

KENTUCKY

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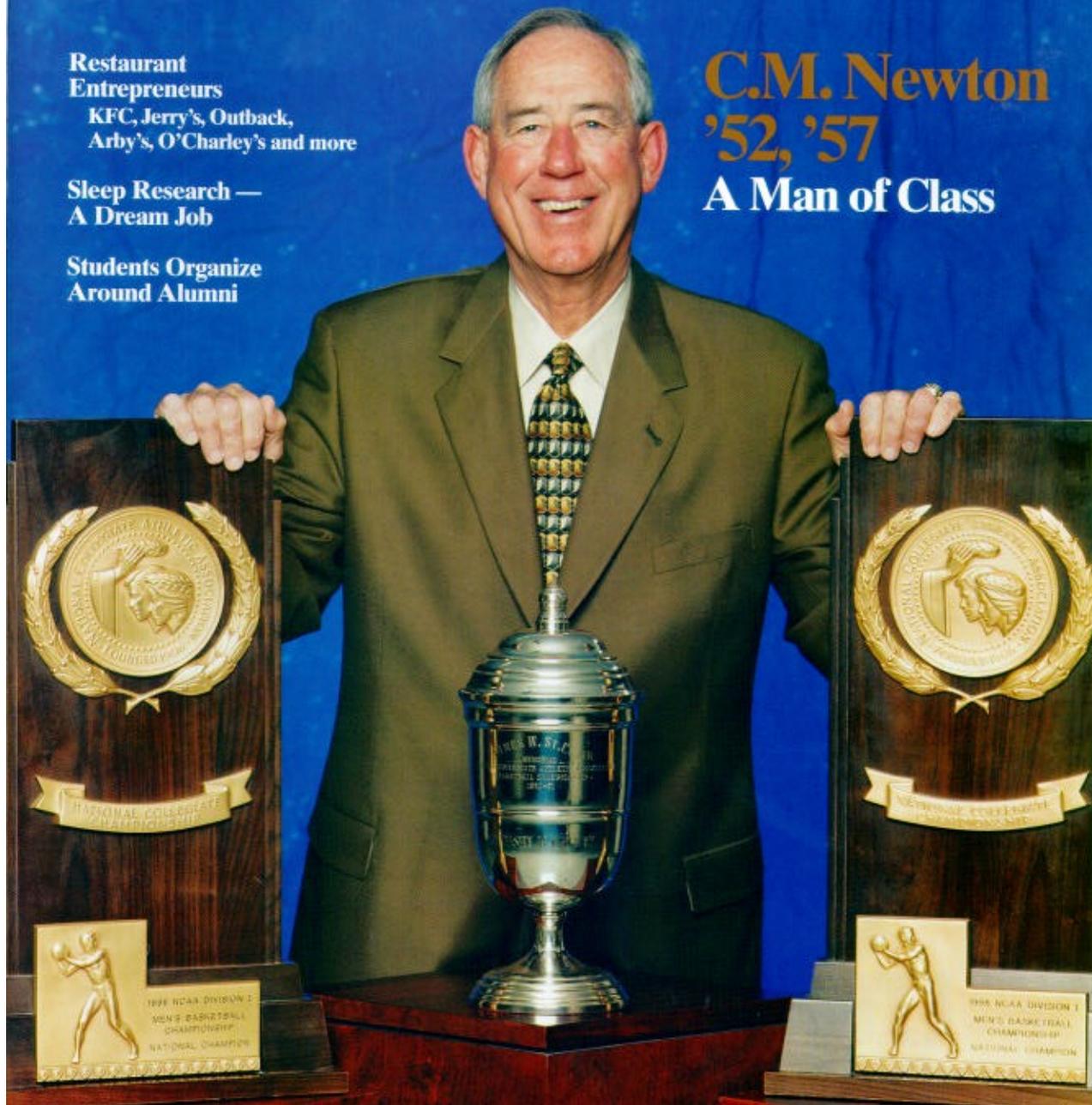
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Students Organize
Around Alumni

C.M. Newton '52, '57 A Man of Class



Recognizable Class

By Tony Neely

The remarkable career of one of the finest persons and most capable administrators in intercollegiate athletics will close a significant chapter June 30, as C. M. Newton retires as Director of Athletics at the University of Kentucky.

Newton spent 11 years in that role, which began with his hiring on April 1, 1989. With a lengthy, impressive list of credentials and a sparkling reputation for integrity, Newton was brought on board at a crucial time in the history of UK athletics.

Newton's term of service at Kentucky has been marked by athletic and academic achievement, dedication to rules compliance, the addition of three sports, expansion of facilities and growth in revenues in response to the increasing financial pressures of collegiate athletics.

Newton's first task, however, was to calm the troubled waters of the men's basketball program beset by controversy in the late 1980s. He succeeded far more quickly than anyone imagined.

"From a competitive standpoint, the key in my coming to Kentucky was to have men's basketball succeed in a short period of time," Newton said. "The catalyst was Rick Pitino and all Kentuckians should thank him for what he did."

Newton's long-term focus, of course, was far beyond the immediate need experienced by men's basketball. He has established four cornerstones for UK athletics: 1) win; 2) complete compliance to NCAA and SEC rules; 3) keep the student-athlete at the heart of the program; and 4) do everything with class.

As he looks back on his tenure in the Bluegrass, Newton sees a number of athletic successes. Newton's hiring of Coach Hal Mumme, and the exciting play of the Wildcats, has unleashed a lightning bolt of enthusiasm for the UK football program.

The men's basketball team has made five consecutive trips to the elite eight of the NCAA Tournament, including national championships in 1996 and 1998. As chairman of the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament Committee, Newton had the pleasure of handing the '98 trophy to Coach Tubby Smith, who was Newton's hand-picked successor to Pitino.

Newton chose Bernadette Mattox to rebuild the women's basketball program, a decision that has proved fortuitous. Mattox has made steady progress, and in 1999, the Wildcats reached the second round of the NCAA Tournament, the team's first appearance in the tourney in eight years.

Newton has overseen the addition of the softball team and the men and women's soccer teams and several of the non-revenue sports have achieved national distinction. Upgrading of facilities has been a continual theme. The 1990s have seen expansion of the baseball stadium, acquisition of a golf course, construction of the soccer/softball complex, building of a new tennis stadium, and construction of the Nutter Field House and the expansion of Commonwealth Stadium.

The triumphs on the field and the growth in facilities and budget speak for themselves. However, when asked about his time at Kentucky, Newton is equally gratified at developments "behind the scenes."

"I'm very proud of what we've done in compliance," said Newton, as Kentucky has maintained a clean record under his leadership. "Bringing in John Bostick (Newton's longtime assistant basketball coach) set a model for compliance which we have been able to continue."

"I'm also very proud of the attention we have given to the student-athlete through our CATS program, not only with academic support, but also with the life-skills programs, community service, career development programs, and so on. We've also been able to provide the facilities that student-athletes need, especially the Nutter Field House, which benefits the entire University community in addition to our athletics teams."

The UKAA also assumed responsibility for paying the \$3.2 million a year necessary to retire the construction bonds of the University's new William T. Young Library.

"Those are the kinds of things that make you feel good."

With retirement, Newton's career has come full circle. His first participation in intercollegiate athletics came at the University of Kentucky in the fall of 1948. It was then he began weaving a rich tapestry of experiences that have made him a Renaissance man in intercollegiate athletics, a tapestry with threads of student-athlete, professional athlete, coach, game official, military man, professor, conference administrator, national administrator, rules chairman, and coach/administrator in international competition.

Newton was an all-state performer as a football quarterback, baseball pitcher, and basketball guard/forward at Ft. Lauderdale (Fla.) High School. He could have played football at Tennessee under Coach Bob Neyland, or basketball at Oklahoma A&M under Coach Hank Iba, but instead followed the lure of Adolph Rupp and chose a basketball scholarship at Kentucky.

"It was the best decision I ever made," Newton said. "Coming to Kentucky gave me exposure to Coach Rupp and Coach Bryant (UK football coach Paul "Bear" Bryant). I had a tremendous undergraduate experience, both as a student and as an athlete."

Newton was a reserve in basketball and was a letterman on UK's 1951 national championship team. He also continued as a baseball pitcher and was the ace moundsman for Wildcats' baseball teams that advanced to the NCAA Tournament. He also quarterbacked his intramural football team to two campus championships, prompting a report in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* that "Newton - next to (All-America quarterback) Babe Parilli - is the best passer on campus."

From 1951 to 1953, Newton's life was a whirlwind. He married his high school sweetheart, Evelyn Davis. He graduated from UK with a degree in physical education. He signed a baseball contract with the New York Yankees and pitched in the minor leagues. During the off-season, he coached the basketball and baseball teams at Transylvania College in Lexington. And, to scratch up extra money, he officiated basketball games, an experience that he said, "gave him a tremendous appreciation for the rules."

Newton had been a member of ROTC at UK and was commissioned into the Air Force in 1953 as a lieutenant. He was the athletic officer for Andrews Air Force Base in Washington, D. C., at a time that the military was placing great emphasis on athletics.

Newton returned to pro baseball in 1956, but the arrival of daughters Deborah and Tracy put C. M. and Evelyn at a crossroads. When Transylvania called, asking him to return to Lexington, Newton reluctantly hung up his spikes.

"The thing that made that decision was lifestyle," Newton said. "Had we not had children, I probably would have stayed in baseball. It was hard to give up that dream, but it was a very difficult family lifestyle."

Newton was head basketball coach and chairman of the physical education department at Transylvania, but at various times also coached the baseball, tennis, and soccer teams. ("I also wanted to coach golf, but I couldn't qualify," Newton joked.)

Newton has been quoted that his time at Transylvania was perhaps his happiest.

"It was a great family time," Newton said. "Our children were born here. We bought our first home. All the things that go into family life started here.

"And, Transy was really good to me. They had a strong academic program. I loved coaching. I would have been content to stay there and coach and teach."

Change was on the horizon in 1968 when Alabama's Bear Bryant called Adolph Rupp looking for a new head basketball coach to revive a downtrodden program. Rupp looked no farther than the cross-town school and advised Bryant to hire Newton.

During his 12 years at Alabama, Newton orchestrated a complete turnaround in the Crimson Tide's basketball fortunes, compiling a sparkling 211-123 record. He won three consecutive SEC championships in 1974, 1975, and 1976, the only non-Kentucky coach ever to achieve that feat. Alabama played in two NCAA Tournaments and four National Invitation Tournaments.

A happy Bryant remarked that, "C. M. Newton is a winner, and that's important, but more than anything else, he wins or loses with class, and that's more important."

The success, however, did not come overnight. Newton's first team went 4-20, 1-17 in the SEC. Then, he created controversy by racially integrating the team with the signing of Wendell Hudson, an African-American forward from Birmingham.

The signing of Hudson had the public backing of Bryant, which greatly smoothed the way. It wasn't easy, of course, but the integration of the team went fairly seamlessly - a situation in which Newton and Hudson graciously have given each other the credit.

"Integrating the program was the key thing," Newton said. "It had importance not only at Alabama, but also around the league. We took in-state talent and won nationally. That opened the door for a lot of African-American youngsters.

"With the success of the football team and our success, it was a golden era at Alabama. Those were fun years."

Newton was named SEC Coach of the Year three years at Alabama, and with few horizons left to conquer, Newton resigned at the end of the 1980 season to accept a job as assistant commissioner of the Southeastern Conference.

"Working at the SEC was another great experience. Newton's goal was to be commissioner, but after one year, a very persuasive Vanderbilt athletic director, Roy Kramer, talked him into a return to coaching.

"I had not intended to coach again, but there was something special about a school with real tradition but was struggling," Newton said. "Vanderbilt is absolutely bent on doing it right. It reminded me of a bigger Transylvania. The challenge excited me and appealed to me."

Newton gradually rebuilt Vanderbilt, posting a 129-115 record in eight seasons, bringing his career totals to 509 wins and 375 losses. His coaching acumen was perhaps at its sharpest at the Nashville school. His last two years were the best, advancing to the NCAA Tournament and being named SEC Coach of the Year both times.

During the 1988-89 season, Newton privately agonized over the troubles at his alma mater, and when UK President David Roselle called, Newton was willing to return to his old Kentucky home.

Newton has steadily grown more prominent on the national scene. Newton has served on the Board of Directors of the National Association of Basketball Coaches Board of Directors for a total of 11 years, including three years at Alabama and all eight years at Vanderbilt. He was a member of the NCAA Rules Committee from 1979-85, including five years as chairman.

It was during Newton's watch on the rules committee that the two most important rules changes of the modern era - the shot clock and the three-point shot - came into existence.

Newton was a member of the NCAA Division I Basketball Committee, overseeing the NCAA Tournament, from 1992-99, including the last two years as chair of the group. In 1998, a survey done by the *San Antonio Express-News* proclaimed Newton "the most powerful man in college basketball."

Newton's influence also extended internationally. He got involved with ABAUSA (now USA Basketball), the nation's governing body for international play and became their vice president in 1988. In 1992, he became president of USA Basketball, overseeing the creation of the Olympic "Dream Team" comprised of NBA players. He continued as USA Basketball president through 1996, also pushing for dramatic growth in international women's basketball.

Internationally, Newton has represented North America on the 14-member FIBA Central Board since 1994. He is a member of the COPABA Executive Board, which oversees international basketball in North, Central, and South America.

Newton's work has been recognized with major honors. In 1999, he was given the Naismith Award by the Atlanta Tip-off Club in recognition of his service to basketball.

In 1997, Newton was given the John Bunn Award by the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame, recognizing his lifetime of contributions to the sport. The Bunn Award is the highest honor given by the Hall of Fame other than induction.

It was also in 1997 that Newton broke new ground by hiring Orlando "Tubby" Smith as the first African-American head coach of the Kentucky men's basketball team. Newton had integrated the Transylvania and Alabama teams, and once more, he was seen as an agent for racial equality, a description he tries to shrug away.

"Each time, integrating the team seemed like the thing to do," Newton said. "I saw youngsters with talent, and I couldn't come up with any reason not to, so why not? And (hiring) Tubby was a no-brainer. He was the best person for the job.

"I never looked at myself as a social reformer. Each time the issue arose, it pragmatically seemed the right thing to do. I learned from my parents (R. Y. and Adelia Newton) that people are people, accept them as individuals. That's the way I was raised."

Newton was born in Rockwood, Tenn., where he was born on Feb. 2, 1930, and then the Newton family moved to Fort Lauderdale, Fla., when C.M. was nine months old. He developed his athletic talents in Fort Lauderdale, preparing for the collegiate journey that began, and returned, to Lexington.

In March, C. M. lost his wife and "best friend" Evelyn to leukemia, a recurring factor in their life together. "Since 1981 we've known that Evelyn may very well die before me. We had a long time to adjust to that. But imagine what it is like when your best friend isn't around anymore."

The two met in the second grade in Florida. They married in 1951, making C.M. the only married player on the basketball team. "We were really good friends before we ever dated and fell in love."

Evelyn Davis Newton herself was a unique and admirable woman. Newton often quoted her advice about his athletic career. When considering a new job, she would tell him "You need to leave while you are still in love."

From the instant you met Evelyn, you knew you were in the presence of a warm, loving and encouraging spirit. She always stopped to say "hello" or listen or even lobby on your behalf. A coach's wife always had an instant comrade to help them through the pressures and demands that can swallow up a wife whose high profile husband is in a career filled with ups and downs and controversies that can wreak havoc on family. Every player had a place in her heart.

Now C.M. will adjust to retirement and to life without his soul mate. He plans to continue living in Lexington, and serving UK as a consultant to the athletics department. Certainly, there will be more time available for his hobby of bone fishing and their three grown children - Deborah, Tracy, and Martin - and five grandchildren.