

JOE B. HALL —

Kentucky Head Coach



Now in his eighth year at Kentucky, Joe B. Hall has turned in another masterful coaching job that brought the Wildcats to a 29-5 record and a No. 3 national ranking. Adding to an already glittering array of achievements, Hall's team won three championships this year—the Great Alaskan Shootout, the UKIT and Hall's fifth Southeastern Conference title.

Following a recruiting year that was judged "best in the nation," Hall worked his magic in blending talented youth with experienced upperclassmen and after trying six different starting lineups during the season, obviously found the formula of success for he is taking the Wildcats to a major post-season tournament for the seventh time in eight years.

The last time Hall had a great freshman group, he blended it with an outstanding senior class that went to the NCAA final game before losing to UCLA in 1975. That freshman group went on to win the 1978 NCAA championship.

Following Kentucky's, 70-67, win over a stubborn Ole Miss team in this year's SEC tournament, a writer asked Hall to evaluate his team's progress this season.

"It's unbelievable so young a team has come so far," he replied. "To have two freshmen in the starting lineup and a total of four in our top eight players places a huge work load on everyone—the upperclassmen, the coaches and the freshmen themselves. They have improved steadily, but to reach the level they have is unrealistic for such a youthful team."

To say that Hall has done his job well is a massive understatement. One coach whose team fell to the Cats' prowess said, "Kentucky is a magnificent team. The only possible flaw I can see is that they are so well coached, they are at times predictable."

Predictable or not, only four teams have beaten the Cats this year and three of those have been avenged. The fourth, Duke, may meet UK in the NCAA tournament in Lexington.

Under Hall's guidance, the Wildcats have won SEC Championships in 1973, '75, '77, '78 and '80, the 1976 NIT championship and six UKIT titles.

In leading the Wildcats to a 29-5 record this year, Hall upped his eight-year UK record to 183-59 (75.6 win percentage), an average of 22.9 wins per season, to keep ahead of the pace set by his former coach, Adolph Rupp, who averaged 21.5 victories a season over a 41-season span to become the winningest collegiate basketball coach of all time.

Perhaps the best appraisal of the job Hall has been doing at the University came from Rupp, who died in 1977.

"A good coach," Rupp said, "is a person who can take good material and win with it. Joe has done that."

Judging from Hall's coaching honors, Rupp was as usual, right on target with his evaluation.

Hall has won such honors as Kellogg's 1978 National "Coach of the Year," three Southeastern Conference "Coach of the Year" awards (1973, '75, and '78) in seven years, and nomination for Kodak's 1975, '76, and '78 (finalist) "Coach of the Year" awards.

Other 1978 honors include the Rupp Cup (presented to SEC Coach of the Year by the Birmingham Tipoff Club) and Hall's most coveted personal award, the Dr. James Naismith "Peachbasket" award, which previously had been awarded to UCLA's John Wooden, Oklahoma State's Hank Iba, Kentucky's Adolph Rupp and the Boston Celtics' Red Auerbach.

However, his greatest satisfaction was adding the first national championship trophy to the University collection in two decades—years that included appearances in the NCAA final games in 1966 and 1975.

The 1978 champions, which had a 30-2 record, became the sixth Wildcat team to win 30 or more games, joining such illustrious company as the 1947 NIT runner-up (34-3), the 1948 Olympic Champions (36-3), the 1949 NCAA champions (32-2), the 1951 NCAA champions (32-2), and the 1966 NCAA runner-up (32-2).

Player honors during Hall's reign include four All-Americans (Kevin Grevey, Jack Givens, Rick Robey and Kyle Macy) selected a total of nine times, and six All-Southeastern Conference honorees (Jim Andrews, Grevey, Givens, Robey, Macy and Sam Bowie) selected a total of 13 times. In addition, Robey and Macy earned Gold Medals in the Pan-American Games.

Entering the tournament, Hall's 14-year career coaching record stood at 259-110, (excluding a 17-2 record on a 1974 Australian tour, a 7-0 record on a 1978 Japan tour, and six pre-season exhibition wins against foreign and domestic teams) and that record was compiled against nationally ranked non-conference teams and teams in a conference that fast is becoming recognized as among the toughest in the nation. Broken down, it shows a 57-50 five-year mark at Regis, a 19-6 record at Central Missouri, and a 183-59 record at UK.

Hall began his tour as UK head coach in rather auspicious fashion, becoming, in 1973 the first rookie coach in the SEC to be designated Coach of the Year by his fellow coaches and by Coach and Athlete Magazine.

Gathering such honors has been one of Hall's trademarks during a coaching career that began at Shepherdsville (Ky.) High School in 1956 and continued through Regis College and Central Missouri State College before he returned to UK July 1, 1965, as an assistant to his former coach, Adolph Rupp.

During Hall's two years at Shepherdsville, the Rams won a Mid-Kentucky Conference title and he was named "Coach of the Year" in 1958. He then served one year as freshman coach and five years as head basketball coach at Regis College in Denver, Colo., where he was also athletic director and earned special recognition as coach of the champion independent team in the area.

His next move was to Central Missouri, where he coached the Mules (19-6) to their first MIAA Conference championship since 1951 and their first Christmas Tournament title in history. He was named MIAA "Coach of the Year" (1964-65).

A three-letter winner and team captain in both sports in high school at Cynthiana, Ky., he played freshman basketball and one year of varsity basketball in the "Fabulous Five" era at the University before transferring to the University of the South at Sewanee, Tenn., where he set a school single game scoring record and was team captain. Coach Lon Varnell, upon retirement, rated Hall as No. 1 of the three best players he ever coached.

After touring Europe with the Globetrotters in 1951, Hall returned to U.K. in 1955 to complete requirements for his B.A. and later (1964) received his M.A. at Colorado State University.

Returning to U.K. again in 1965 as assistant coach and head recruiter, he was instrumental in adopting a running-conditioning program which obviously paid huge dividends as the Wildcats capitalized on speed and endurance to offset a lack of size and advance to the championship game of the NCAA Finals. Hall then successfully recruited six prep All-Americans, including all-time U.K. scoring leader Dan Issel, to form the nucleus of a varsity team that won three straight conference championships and was followed by a team that won three more consecutive SEC titles.

Hall became No. 1 varsity assistant and head freshman Coach to Rupp after Harry C. Lancaster was named permanent athletic director Feb. 1, 1969. His record with the freshmen was 60-15, including an undefeated (22-0) season (1971-72) which resulted in the Kittens being crowned National Freshman Champions by the Basketball News.