

Bright Spots

The ever-resilient Eddie Elder

By Jeff Chapman Contributing writer

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Former K-State players stand at half court for the College Basketball Hall of Fame ceremony for Coach Jack Hartman. Jack Hartman's daughter, Jackie Hartman, stands in the middle. The players are, from left, Simmie Clancy, Percy Eddie, Steve Soldner, Scott Langton, Dean Danner, Ben Mitchell, Carl Gerlach, Eddie Elder, Hal Bentley, and a CBHOF representative. Courtesy photo

Ed "Eddie" Elder is a longtime friend to me and to many, and is not only known for his leadership in commercial real estate as the President at Collier's (not the encyclopedia) in Kansas City for the most of his professional life, he is also known as one of the last team leaders during the coaching era of Jack Hartman. He was on the Wildcat roster from 1981 through 1985 and wore No. 50. I spoke with Eddie from a conference room overlooking the campus of University of Missouri-Kansas City south of the Kansas City Plaza. We enjoyed lunch and a very deep conversation about his personal relationship with K-State.



Eddie at his home in Kansas City

Chapman: Why did you change from “Eddie” to Ed after college?

Elder: It was a mistake. My uncle said Eddie sounded too youthful and unprofessional as I entered the business world, so I switched to “Ed.” My friends, my family, my wife knows me as Eddie. It was clear I should have just stayed with it.

Chapman: Was it your height or another influence or inspiration that got you started playing basketball? I assume this was in Tulsa.

Elder: Yes, I was born in Chanute, Kansas, but we moved to Tulsa in grade school. I was taller, but that came in handy for all sports, not just basketball. Organized youth sports wasn't really a thing back then, so all of us just played everything. Baseball, basketball, and football from fifth grade on up. The most influential coach growing up was my high school coach, Bill Kusleika. He was my inspiration in basketball.

Chapman: At what point did basketball become more of a focus or were you always a star?

Elder: I didn't have immediate success in high school. I grew into it. By my junior year at Cascia Hall High School, I was about 6'7" to 6'-8" and my height became a factor in focusing on more basketball and less other sports. The City of Tulsa had very competitive teams. I played summer league, went to camps, and even played against players at the

University of Tulsa when I could get into their games. Nolan Richardson was the coach, and he brought in a lot of talent. It was great summer league competition.

Chapman: Were you a normal kid like the rest of us, working too?

Elder: I always worked in the summer. My father was a stickler on work.

Chapman: How did you end up in Manhattan?

Elder: Like most recruiting stories, mine is very unconventional. My grandfather passed away, so my grandmother moved to Manhattan where she grew up. She eventually remarried one of my grandfather's friends who had lost his wife also. He told me I should attend one of Coach Jack Hartman's basketball schools. It's true, Hartman called it a school and not a camp. So, I signed up and went in 1980, and they started recruiting me right away.

Chapman: Were you still part of the lavender jerseys or had that ended by your time there?

Elder: Oh, I loved those. We wore them on the road a lot. What I hated were those really short purple shorts... Too small and too tight. (He motions to his mid-thigh and we both laugh)

Chapman: This is difficult for me to ask, but the time you played...

Elder: You mean "The dark years?" It's not difficult for me to talk about, but it's reality. You're a fan, you know we (KSU) were in a decline in basketball from '82 to '86, we all knew it. Inside and outside. So, it's fair.

Chapman: What happened? Was it Coach Hartman's health? I am sure it was a combination of things.

Elder: Jeff, first of all, I love Kansas State, I love our basketball program and the players and coaches I was associated with, but I'd say it was three primary things. After the loss to Boston College (NCAA Tournament) my freshman year, it was obvious we had no returning horsepower the next year.

The second issue was we missed on a few key recruits, so we had no main couple of players to carry the team in leadership and statistics, and the third factor was; we lost Coach (Lon) Kruger off of the staff, and some other assistant coaching changes put us in a bit of a leadership deficit.

Coach Hartman always felt he could coach guys up and get the most out of people, to complement the stars, but we had no stars, and it hurt us.

Chapman: Would you say then you were a perceived star of your team?

Elder: I was not a star. I was more of a role player who had a few bright spots in my career.

Chapman: Eddie, let's rephrase that. As a leader of your team, based on stats and performance, did you feel pressure to perform better, lead by example, were you asked to?

Elder: No that was kind of my point. Nobody sat me down and said "Eddie, we need you to be a leader on this team." I mean yes, I worked hard. Hated losing games. It sucked to be honest, but I loved the game and the opportunity so I gave it my best, and I suppose looking back, I was a little naive about what my role was or could have been. I knew the tradition of this winning program. It was a struggle knowing the fan base was disappointed in those years. I am thankful for not having social media like today.

Chapman: Let's talk specifically about your last/senior season, 1984-85, and Jack's health.

Elder: We had a decent team. We had just lost a heartbreaker to Ralph Miller's Oregon State team with AC Green on Jan. 12 at home in Ahearn. Jack had a heart attack. The next morning assistant coaches Tim Jankovich and Dennis Edmands came into the dorms to share the news on Coach.

Daryl Winston became interim head coach for the remainder of the season. It was a struggle from that point forward. We really fell off. It was not a happy place to be.

Chapman: You had some pretty great moments. Making a one-and-one then getting the rebound to end a great game against Iowa State, going 11 for 11 against Colorado a 30-point outing. You also had 30 pts against Wayman Tisdale (Oklahoma) in your junior year, who I think was probably the second greatest player in Big 8 history, behind Rolando Blackman.

Elder: Those moments are what makes the tough times a little easier to reconcile. (smiles)

Chapman: You played with a lot of future coaches like Jankovich and Underwood; did you detect their coaching skills then?

Elder: No, as a player I didn't. I don't recall them ever being anything other than players in the gym and great teammates.

Chapman: Who were some of the best players you witnessed on the court, on your team or against them?

Elder: Without question, Wayman Tisdale. I grew up playing against him in Tulsa and then more when he was at OU. Danny Manning was probably next or Jeff Grayer, Jeff Hornacek. The Big 8 at the time was loaded with talent.

Chapman: Did you ever get a shot to play professionally?

Elder: Yeah, funny enough I got a shot at the Chicago Bulls through Tex Winter. I was rewarded, if you will, with that opportunity, but then Jerry Krause cut me from the team.

Chapman: I am going to rattle off the head coaches for K-State since you left and want you to give me a few words to summarize them in your mind:

Chapman: Kruger (Lonnie)

Elder: Excellent, confident in his abilities across the board. Incredibly competitive.

Chapman: Altman (Dana)

Elder: He proved everyone wrong. His hiring process was flawed, and he got off on the wrong foot with some of the fan base. Great coach though.

Chapman: Asbury (Tom):

Elder: A miss. Two wins in Wichita by a mid-major team is no resume to work for a program as good as K-State. Tough deal losing his daughter right before he came to Manhattan.

Chapman: Wooldridge (Jim)

Elder: Really nice guy. Struggled in recruiting. His resume was light to get the job. Our AD and our university leadership were focused on football at the time. Rightfully so!

Chapman: Huggins (Bob)

Elder: He flipped the program around, wasn't a perfect person but could recruit.

Chapman: Martin (Frank)

Elder: Closed the gap with KU, made us competitive, put us back on the map.

Chapman: Weber (Bruce)

Elder: Won the conference a couple of times. He was a safe pick after the Frank. We could have had Underwood instead and I think Brad would still be here if we did. Bruce was a good coach, but it's hard to sustain success in this conference.

Chapman: Tang (Jerome)

Elder: He loves the players and is a great recruiter. The ecosystem for college basketball is very challenging. Hard to maintain success and sustainability as I said. It's the wild west with the portal and NIL. Hopefully, things settle down.

Chapman: Let's talk about your personal life. You and your wife (Lynne) both had cancer and have had a rough few years. Are you OK?

Elder: Yes, those were rough times, but we are doing well and feeling great. Right after the leukemia went into remission, I found out I had a rare skin cancer, which was mutually exclusive but related somehow. I have had stem cell and bone marrow transplants, (his son Jackson was a donor) and I have been doing a lot of rehab.

Chapman: Do you think your time at K-State, the suffering mentally through the dark years has helped you?

Elder: Absolutely, I think about it often. I think about Coach Hartman making us to be self-reliant, resilient and to persevere through challenging times.