
PROLOGUE

One More Word about Wayman: “Thanks for the Memories”

Would that I had had the ink and newsprint concession for all the words that have been written about OU basketball wizard Wayman Tisdale in the past three years. If ever a young man captured the hearts and imaginations of the citizens of Oklahoma, he was Wayman Tisdale of Oklahoma. To his fans he was “W.W.T.,” “Wonderful Wayman,” “Mr. T.,” “Flaming Wayman” or just “Tiz,” but most of all he was ours, however much he may have charmed the national TV audiences or the Olympic crowds.

We gloried in his on-court exploits, hung on his every word, succumbed to the sports world’s most captivating smile. Finally we shed a few tears when he elected to bypass his senior year to take his talents to the N.B.A., and all those who had chronicled his every move as a collegian now speculated ad nauseum on the reasons for his decision.

Perhaps no more needs to be said on the occasion of the departure of Wayman Tisdale — and yet, an old

Sooner basketball fan of my credentials surely should mark the moment with a personal comment or two. A simple thank-you note somehow seems inadequate.

Only someone who has been sitting beside me at basketball games since the fall of ’55 could appreciate fully what a joy these past three years have been. In 1955, you may remember, Lester Lane had just graduated; the glory days of the Bruce Drake era were only a memory. It was the Big Seven then, and in 1955 Doyle Parrack’s Sooners finished 7th. Bob Stevens’ teams of 1963 and 1964 did them one better, finishing 8th in the new Big Eight. The crowds were certainly no problem in those days; in fact, one year all of us season ticket holders together constituted a select group of six.

John MacLeod brought the faithful some pretty fair-to-middlin’ basketball (except for a disastrous ’68-69 season). More importantly, he brought us Alvan Adams, and Alvan brought the fans back to the old Field House. But even Alvan’s Army could inspire the team to only 4th, 3rd and 5th place finishes, the last two under Joe Ramsey, before Adams opted for the pros, not even putting up a shot in the new arena that he had helped make possible, Lloyd Noble Center.

Dave Bliss utilized the court leadership of John McCullough to end the 30-year conference championship drought in 1978-79, but the joy was short-lived. Billy Tubbs’ second season, 1981-82 B.W., hinted of things to come, and when Tisdale joined David Little and Chucky Barnett the following year, a new era began.

In Tisdale’s first year as a Sooner, the team finished 2nd in the conference, then won the title twice running, ending the ’84-85 season just three points shy of the Final Four. While those three teams compiled an 84-20 record, Tisdale’s individual statistics

were legendary. He rewrote the OU record book, including total points (2,661), total rebounds (1,048), single game scoring (61), etc. etc. He broke the Big Eight all-time scoring record by 546 points and was the first player in collegiate history to make the AP All-America list as a freshman, sophomore and junior.

There is a quality about Wayman Tisdale’s play, however, that will remain with Sooner basketball fans even after his records are broken, unlikely as that may seem. Wayman was so much fun to watch. No one ever loved his work the way Wayman loved to play basketball, and he had a way of sharing his joy with his teammates and with the crowd that adored him.

None of us wanted the magic to end. We chanted “One More Year” to hold back time, to savor the moment just a little longer. “He won’t have this much fun in the pros,” we reasoned, meaning that we won’t have that much fun without him. “He could go to the Final Four next year,” we insisted, and just maybe we could go along, too.

Wayman Tisdale is that once-in-a-lifetime player, the legitimate superstar. However, unlike his nearest rival for Sooner all-time honors, Alvan Adams, Tisdale was blessed with a supporting cast worthy of his extraordinary talents, authentic stars in their own right. They may have come to Oklahoma to play with Wayman Tisdale, but they also planned all along to inherit the winning tradition he franchised here. OU’s competition, who breathed a sigh of relief when Tisdale went pro, may be in for some big surprises.

Meanwhile, Wayman has done what every college student does sooner or later. He has made a judgment on what is best for his future. Did Wayman owe something to his fans? You bet. And he already had repaid that debt with interest. —CJB