

*Big Blue Basketball: Dwane, first of all I'd like to discuss your playing days. You had an outstanding career at Union County High School, you were a two-time all-stater, and deservedly, you were inducted into the Kentucky State High School Hall of Fame last year. Was it difficult for you to come to UK and see yourself develop into a role player?*

Dwane Casey: It was, and I think that's one of the most difficult things for a so-called high school star to do, is to come in and feel out his role and find out what his role is on the team. My role under coach Hall was as a defensive player and handling the ball and getting the ball into the offense, getting the ball inside to guys like Robey, Phillips and Jack. I felt like I adjusted well. It was tough at first, as it is for any freshman, but I feel like I adjusted and accepted it mentally, to do the things coach Hall wanted.

*Big Blue Basketball: It came down, basically, to a decision between UK and Vanderbilt. Was there ever a time when you wished you had gone to Vandy, or some other school where you could have seen more playing time?*

Dwane Casey: No. You do think about that sometimes, it's human nature to do that, but in my heart I've always been a Kentucky fan. I grew up being a Kentucky fan. My hometown, that's all it is, is Kentucky. So it was very easy for me to make that decision.

*Big Blue Basketball: I was thinking about this the other day, you probably played ball during one of the most exciting times in UK basketball history. You were a part of the 1976 NIT championship team and the 1978 NCAA championship team. And you were one of the few players that had the opportunity to play in both Memorial Coliseum and Rupp Arena. What was it like?*

Dwane Casey: I'll tell you, in my experience here at Kentucky I played on a lot of winning teams. It was a great situation. Like you said, we won the NIT there in New York. And that was very exciting because no one expected us to win. We were 10-10 and one point and we came out down the stretch and won our last 10 games. That was probably as exciting as winning the NCAA because nobody really expected us to do it. We had lost five seniors—(Bob) Guyette, (Kevin) Grevey, (Jimmy Dan) Conner, (Mike) Flynn and Jerry Hale—and (Steve) Lochmueller the year before that. They went to the Final Four in San Diego, but nobody really expected us that next year to do anything. And then to come back and win the NIT the year after the Final Four, that was really a great time. And then to come on two years later and win an NCAA championship.

*Big Blue Basketball: In between the '76 NIT championship and the '78 NCAA championship was the '77 club, which lost that heartbreaker to North Carolina in the East*

*Regional Finals. You had almost the same personnel that season—Kyle Macy hadn't become eligible at UK yet, that would be the most notable exception—as you did in '78. Mike Phillips, Truman Claytor and Jay Shidler were suspended for the UKIT that year for curfew violations, and I read somewhere that coach Hall said that the incident caused a division among some of the players, and he said he thought that kept you from possibly going to yet another Final Four. How would you respond to that?*

Dwane Casey: Well, on any team. . . you're like a family and you're gonna have problems here and there. And I thought we handled, and coach Hall handled, that situation very well. It kinda disturbed us during that UKIT a little bit, but we bounced back and had an outstanding season. We got in the finals of the East Regional against North Carolina up in Maryland, and they had a great team with Phil Ford, Walter Davis, and (Mitch) Kupchek. They had a helluva team that year.

*Big Blue Basketball: And then that next year, of course, you won the NCAA title in St. Louis, a season a lot of people have called "the season without celebration," or "the season without joy." Looking back, was it really as businesslike and unemotional as some people would like to portray it?*

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—Dwane Casey

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Dwane Casey: It was strictly business. We knew what our job was gonna be, and we started out the first day of school with our running program. As soon as we reported, we had a running program that day. So we knew that coach Hall and the coaching staff meant business. We had a great running program that year, and I think there's something to it that your running program is gonna be a barometer of what kind of season you're gonna have. I think we got up to something like 15 220s or 18 220s that year, and that was very difficult. (Strength coach Pat) Etcheberry put us through a rigorous running program, and we ran the last 220 as a team. And at that time we knew that year was gonna be something special because everybody was working hard and paid the price. Rick came back in great shape, he'd slimmed down to 220; Mike Phillips dedicated himself, he came back in great shape; everybody dedicated themselves and we came back in great shape ready to go. So that running program set the tone for the rest of the year. We had one bad practice that entire year, the rest of the time we had knock-down, drag-out practices because there was so much com-

petition in practice. . . the first team against the second team. Guys got into it, there was a lot of competition—diving on the court, taking a charge, busted lips, getting fingers in the eyes. You had everything going on but it was all in competition. And then we went out and took it out on the other teams.

*Big Blue Basketball: You've mentioned some of the starters on the team, but you haven't mentioned yourself. You didn't get a lot of playing time, only 177 minutes in 26 games, but coach Hall has said you were very important to that team. And Jack Givens said that if it wasn't for you, displaying a great attitude and pushing everybody in practice, it's very possible there would have been no championship. I think that says a lot about Dwane Casey.*

Dwane Casey: That was nice of Coach to say. I won the 110 Percent Award that year, and that was probably the most valued award I've ever received because I did go out and lay it on the line every day in practice, tried to make the first-team players work hard, tried to make the best of the opportunities I got in the games to produce. So that was really an honor for coach Hall to give me that award. Like anybody else, I wish I could've played more and been a great player, but I did what I could do to help us win a national championship.

*Big Blue Basketball: All during coach Hall's tenure, all the players went out around the state and had a lot of speaking engagements to various clubs and organizations, yourself being one of the most popular guests. Since coach Sutton's arrival, however, we haven't seen much of that. Your thoughts on that?*

Dwane Casey: A lot of it is the change made in NCAA rules and a change in policy. I think there were a lot of questions that came up about how you go about arranging those speaking engagements. I enjoyed going out in the state and making speaking engagements, speaking to different groups. I think I've spoken to almost everyone in the state of Kentucky. I think a lot of it was because Kyle, Rick and the other guys were so booked up that I was the easiest one to get. So I enjoyed it, met a lot of great people around the state of Kentucky, made a lot of friends around the state and tried to pass the word out about the Kentucky basketball program.

*Big Blue Basketball: I was reading a feature story that appeared in The Cats' Pause during your junior year, and you were quoted as saying you wanted to coach a few years on the college level and then wanted to get into business, which is pretty much what you did. But after you worked in the sales department at Channel 27 here in Lexington for a year, you got back into coaching. What was it that drew you back to the game?*