

University of Kentucky Alumni Association

KENTUCKY

Alumni

Fall 2024



Remembering Memorial:

Alumni Recall Love of Iconic Building



Memories of Memorial



Memorial Coliseum, the much-loved arena on the Avenue of Champions, is undergoing an \$82-million renovation.

Built in 1950 and originally covering an entire block on campus, the arena has been home to some of the University of Kentucky's biggest sports moments. Originally built as a memorial to Kentuckians who lost their lives in WWII, the name Memorial Coliseum was recommended by President Herman Donovan in 1945.

We asked alumni to share their memories of the historic building that is such a key part of life on campus for many Wildcats. Whether you registered for classes there, saw President Lyndon B. Johnson speak there, listened to Jimmy Buffet play there, graduated there or watched the University of Kentucky Wildcats play basketball there, Memorial Coliseum likely remains in your memory.

I attended the first commencement ceremony at the Coliseum in 1950. My grandfather, Thomas Poe Cooper, was dean of agriculture. I went to the ceremony with my mom, and I sat in the stands. I remember the grandeur of the new building, the pomp of the ceremony and the varied colors of all the academic hoods. Being only 6 years old, my memories are limited, but I recall that after the ceremony my grandfather introduced me to the commencement speaker, his friend John Sherman Cooper, who was then an alternate delegate to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

When I walked through Memorial I was pleased to see a picture of my dad, Claude Hammond, a UK football player, on the wall of the concourse. My future father-in-law, Dave Rogan, a UK track star, was there as well.

Growing up I was lucky enough to witness some of the greatest games in Wildcat history at the Coliseum. The one season I'll never forget is '57-58, the "Fiddlin Five." Vernon Hatton's miracle shot in the three-overtime win over Temple and Jerry West and West Virginia handed the Cats a loss in the UKIT - University of Kentucky Invitational Tournament.

Nearly 40 years later, Jerry would reminisce with me about his games at the Coliseum, including one of the times he broke his nose. Years later, improbably, a UK fan handed him the old towel they had used to sop up the blood! It drew a great laugh and Jerry said, "only a Kentucky fan."

I got to play many games at the Coliseum as a member of the Lafayette High School team. On Saturday mornings several players from Lafayette and Henry Clay High School would sometimes sneak into the Coliseum for pickup games. We used an unlocked door at the rear of the building to get in. The state high school tournament was one of the Coliseum's most popular events. Sometimes during the season, I would find my way to the equipment cage under the stands, in search of some UK gear. The equipment manager, George Hukle, treated that equipment as if it were his own, even for the players. I think the only thing I ever got was a pair of socks. Years later, equipment manager Bill Keightley was a little more liberal with the Wildcat gear.

As a UK student, I never missed a game, including those of my all-time favorite team, "Rupp's Runts." I was friends with many of the players and would often hang out with them.

I had known my future broadcast partner Larry Conley since we were both 16. Thad Jaracz was a Lafayette teammate. Pat Riley had a summer job at a horse farm where I also worked.

And Jim Lemaster was a fraternity brother. They passed the ball like no team I have seen before or since. I was in the stands and then the hotel with them after the landmark loss to Texas Western in the NCAA Championship game in College Park, Maryland.

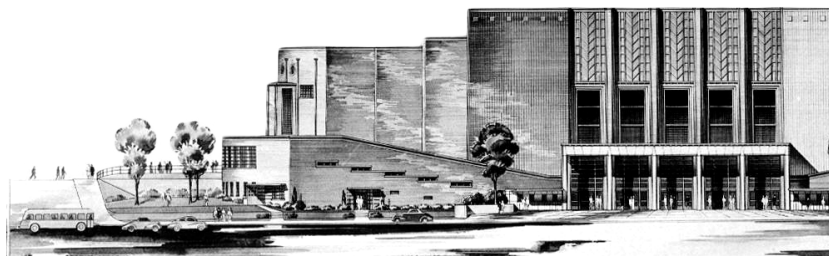
While we were students, we went to the Coliseum for reasons other than basketball: class registration, concerts, lectures and an address by then-President Lyndon Johnson. My graduation ceremonies for high school and college were held at the Coliseum.

After graduation I spent getting time into the Coliseum without a basketball ticket (I had a few tricks up my sleeve), until I landed my first real job at WVLK radio, where I would sometimes be able to sit on press row. Occasionally the opposing team would require an engineer to help originate their broadcast and would ask WVLK to supply one. I was no engineer, but once I learned that all you had to do was hook up a couple of wires and ride the controls, I volunteered for the job. I got paid to watch the game!

My most important Memorial Coliseum memory is after I was hired at WLEX-TV. The first event I did on television was play-by-play of a Kentucky rout of Kansas, led by Dan Issel and Mike Pratt, in December 1969. It was the first step in an improbable career that would take me places I could never have dreamed of. When NBC would come to town to do a UK game with Dick Enberg, Billy Packer and Al McGuire, I would sit down with them and their crew to tell them anything that might help with the broadcast, making valuable contacts for later. NBC always parked the remote truck in front of the Coliseum, and I remember walking by it and wondering if I would ever be in that situation. Little could I have guessed that I would eventually be on NBC with Enberg, Packer and McGuire.

All these years later, I still maintain that the original Memorial Coliseum, capacity 11,500, was the greatest place in the world to watch a basketball game.

Tom Hammond '67 AFE, '18 HON



In the fall of 1950, I began college at UK. I did not realize that was the year Memorial Coliseum opened. We students took it for granted that it had always been there. I remember we registered for classes in Memorial Coliseum and students registered alphabetically. Everything we attended in the Coliseum was free: concerts, guest speakers and home basketball games. I was a member of the University Chorus (about 100 members), and we practiced in the Coliseum and had concerts there. I graduated in late May 1954 and the last picture of Memorial Coliseum is me and my UK friends holding our diplomas standing in front of Memorial Coliseum saying our goodbyes and wishing each other good luck in our new phase of life.

Genevieve (Brashear) Schmitt '54 AFE



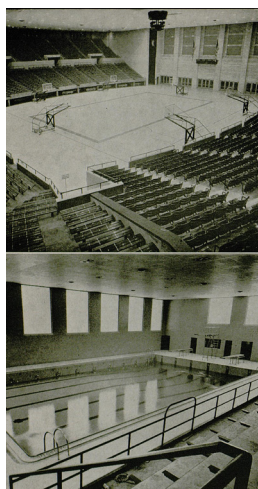
I'm now 78 years old and remember when my dad used to drop me off in front of Memorial Coliseum to purchase standing room only tickets to men's basketball games. I graduated from Lafayette High School in 1964. During the winter, our track team used the concourses and walkways inside Memorial to do our workouts. We could always watch and listen to Coach Rupp during their basketball practices while we ran.

Gil Searcy '68 BE



I had the fortune to go to the last UK basketball game in Memorial Coliseum and the first UK basketball game in Rupp Arena. To make things even more special, I was living in the basketball wing of Holmes Hall because there were no other rooms for the baby boomer generation that had enrolled in the fall of 1975. My roommate, Paul Servino, and I were the only two non-basketball players in that wing of Holmes Hall. I got to know Kentucky's Rick Robey, Jay Shidler, Mike Phillips, Truman Claytor, Jack Givens and watch them play the final UK men's basketball game in Memorial on March 8, 1976. And then I got to attend the first game in Rupp Arena on November 27, 1976. And I do remember many, many nights camping out to get basketball student tickets around Memorial Coliseum.

Roger Herdy '81 EN



I grew up going to games in Memorial Coliseum. There were several children in my family, so it was always a treat when I got to go. I remember hoping my shoes had smooth bottoms so I could slide down the ramps inside. My dad said it wasn't right for me to slide on them. Many years later I realized he was referencing the memorial names on the wall, and I should show respect.

I remember going to a game in December 1968. It was a big game. I think it must have been UNC. At that time, students could get a ticket at gate after showing UK ID. I went with my husband and my sister and her husband, but they ran out of tickets. We were told to wait. Eventually it was announced that the fire marshal had agreed a certain number of people could come in and sit on the floor courtside - on the floor, not in seats - if we agreed to be still and not moved around or get up and down. We immediately agreed, and we went and sat on the floor for the game. I was nine months pregnant at the time so I couldn't have gotten up and moved around if I had wanted to. I also remember going to the pool at Memorial Coliseum with my older sisters when they had swimming lessons there. I had swimming lessons in the pool, too.

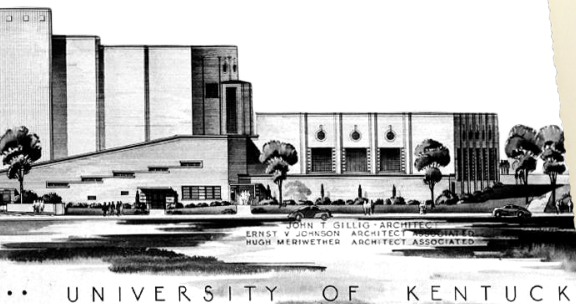
Kathy Harris '71 BE, '77 LAW

My father took me to a UK football game, probably in 1948, when I was about 7 or 8. Instead of watching the game, I climbed the steps to the top of Stoll Field and looked across Euclid at the construction site of Memorial Coliseum. I spent most of the afternoon watching the workmen guide the steel beams into place, forming what would become the showplace of basketball in the South. It must have been an early manifestation of my lifelong vocation of engineering.

This memory came from a bit later, when I was a sophomore at UK. The basketball team - Cotton Nash, Ted Deeken, Charles Ishmael - was going to the NCAA in 1961. The first round was going to be in Freedom Hall in Louisville. UK played an in-state team in the first round, but Ohio State, with Jerry Lucas and Hondo Havlicek, loomed in the second game.

It was announced that tickets would be sold on Wednesday morning at the Memorial Coliseum ticket office. My frat brother and I decided we would get in line early, so we drove over to the ticket office at 6 p.m. the evening before and parked right up on the sidewalk in front of the ticket office. We sat there all night, playing bridge most of the night. By dawn, the line was around the building and out of sight. As soon as the ticket office opened, we were first in line and proudly bought our tickets. Even though UK won the first game, mighty Ohio State was too much for the Cats that year.

Clifford Holliday '63 EN, '68 BE



I have several great memories of Memorial Coliseum. I was there in 1992-1996 when you had to camp out for Midnight Madness. It was such a great time hanging out and making friends for hours for your chance to see the basketball team for the first time that season. Plus, the smaller, more intimate crowd made it even more insane. I was a student manager for the Lady Kats my junior year and being able to shoot hoops on that court where so many legends had played always gave me chills. That's something I'll always cherish and never forget.

Darlene Tomas Eisemann '96 CI



Memorial Coliseum brings back great memories of waiting in anticipation to hear which number they were starting the basketball lottery with bright and early on Sunday mornings. A few times I was lucky enough to have the first number and got front row seats at Rupp. On a handful of Saturday nights I did not go out because I wanted to make sure I was at Memorial Coliseum at 8 a.m. Sunday to get my number. I also spent the night on the floor of Memorial Coliseum to see the Wildcats play in the Sweet 16 and Elite 8 games in Charlotte back in 1993. That was well worth having to sleep on a hard uncomfortable floor because I watched them dominate in both games and make it to the Final 4!

Tara Hubbuch '93 AS '95 ED



My favorite memory of Memorial Coliseum does not include the Cat's games though I never missed one as a 1968 graduate. In the spring semester prior to my senior year, my academic advisor discovered I needed another physical education class. We found a two-credit course, baseball coaching, which met at noon in Memorial. The instructor was Harry Lancaster, Coach Adolph Rupp's assistant. In the first session, Coach Lancaster arrived, looked at the class of mostly football players, looked at me and asked, "Who are you?"

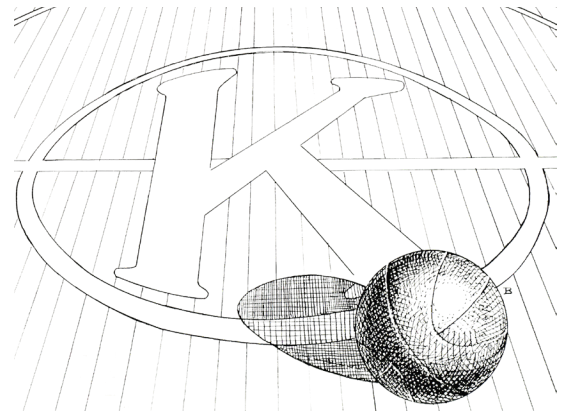
He explained that occasionally Coach Rupp would call a noon meeting and he may be late or not able to come to class. He handed me the class attendance rooster and said I would be responsible for taking roll. Coach Rupp must have called a lot of noon meetings because we did not see Coach Lancaster very much. When he was there it was most entertaining and not much about baseball. At semester's end I turned in the attendance book to Coach. I got an A in the class. Go Cats!

Howard 'Bucky' Kahl, '68 BE

My greatest memories of Memorial Coliseum were not just watching UK beat eventual national champion and John Havlicek and Jerry Lucas who led Ohio State (96-93) on December 28, 1959 or UK beat All-American Guy Rodgers who led Temple (85-83) in triple overtime on December 7, 1957 or beat Jerry West's West Virginia team (97-91) on December 20, 1958, but watching every UK home game from the front row for four years starting with the 1954-55 season.

How was I so lucky? At the time, university professors acquired basketball tickets on the Rose Street side of Memorial Coliseum. The higher the tenure of the professor, the better the seats. My uncle, Buddy Neuman, was part owner and operator of Kentucky Dry Cleaners. One of the highest tenured professors traded his two front row seats to my uncle in exchange for receiving free laundry and dry cleaning. The seats were just off midcourt. As a teenager I did not mind that the only people between me and the playing floor were the cheerleaders.

Ellen van Nagell '74 HS



In the spring of 1959, the UK Student Congress decided we should close out the school year with the "Little Kentucky Derby Weekend." The fraternity's sororities and independent groups had go carts, beauty contests and other activities. The highlight was a big-name band at Memorial Coliseum. As student body president, I was designated to contact the agent for Louis Armstrong and his band. We agreed on the date and the cost in a phone conversation.

The next day I met with Dr. Frank Dickey, the president of the University of Kentucky. He asked, "How are you going to pay for this?" I told him "That is why I am here right now."

Dr. Dickey was excited about the plans and suggested that I meet with Coach Adolph Rupp and Athletic Director Bernie Shively. If they were supportive, he would meet with the Board of Trustees. Eventually, everyone gave their approval. The Hilltoppers agreed to come, too, and the band only charged their expenses.

If there was ever a bigger special event at Memorial Coliseum, we were not aware of it. The Saturday night show was sold out. We could have sold twice as many more. We had the No. 1 band and No. 1 quartet in the country. We also had Memorial Coliseum (the house that Rupp built) which was the top venue in the country. I sure was proud to be a part of this.

Peter Perlman '59 AS, '62 LAW





My father was a college student when Memorial Coliseum opened in 1950. Skeptics said the 11,000-seat on campus facility was too big to be filled, he said. I saw my first men's basketball game on February 22, 1971, when the Wildcats played Alabama, coached by future UK athletics director C.M. Newton. My Uncle Harry had an extra ticket. We sat in the upper deck. UK rolled 101-74. Two things stuck out: Alabama had a player named George Harrison, same as the member of the Beatles – a 12-year-old would notice such a thing – and UK's legendary Adolph Rupp coached the game with his foot propped up on a pillow. The then 69-year-old Rupp was battling a foot infection complicated by diabetes. A year later my father took my friends and me to a UK freshman basketball game at the Coliseum for my 13th birthday. That was the famous "Super Kittens" team before freshmen were eligible to play varsity basketball. It featured Kevin Grevey, Jimmy Dan Conner, Mike Flynn, Bob Guyette, Jerry Hale, Steve Lochmueller and G.J. Smith. The Kittens whipped Florida 108-64 that Saturday afternoon. A good time was had by all.

Rebecca Hetzell '12 ED

I remember one big game (maybe against Tennessee) when the students were cheering so loudly before the players came out of the locker room that reportedly they couldn't hear Coach Joe B. Hall giving his pre-game talk. He finally gave up and just sent the players out early onto the floor for warmups. The Coliseum always had such a great atmosphere! Students lined up early one morning for a night game that would decide the conference championship. I was one of hundreds who skipped classes that day (including a chemistry class that I didn't need to skip). Gloria Singletary, wife of UK President Otis Singletary, brought sandwiches to students lined up on the sidewalk around the Coliseum.

Martha Perkins '76 AFE, '95 ED

I entered Memorial Coliseum for the first time in 1972 during fall semester. It was like passing into heaven for a Kentucky country boy from a town of 500. Walking up the ramps, the walls were covered with mementos of those basketball legends that I had only followed on the Cawood Ledford broadcasts. On the concourse I saw display cases with the championship trophies won by my boyhood heroes. Then came my first view of the polished basketball floor and the banners hanging in testimony to the successes achieved. Memorial Coliseum had an intimacy that grabbed my heart and will never depart. I did not miss a home game as a student. Concerts by Sly and the Family Stone, James Taylor, Three Dog Night and the combined Supremes/Temptations stand out. But Memorial Coliseum will always revolve around basketball: the UK fight song played by the band, the student section getting a wave and smile response from the coach to their hearty "Hello Adolph" greeting. The most memorable night was when UK played arch-rival Tennessee. Memorial Coliseum was electric that night and Tennessee never had a chance. The UK fight song must have been played 100 times.

Charles R. (Bob) Stark, Jr. '74 AFE, '82 ED



I grew up in Lexington and as a young teen, I snuck into UK games with friends. Since there were PE classes and the pool in the building, it was open hours before the game, and we were able to go up the concourse and wait in the bathrooms. As a janitor came through mopping the floors, we hid in stalls and raised our feet. When we heard the commotion from the students entering and rushing to the student section, we walked out and made our way into the student section. I saw about every home game in 1965 and the Runts in 1966. As a student later in the 60s and early 70s, I remember the student section saying "Hello" to Coach Adolph Rupp and then Gov. A.B. "Happy" Chandler in unison, fondly remember Chandler singing "My Old Kentucky Home," watching Dan Issel, Mike Pratt, Mike Casey and all three times Pete Maravich came to town. I also remember seeing Jerry West, Bill Bradley, Cazzie Russell, Cotton Nash, Billy Cunningham and more, earlier in the 1960s.

Michael L. Brown '72 BE

For anybody who was there for the last regular-season game in 1976, the night is seared in our minds. Capacity crowd to overflowing, with unequalled pomp and ceremony, but we trailed Mississippi State so badly late in the game that Mississippi State was already celebrating. Then, an impossible rally in the last minute and a half resulted in a win in overtime. That game was unwinnable, but the guys pulled it out somehow.

The other memory that is very rich to me is my first Memorial Coliseum game with my dad, who drove through a hard Eastern Kentucky snow to get us there. I got to experience the thrill of the atmosphere of a UK basketball game in Memorial Coliseum, with Adolph Rupp coaching, the band playing, and I recall a blue carpet rolled out for the players to run across as they came out from the locker room.

Douglas Sutherland '78 BE



1950

The **Memorial Coliseum is dedicated** as a secular shrine to Kentucky's departed soldiers, sailors, Marines and aviators in WWII. The first men's basketball game is December 1 with a 74-43 win over West Texas State College, now West Texas A&M University. The arena was full with 11,500 in attendance.



1955

To mark the end of Coach Adolph Rupp's **25th season at UK**, Rupp is honored at a postgame celebration when a light blue Cadillac with whitewall tires is wheeled onto the floor of the arena, a gift from an anonymous alumnus.

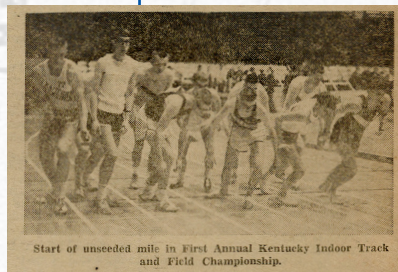


1952

A **new scoreboard** capable of including three digits is installed. The Wildcats had passed the century mark in points twice the previous season at home.

1963

First and only Kentucky Federation Indoor Track Meet Championships in Memorial Coliseum.



Start of unseeded mile in First Annual Kentucky Indoor Track and Field Championship.

1951

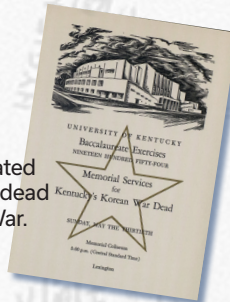
First UK vs. UCLA basketball game. No. 1 UK defeated No. 16 UCLA 84-53.

1954

Memorial rededicated to include the war dead from the Korean War.

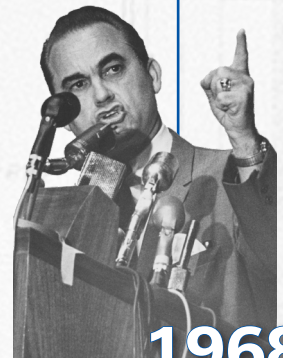
1954

Maintenance worker George Erhart, who cared for the basketball floor in Memorial since 1951 falls 80 feet through an air duct while cleaning the walkway above the ceiling. He returned to work two months later after not sustaining any serious injuries.



1966

Outside of Memorial, members of the Black Student Union protest Adolph Rupp's all-white teams. Four years later, the men's team is integrated.



1968

Alabama governor and presidential candidate **George Wallace speaks.** Student protestors gather outside and inside "Hippies for Wallace" sat high in the rafters with signs reading, "Turn on With George."

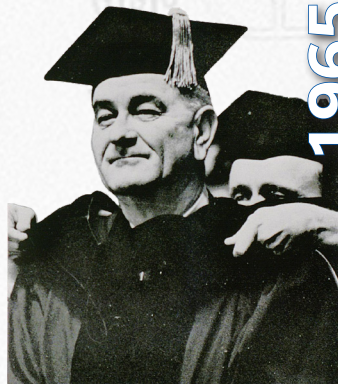
1953

Oranges are thrown at University of Tennessee players as they run onto the floor. Students from both schools join in the orange feud tradition which lasted for many years between the rivals.



1949

J. Sherman Horine, professor of mechanical engineering, hand wrote the names of the Kentucky World War II dead on a roll of paper for display in Memorial Coliseum.



1965

President Lyndon B. Johnson is keynote speaker at Kentucky's Centennial Celebration on February 2. He receives an honorary degree.

1967

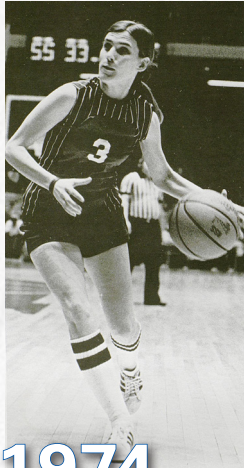
Conversation begins about building a bigger arena. Memorial had sold out games since 1961.



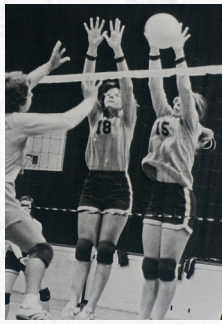
Billy Graham packs Memorial for four days. Overflow gathers at Stoll Field.

1971

The women's basketball team - after a 50-year absence - granted varsity status again. The team had varsity status from 1903-1925 when the university senate abolished the sport deeming it too strenuous for women. Sue Feamster coaches for two seasons for a record of 29-21.

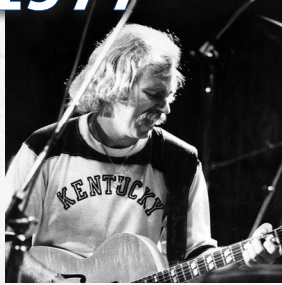


1974



Volleyball is introduced to UK athletics and the team plays and practices in Memorial.

1977



Jimmy Buffett performs. Tickets were \$5 and \$6.

1981

UK opens one of the nation's first academic centers for student-athletes located in Memorial Coliseum. Known as the "Center for Academic and Tutorial Services" (C.A.T.S.).



1985

1982

Coach Joe B. Hall introduces **Midnight Special**, now known as **Midnight Madness**. Originally an event just for students. Freshman Kenny Walker thrilled students with flying dunks.

Sting performs. R.E.M. performs.



1976

Men's basketball competitions move to Rupp. Memorial becomes the home to women's basketball team. The last men's basketball game played inside Memorial on March 8. The Cats beat Mississippi State 94-93. Overflow crowd sits on floor.

1983

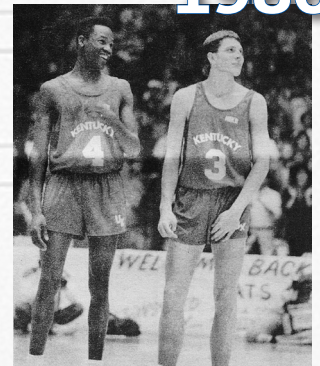
Talking Heads perform with the lights on due to a bomb threat.



Kat crowd tops record

The seventh-ranked Lady Kats defeated the sixth-ranked Old Dominion Lady Monarchs 80-66 before a NCAA record crowd of 10,622 Saturday night. The attendance beat the old women's record of 10,200 set at Old Dominion arena. The Scope, two years ago reported, however, says...

1986



Fire marshal closes doors of **Midnight Madness** leaving hundreds of fans outside. More than 12,500 get the first glimpse of super-fresh Rex Chapman.

1972

Adolf Rupp coaches his **last game in Memorial** with a 102-67 win over Auburn. Coach Joe B. Hall takes over that fall.



1983

A crowd of 10,622 fills Memorial for a women's basketball game versus No. 6 Old Dominion. Kentucky, featuring Valerie Still, Lea Wise and Patty Jo Hedges, wins 80-66. The attendance is the **largest crowd for a women's basketball game in the United States at the time**.



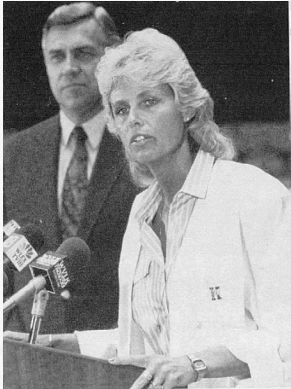
1992

Big Boo Madness takes place on Halloween night after NCAA pushes the start of basketball practice to November 1. Jamal Mashburn, known as "The Monster Mash," is the featured attraction. Announcer Cawood Ledford pops up out of a coffin to start the show.



1998

The "Center for Academic and Tutorial Services" (C.A.T.S.) is relocated to a new two-story facility located within the existing area previously occupied by the pool and locker rooms in Memorial Coliseum. The new spaces includes a study hall, computer lab, administrative offices and tutorial spaces.



1987

Sharon Fanning becomes women's basketball coach.

2003

Mickie DeMoss becomes women's basketball coach.



1995

Midnight Special name changed to Rockin' After Midnight.



1989

Coach Rick Pitino is introduced as the men's head basketball coach.



2002

Yearlong 100 years of Kentucky basketball celebration. Equipment Manager Bill Keightley pops out of birthday cake at Big Blue Madness.

1990



\$1-million renovation includes new weight training facilities, offices, players' lounge and team meeting room. Memorial becomes home to UK gymnastics.





DanceBlue participants performed their last live dance Saturday night as the dance marathon ended in Memorial Coliseum. The participants learned the dance Friday night and performed it across each hour for the next 24 hours.

Dance 'till you're blue in the feet

2006

First ever 24-hour DanceBlue marathon to fight pediatric cancer in memory of Jarrett Myneer.

2006

UK women's basketball defeats No. 1 Tennessee 66-63 snapping a 24-year losing streak to UT. The win is the program's first win over a No.1 ranked opponent.



2005

Midnight Madness moves to Rupp Arena.

2007

New video and scoreboards added, new flooring installed. RS Guitarworks makes three guitars from pine flooring.



2007

Joe Craft Center opens adjacent to Memorial Coliseum as a new basketball practice facility for men's and women's teams.



2009

Men's Basketball Coach Billy Gillispie's last game takes place, an NIT win over UNLV. The game, with a score of 70-60, is in Memorial because Rupp was the venue for the state high school basketball tournament.

2010

Drake performs.

2012

December graduation is the last graduation ceremony held in Memorial Coliseum. UK graduations move to Rupp Arena.

2011

My Morning Jacket performs.

2008

New sound system installed.

2020

Women's volleyball wins 2020 National Championship. Because of COVID, during the game-watch party inside Memorial, fans leave three seats empty between them.



2024



Women's volleyball play in the first event held at the renovated Memorial Coliseum since an exhibition volleyball match in March of 2023. Since that time, the interior of the arena has seen significant changes as part of the renovation project.



2023

\$80+ million renovations begins. Includes HVAC, new seating, center-hung scoreboard/video board, club area, new ceilings and renovated concession, concourse and lobby.



2019

Comedian Trevor Noah speaks as part of 70 years of integration celebration.