

# Big Four may have started a trend in college hoops

Two other similar tourneys have sprung up

When four of basketball's bluebloods decided last year to start an annual December doubleheader, it probably started a new trend in college hoops. Kentucky, Louisville, Indiana and Notre Dame



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started the Bank One Big Four Classic last year. All four teams were ranked in the top 25 and over 43,000 screaming fans paid \$25 each to watch the action in the Hoosier Dome.

The second extravaganza Dec. 3 drew over 45,000 fans even though the four teams had a combined mark of just 6-6 and just one, Louisville, was ranked in the top 20.

"No matter what the records this is one of the classics in college basketball," said Notre Dame Coach Digger Phelps. "You're going to see more places doing this.

"It is very healthy for college basketball. It allows schools to get into national competition before they start conference play. This could be so popular that you might even see some of these things in January or February.

"Strength of schedule does more for you getting into the NCAA than winning 20 games does. That's why these games are so good."

Others have noticed. The weekend the inaugural Tournament of Champions was played in Charlotte, N.C., with Temple, Missouri, North Carolina and Arizona participating. All four were ranked in the top 20.

Another doubleheader made its debut in McNichols Arena in Denver the same weekend. Wyoming played Wake Forest while Purdue met host Colorado.

The Atlantic Coast Conference and Big East are also discussing a December event that would match teams from each league.

"The first and second weekends in December are great dates for college basketball," said Phelps. "The Big Four here is a happening. People want to be here to see two great matchups. That's why these things are good for the game and good for the fans."

The Classic, and that term has to be used lightly after the way Louisville and Notre Dame demolished Indiana and Kentucky this year, should be even better.

The schools, though, apparently have only one priority — making as much money as possible.

Why else wouldn't arrangements be made to open the Friday practice sessions to the fans? Practices before many NCAA Tournament games are open to the public and every time the team has left the court okay. But somebody must be afraid of something crazy happening at the Hoosier Dome.

If the four schools really want this to approach a Final Four setting, the fans should be allowed to watch practices. At least that way the ones paying \$25 to set in the cheap seats could at least see what the players look like.

Even the media has been banned from the practices. Well, almost all the media has been booted out.

If you have an ABC-TV badge, then you are not considered disruptive to the practices. Of course, ABC-TV has a four-year deal to televise the games and no one would expect them to operate under the same rules as all other media members at the Big Four Classic.

It's amazing how college presidents and athletic directors can talk about integrity one day and then sell out to TV the next. When the big bucks talk, the college administrators jump.

These same administrators, though, can't tolerate

giving a potential recruit a T-shirt or loaning a player money for food or clothes. They feel those things ruin college basketball.

Somehow, though, letting a TV network buy its way into practice and dictate game times is okay. The logic escapes me unless making money is all schools are interested in and no one would ever admit that is the goal of their scholar-athletes.

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WHEN BASKETBALL analyst Dick Vitale saw the Northwestern State players last week, he told them they could beat Kentucky if they believed they could.

Vitale, who works for ESPN and ABC-TV, had watched the Cats in their 81-65 loss to Notre Dame and knew any team that could run or rebound would give UK problems.

"We saw him at the Cincinnati airport and he told us we could beat Kentucky," said Northwestern guard Patrick Wesley. "We thought he was just joking and trying to be nice."

The joke, though, was on Kentucky because the Demons stunned the Wildcats 85-82.

"We don't need to play Kentucky eight more times," said Northwestern Coach Dan Bell. "If we did, we would get our fannies drilled eight times. We can't beat this team night in and night out. Just this one night was our game."

"This was the best situation we could ever catch Kentucky in," said Northwestern guard Patrick Wesley. "With all the problems they are having this is a good time to play Kentucky. They have too much stuff on the outside to worry about to concentrate totally on basketball."

Both Sutton and LeRon Ellis, who had a sensational 37-point outing against Northwestern, said the current NCAA probe was not the reason UK had played poorly in two straight games.

"Just because we lose one or two games is no reason to blame that," said Sutton. "We're just a young team that doesn't handle adversity on the court very well yet."

"This whole NCAA thing has gone on so long that we have just put it all on the back burner," said Ellis.

"We're concentrating on basketball and having good

practices.

"We're frustrated by what's going on on the court, not what's happening off the court."

Ellis just hopes Kentucky fans don't give up on the team too soon.

"It doesn't matter what we say or do because some fans will think what they want," said Ellis. "I just hope they will bear with us. When we get some experience and confidence, we will get on a roll and win some games for them. They just need to give us time."

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COUNT SUTTON and Vanderbilt Coach C.M. Newton as two believers in Louisville.

"I am very impressed by Louisville," said the UK mentor. "I still contend they are one of the two or three best teams in the country and they displayed it. Louisville is for real. It has a chance to have a great season."

Vanderbilt Coach C.M. Newton agreed even though his club beat the Cardinals on a desperation last-second shot by Barry Goheen.

"Louisville is an outstanding team with great talent," said Newton. "We just caught them on a night where they weren't shooting. They didn't get different shots or lack intensity. The shots just went down. They have the potential to be in the Final Four."

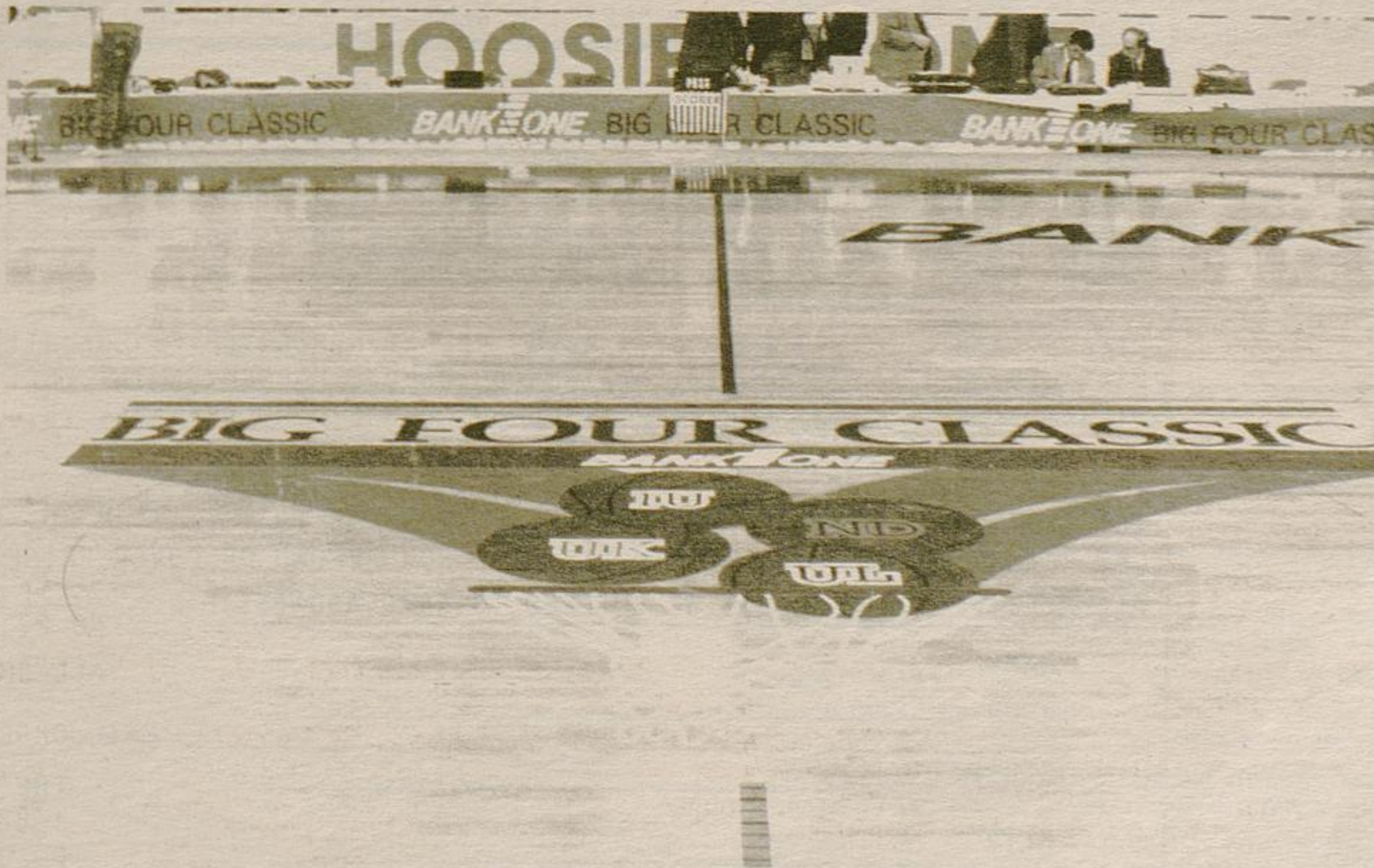
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TENNESSEE opened league play with a win at Mississippi but Ole Miss newcomer Gerald Glass made a believer of Vol Coach Don DeVoe with his 38-point outing.

"He had as good a game as you could have for his first SEC game and first game in Oxford," said DeVoe. "He did all he could do. He scored inside and outside. He blocked our shots.

"Nobody we had could keep him from scoring and our team couldn't stop him. He's going to be a threat for high scoring honors on a national basis this year."

The 6-7 Glass sat out last season after transferring from Division II Delta State to Ole Miss.



The Big Four has been such a hit that two other cities have copied the format. Last week in Charlotte, four Top Twenty clubs—North Carolina, Missouri, Temple and Arizona did battle in the first annual Tournament of Champions. Meanwhile there was a doubleheader in Denver with Wyoming taking on Wake Forest and Purdue going against host Colorado.