



# prologue.

## Cheering Wayman on to his greatest achievements was a Sooner way of life.

**W**e always thought that Wayman belonged to us. To the thousands of Sooner fans whose frenzied cheers spurred him on as he became arguably the greatest ever to play basketball in an OU uniform. To others throughout the state who succumbed to the smile that could light up a room, an arena or a TV screen. Even when he spent 12 seasons in the NBA, charming hometown fans in Indianapolis, Sacramento and Phoenix and earning respect in every other place that he played. Even when his second career as a jazz musician began to take off, interrupted by a gallant battle with bone cancer—but just temporarily, we were sure. Even then, he still belonged just to us, to Oklahoma. Or so we thought.

When Wayman Tisdale died on May 15, at the much-too-early age of 44, we discovered that we shared our hero with an audience far beyond our borders. His passing was noteworthy, not only on ESPN and in sports publications but also in newspapers throughout the country, on the nightly news, as a *Time* magazine “milestone,” on the Internet. The music world, where his prowess on the court was obscured by his genius on the bass guitar, mourned the loss of a rising star.

It shouldn't have been startling to realize how much this man was loved—but it was. In Oklahoma we somehow did not comprehend the mark that Wayman made after playing his final game at Lloyd Noble Center. But those he touched stepped forward to enlighten us. Tributes dominated the state media for more than a week leading to the public memorial service in his hometown of Tulsa. With a flourish fitting to the occasion, a horse-drawn carriage bearing his casket led a motorcade through the city's streets to the BOK Center, where more than 5,000 turned out for the nearly

three-hour, fast-paced “Celebration” of this favorite son. It was quite a party. His band, which had been poised for another national tour before his sudden death, played for 30 minutes, followed by remembrances from coaches, NBA players



Wayman Tisdale

and officials, jazz luminaries—and more music, from gospel to country.

Those remembering Wayman focused on his personal attributes, his devotion to faith and family, his caring and generous heart, his joy for living—but there was also time for recounting his more tangible accomplishments. In his three All-American seasons at OU, 1983-85, he averaged 25.6 points and 10.1 rebounds, and still holds the school record for career points and rebounds, points per game, field goals, free throws made and single-game scoring at 61. The Big Eight player of the year all three years, he also played on the 1984 gold-medal Olympic team. In April 2009, he was named to the National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame.

Leaving OU for the NBA after his ju-

nior season, Wayman was drafted No. 2 overall, spending his pro career on struggling teams but still averaging 15.3 points per game. But even before retiring from professional basketball, he had turned to his other passion, contemporary jazz. He formed his own band, toured and recorded eight albums, writing much of his own material. “Way Up!” topped the charts for four weeks in 2006, and he had hits like “Ain't No Stopping Us Now,” “Can't Hide Love” and “Don't Take Your Love Away.”

Two years ago, he lost a leg to cancer, undergoing excruciating treatments and complications that he hid behind his trademark smile. Having moved his family back to Tulsa, he strapped on an OU crimson prosthetic leg and returned to the road, recording his last album, “Rebound,” with guest artists Dave Koz and country star and fellow Oklahoma fan Toby Keith.

In 1997, Wayman's jersey number 23 was retired and hoisted to the rafters in Lloyd Noble, the first time an OU athlete in any sport was so honored. When high school phenom Blake Griffin came to OU two years ago, he asked Mr. Tisdale for permission to wear the storied number. Request granted—and with it the encouragement of an enthusiastic new supporter, who often could be seen watching from courtside.

The University of Oklahoma had one more special recognition for this beloved Sooner. Construction will begin later this year on the Wayman Tisdale Health Center, a \$20-million medical specialty clinic in an underserved area of north Tulsa. His demonstrated courage and determination can only be an inspiration to the patients who will benefit from in this long-needed facility. And that should make our Wayman smile one more time.

—CJB