

# SCARLETSPORTS

PREVIEWS AND RECAPS OF VARSITY, CLUB, AND INTRAMURAL ATHLETICS

## Glory Days

All season long, The Barn was a cauldron of passion. Game after game, fans couldn't get enough of watching Phil Sellers LC'76 work both ends of the court in the raucous College Avenue gymnasium in New Brunswick, scoring and rebounding with ease as he led the 1975-76 Scarlet Knights men's basketball team to a 31-2 record and its only Final Four appearance.

"I saw myself as the ringleader who showed no fear and instilled confidence so that anyone could step up and make the difference," says Sellers, Rutgers all-time leader in points (2,399) and rebounds (1,115), who last fall was ▶▶▶

## Glory Days

inducted into the New York City Basketball Hall of Fame.

He was “Phil the Thrill,” not quite 6-5, a tenacious player who burnished his game on the tough playgrounds of New York City and Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn’s rough Brownsville section. By his senior year, coach Tom Young gave him teammates who were fast, very fast— forwards Abdel Anderson and Hollis Copeland, guards Mike Dabney and “Fast Eddie” Jordan, and center James Bailey—all of them made better by bench players who pushed them in practice. When Young took one look at the players’ speed in early road wins over Purdue and Boston College, he turned the starting five loose. “Many coaches wouldn’t have let us fast-break like Tom did,” says Sellers.

When it became clear that Sellers and the team were working on something special, the pressure mounted to see if the Scarlet Knights could run the table, to have a perfect season of 33 victories. High drama came in the final regular season game against St. Bonaventure, when, with less than two minutes to go, Rutgers pulled off the win by making steals born of a full-court press. In the Eastern Regional Championships against Princeton, Rutgers won the game, 54–53, when Princeton’s Pete Molloy blew a free throw with four clicks on the clock.



Phil Sellers led the 1975–76 Scarlet Knights men’s basketball team to a 31–2 record and its only Final Four appearance. “I saw myself as the ring-leader who showed no fear,” he says.

The Scarlet Knights were on their way to the NCAA tournament.

Facing the University of Michigan in the semifinal game of the Final Four in Philadelphia, the team played like “deer in the headlights,” says Sellers. “The Barn was loud and intimidating, but it was the size of a high school gym. The national spotlight and the big arena got to us.” Unfortunately for Sellers and his team, they coughed up their worst performance of the season, losing 86–70. Although he averaged 19 points and 10 rebounds during the year, he managed only 11 points in the loss. “Nothing dropped in the first half; it was our worst game of the season.” In the consolation game, Rutgers played a little better in losing to UCLA.

During the New York City Basketball Hall of Fame induction ceremony held last fall at the New York Athletic Club, Phil Sellers’s daughter, Kendra, witnessed the ovation that enveloped her dad as he approached the podium, an inkling of the excitement that carried the Scarlet Knights through their big year, when Sellers was named a first-team All-American. Rutgers teammates and coaches were present to honor “The Thrill,” and the evening served as a vivid reminder of what Scarlet Knights basketball was—and may well be again.

— Bill Glavin

## The Field General of Field Hockey

● “I don’t want robots,” says Michele Madison DC’82. “I want kids who think and feel and mesh. Life is taught through sports.” Such is the coaching philosophy of the head coach of the women’s field hockey team at the University of Virginia, and

who can argue? She was named the Division I Field Hockey Coach of the Year for the second time in 2009, relying on her proven calculus of demanding high standards, strict adherence to her rules, and spirited participation in her short but intense practices. If she

detects any negativity, practice stops on a dime and the offending player must recite 10 positive things, pronto. “I’ve been called obnoxiously positive, but it creates a fun and learning atmosphere,” she says.

A field hockey head coach for 21 years, Madison

became the coach at the University of Virginia in 2006, the year she was named National Coach of the Year after returning the Cavaliers to the top 10. In 2009, she led her team to a 20–4 record and the NCAA semifinals. “No one does it alone,” says Madison, who

has helped coach two Olympic teams and a U.S. National Team and has mentored 19 All-Americans. “I owe a huge debt to the many coaches I’ve learned from and the hundreds of players who have helped my teams achieve great things.”

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