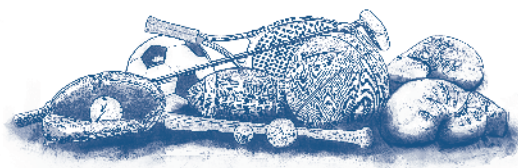


UP FRONT



WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SPORTS MUSEUM

By Anne Madarasz

The Final Four

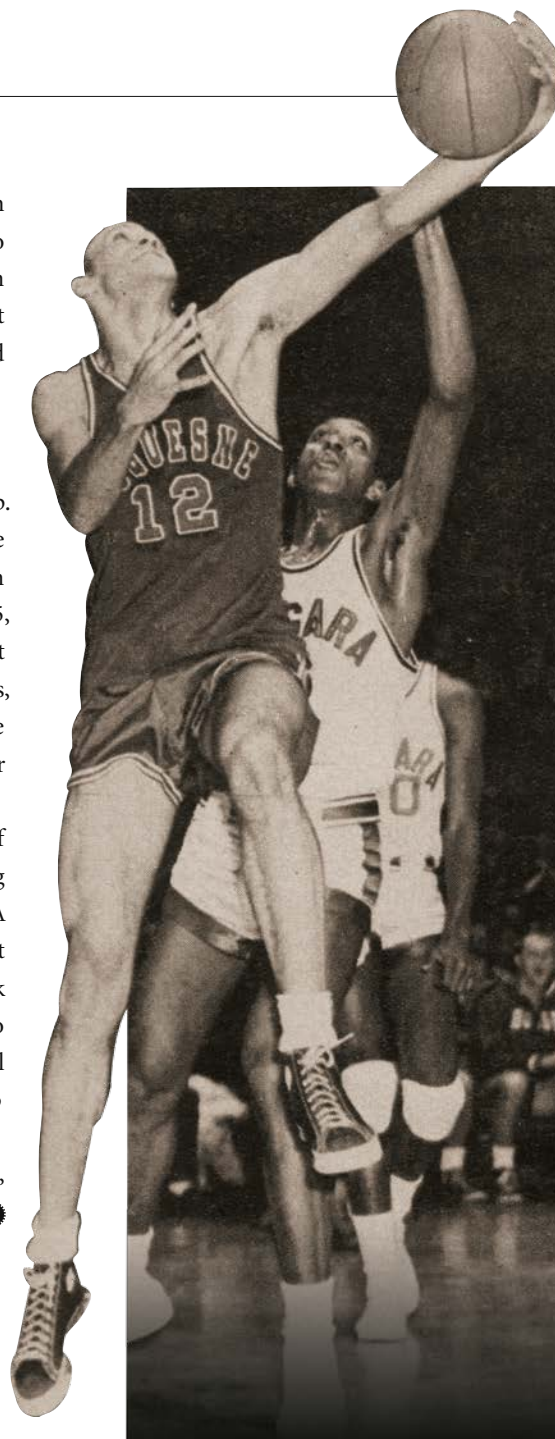
As the regular college basketball season winds down, fans focus on the playoff competition known as “March Madness,” which crowns the NCAA national champion in basketball. With a long tradition of college hoops in the city, a number of storied teams have graced the final brackets come tournament time.

Post-season play kicked off in 1938 with the founding of the National Invitation Tournament. Temple captured the first championship, beating a Colorado team that featured future Steelers player Whizzer White. Originally played at Madison Square Garden, the tournament invited just six teams in the early years. West Virginia became the first local school to find success, capturing the national championship in 1942 with a win over Western Kentucky.

Another local team, however, dominated the tournament in the 1940s and '50s: Duquesne University. Chick Davies took over as coach of the Iron Dukes in 1925 and built a powerhouse in his 23 years at the helm. His team made numerous appearances in both national post-season tourneys, the NCAA tournament having started in 1939. In 1940, Duquesne played in both tournaments (this was allowed until 1952) and made it to the Final Four of the NCAA's, as well as finishing in second place in the NIT, losing to Colorado.

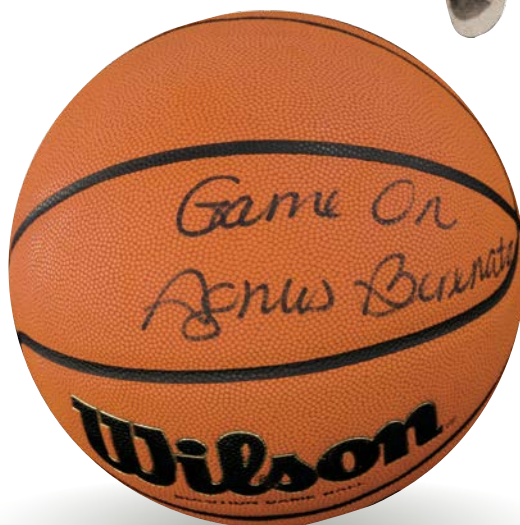
In 1948, Duddy Moore took over as coach at Duquesne. With All-Americans Sihugo Green and Dick Ricketts anchoring the team in the early 1950s, Duquesne achieved great success, finishing third in the NIT in 1953 and second in 1954. In 1955, Duquesne won it all, beating Dayton 70-58 in the NIT. Sihugo Green scored 33 points to lead the Iron Dukes to the school's only national championship. Green went on to play for nine years in the NBA and won a World Championship with the Celtics. Ricketts, his co-captain in '55, played three years in the NBA. He also spent some time playing for the St. Louis Cardinals, pitching nine games in 1959. Duquesne recognized these champions, retiring their jerseys in 2001.

More recently, the University of Pittsburgh has flirted with fame, appearing in the Sweet Sixteen round of the NCAA tournament seven times and making it to the Elite Eight in 2009. Pitt did crack the Final Four once, in 1941, losing to Wisconsin, who went on to win the national title. Thus far, the NCAA championship has eluded teams from our region, but each March when the brackets are announced, hope springs anew.



Dick Ricketts, Duquesne, c. 1955.

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Basketball from Women's NCAA Sweet Sixteen, signed by University of Pittsburgh Coach Agnus Berenato, 2009. The Pitt women qualified for their first NCAA tournament following the 2006-07 season. The next two years they made it all the way to the Sweet Sixteen, their highest finish to date. In 2009 Pitt lost to Oklahoma, 70-59.

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Duquesne University basketball program featuring Coach Dukey Moore, 1953-54. The team was a runner-up in the NIT Tournament that season, but Moore led his team to a NIT championship the following year.

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LeVance Fields jersey, 2008-09 season, and *Sports Illustrated* cover featuring LeVance Fields, March 30, 2009. That season proved to be a historic one for the Pitt Panthers—the team was ranked number one in the *Associated Press* poll and *ESPN/USA Today* coaches' poll for the first time in school history, and claimed that spot for a total of three weeks. Pitt twice defeated the first-ranked team, the University of Connecticut Huskies, during the season and received its first number one seed in the NCAA tournament. The team made it to the Elite Eight round, losing in the final seconds to Big East rival Villanova. LeVance Fields, a senior point guard for the Panthers, made his mark with his excellent ball handling skills, his high assist to turnover ratio, and his clutch shooting.

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