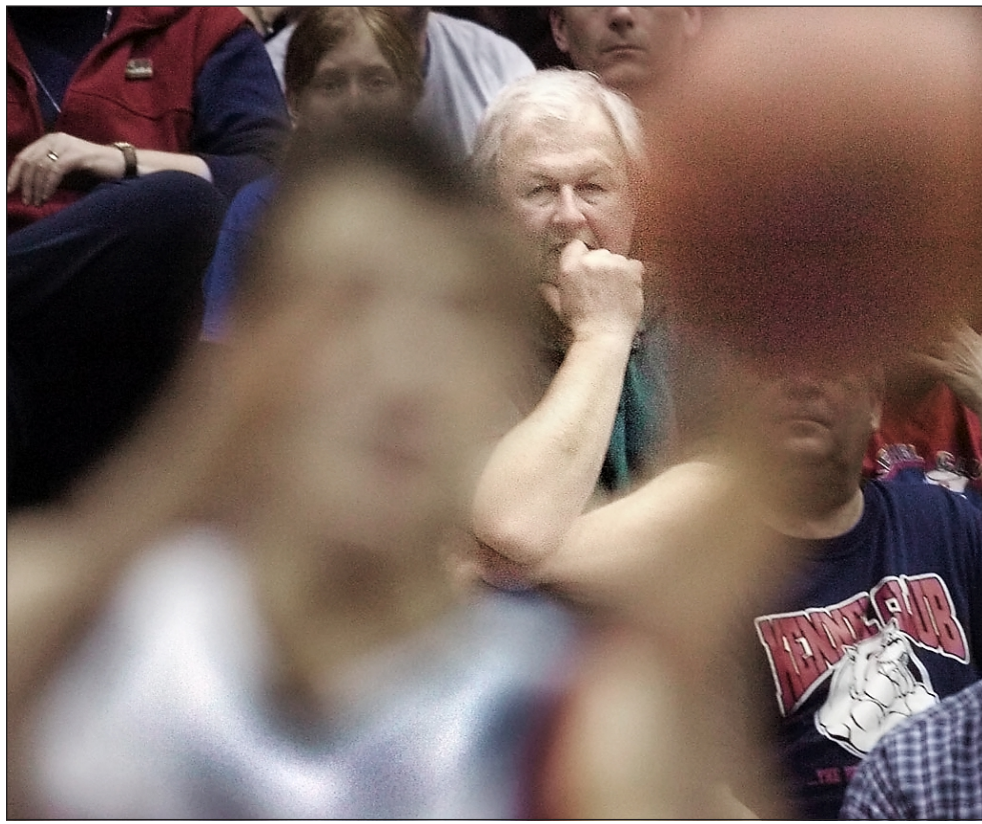


THE KENNEL

1965 - 2004



Christopher Anderson/The Spokesman-Review

Season ticket holder Mike Shields will have attended 500 of the Kennel's 501 games when the building hosts its final two games this week.

Kennel: Gonzaga will be looking to create memories in expanded facility next door

Continued from C1

Saturday afternoon, the Bulldogs will play their final game at what has become known, colloquially and defiantly, as The Kennel. A 34th consecutive sellout audience will test the limits of the human larynx — and will include former players invited back for the moment and an unassuming fan who will have witnessed 500 of the 501 men's varsity games played in the joint.

It will be a party and a memorial — and not because The Kennel is a storied structure in the class of Allen Fieldhouse, or Pauley, or Cameron Indoor.

It is both less and more.

As a home court, it has grown big, ugly, Bulldog jaws — the Zags are 386-104 (78.7 percent) in The Kennel in 39 years, but 148-11 (93.1) since 1991. So rare are home losses that they take on a death-in-the-family vibe.

Of course, that's mostly because the program itself has grown sharper teeth. But even as he presides over the nation's sixth-ranked team, current coach Mark Few refuses to devalue what Kennel living has meant to his team.

"It's not something you can easily put into words," he said. "It's so loud you can hardly think, yet because you know you're in The Kennel, there's an inner peace that comes over you."

"You see your guys playing as hard as they've ever played, dialed in completely. It kind of all comes together in The Kennel and you just step back and go, 'Wow.'"

The "wow" moments seem to have increased exponentially since the Zags and national notoriety became an item, and yet a broader perspective (see accompanying list) reveals that great games in The Kennel go way back, too.

And while the new palace has been called the final puzzle piece for this improbable program, it's time to acknowledge how this old house probably saved Gonzaga athletics.

Hank Anderson remembers.

When he came to Gonzaga as basketball coach and athletic director in 1952, the Bulldogs were coming off the best run of basketball in their history. The Navy V-12 team of 1944 had gone 21-2 and was considered the best in the Northwest, and after the war the trio of Rich Evans, Jack Curran and Frank Walter led GU to 79 victories in four years and trips to two national tournaments.

But so much of the Gonzaga mentality still mourned the dropping of football in 1941. Then the plug was pulled on boxing, which had won a national championship in 1950. Basketball played its games in a tiny and dingy hole in the Administration Building — where Russell Theater is now — and was still something of an entertainment afterthought.

"Actually, athletics was kind of hanging by a thread," said Anderson, now retired in Tacoma. "There was always this wish to bring football back so they sent me to Santa Clara to investigate — and when I came back with the numbers, they saw there was no way of doing that."

Slowly, key figures — including Rev. Arthur Dussault and Gonzaga regent Dr. Edgar Fitzgerald who had been a basketball teammate of Dussault's in the 1920s — began to agitate for a new athletic facility. But there were other building projects needed first, and Anderson — knowing he had to grow the program — moved the bulk of his games to the new Spokane Coliseum, even though the \$500-a-night rental limited his home schedules to 10 games a year. That got him enough games to take GU to major-college status in 1958, and into the new Big Sky Conference in 1962.

It wasn't until 1964 when the regents granted approval to take bids on a \$1 million athletic facility. The gymnasium, swimming pool and offices were completed in less than a year, and in November 1965, Sen. Edward Kennedy came to Spokane to dedicate the

pavilion in honor of his brother, the late President John F. Kennedy.

"Without knowing we were going to build Kennedy, I don't know if I get (the program) to where we did," Anderson said.

Behind Lechman and guard Billy Suter, the Bulldogs won back-to-back Big Sky championships those first two seasons — Lechman recovered to score 37 points and beat WSU in a rematch in Pullman that first year. After that opening loss — in front of the building's first sellout of 4,300 — GU reeled off 18 straight home victories before losing to Idaho in 1967.

Of course, that really wasn't the very first game. The Gonzaga and WSU freshmen played a preliminary, won by the Couababes 91-64. Don Migliuri, a regular in the stands at current games, was at center court for the opening tip of that one; another current season ticket holder, Jud Heathcote, coached the WSU frosh.

That trivia is courtesy of Mike Shields, a GU grad who has managed to see all but one of the 499 men's varsity games in the building — and who knows how many others?

"It was unthinkable at one point to miss a game," said Shields, a retired fireman, "but last year I went down to Atlanta with the team and didn't make it back in time for Long Beach State."

His alibi was solid — he stayed to check up on a number of former Zags, including Bakari Hendrix (who was playing in the NBDL) and Jay Sherrell and Germaine Forbes, now at West Georgia.

"After 32 years of marriage, my wife wonders about all the weddings and graduations and family things I just couldn't get to because of the fire department," Shields laughed, "but how the seas suddenly parted when it was time for a basketball game."

Among Kennedy's early features, recalled Shields, was lighting "that was really poor."

"You'd look across the gym and you couldn't see the top rows, so it looked like a much bigger arena."

Well, it's always been listed as a bigger arena. The published capacity of 4,000 is science fiction as much as anything written by Ray Bradbury — which is not to say there has never been 4,000 in the building.

On Feb. 28, 1981, a crowd that was every bit the announced total of 4,731 jammed Kennedy — including the old west-end-zone balconies on the second and third floors — to watch the Bulldogs score a 79-67 upset of a University of San Francisco team that included two future NBA players and NFL linebacker Ken McAlister.

"The emotion was just electric — I had never seen it like that," said Don Baldwin, the point guard on that GU team. "Maybe it's because we shouldn't have won — like most of them that year — but people got behind us and I think appreciated how we played."

If that game wasn't a turning point for Gonzaga basketball, it certainly probed the possibilities. Average attendance that year topped 3,000 for the first time, and would again for John Stockton's senior year in 1984.

Two years later, the arena underwent a renovation and returned as Martin Centre — trustee Charlotte Martin having donated \$4.5 million to fund the remodel and the addition of a fieldhouse.

At the time, athletic director Dan Fitzgerald urged university president Rev. Bernard Coughlin to ask for additional funds to build a new 5,000-seat arena. But Martin was adamant about the bulk of the money going to expanding recreational facilities for the student body.

"Give her credit for that," said Fitzgerald. "Besides, if we build that then, there wouldn't be the place next door going up right now."

Rejoice, too, that the building didn't lose the compact, reach-out-and-touch the players feel that has made it such a snakepit for visiting teams — or the lousy acoustics which turn every handclap into a cacophony.

Having overseen the renovation of the building, Fitzgerald then returned as coach to



Christopher Anderson/The Spokesman-Review

Sports information director Oliver Pierce hasn't unpacked from his last move and will be departing the former "Cave" when The Kennel closes.

Deep in Kennel was 'Cave'

Back in Neanderthal days, tiny apartment was a perk

By John Blanchette
Staff writer

It isn't merely that The Kennel — originally Kennedy Pavilion — affords the Gonzaga Bulldogs such an irresistible homecourt advantage.

It's also been somebody's actual home.

For 20 years until the mid-1980s, a spartan — and perhaps that's overselling it — studio apartment just off the gym's southeast corner provided free shelter to a series of woefully undercompensated coaches.

Well, technically it was an apartment. More familiarly — and properly — it became known as "The Cave."

Families were started there, politicians and rock stars dropped in and, yes, a few escapades were perpetrated that the Jesuit landlords would just as soon not know about.

Pat Clark and his wife and friends having canoe races in the swimming pool, for instance.

But GU athletics always profited from the arrangement.

"I was the only person at the time who was on the payroll," said Hank Anderson, the athletic director and basketball coach when Kennedy was built in 1965, "so to get some help, this was something we could offer — an extra deal for a freshman coach

or an intramural director."

Jim Bresnahan was all of those things for two years — caretaker, freshman coach, varsity assistant, cross country coach, golf coach. And Cave dweller.

"I swear, you could hear basketballs bouncing in that place in the middle of the night," he said.

But living in The Cave allowed Bresnahan and his wife, Pauline, brushes with the rich and famous. In 1968, the Secret Service used the room as a staging area prior to a speech by presidential hopeful Eugene McCarthy. More delicate was a concert appearance by rocker Frank Zappa.

"He came in to rehearse and had this blonde on his arm," remembered Bresnahan, a Spokane businessman. "Well, his wife calls the number in our apartment and I have to go tell him — with his girlfriend standing there — that his wife is on the phone."

One running joke was the fertility rate of the place. Bresnahan's daughter, Jenny, was conceived there. So was former baseball coach Steve Hertz's oldest, Sarah. Clark, now a teacher at Mead, and his wife brought daughter Christa home from the hospital to live in Cave splendor.

"Since we were right below the practice court behind the bleachers, basketballs were bouncing day and night," he said. "Christa learned to sleep through noise. We could vacuum under her crib and she wouldn't wake up."

There are more domestic stories —

Hertz and his wife, Vicki, came home once to find that their two Irish setters had strewn phonograph records all over the floor. But the Cave housed its share of wild animals, too.

Dave Tomson, a baseball coach who believes he was the last inhabitant, recalls his role as occasional halfway house counselor for the wayward athlete.

"Back then, Smitty, the security guard, if he'd come across an athlete who had partied too hearty, he'd bring him by and tap on my window at 2 in the morning and ask what I wanted to do about him," Tomson said, "and usually I'd have him bring the guy in."

"A couple of times I had to call parents because a kid was just out of it. One guy's mom and dad came down at 3 a.m. and the dad was just steamed — he's yelling at the kid while the mom is hugging him like crazy."

But legendary among Cavemen is former basketball assistant Charles Quisenberry — a good-times Texan who, alas, pleads the fifth.

"If you were from Playboy magazine," he said sheepishly, "I could tell you some stories."

Still, there is corroboration for a wee-hours swim party with female guests in which clothing was, uh, optional, although surely the statute of limitations has run out.

"I don't think Quis was the only one that happened to," Tomson allowed.

oversee the renovation of the program — and took a big step in 1992 when the team led by Mead High School alums Jeff Brown and Jarrod Davis won 20 games, a first in 44 years.

Somewhere in there emerged the phenomenon of the Kennel Club, the student cheering — and jeering — section that alums of four different decades take some credit for, though it hit its stride in the '80s.

And then went nuclear the last few years.

"It's funny — we've had some of our recent graduates, guys from the late '90s, come back to games," said Few, "and they'll tell me the noise level then is nothing like it is now. It's really been turned up a notch."

And Few knows he'll miss it — but as a guy who just built a new house himself, he appreciates the dynamic of change.

"I'll miss it because this is where we've had so many great memories," he said. "Driving away from our old house, we remembered that it was where (his son) A.J. was born, where this happened and that happened. But you'll create new memories in your new house, too."

Best of all, the old house will be right next door. Though when the Zags walk inside now, the silence will be deafening.



File/The Spokesman-Review

This 1965 photo shows off the new Kennedy Memorial Pavilion, a.k.a., The Kennel. It receives credit, past and present, for the growth of GU basketball.