

Colorful Personalities, “Refuse to Lose” Mindset Fueled Lady Cub Machine in 1990-1991

By: James A. Rose

Team videographer for Coach Phil Carr at Sycamore Junior High School, 1985-1987

Mascot Cubby, 1989-1991

Here in the 2020s: Volunteer attorney, Cheatham County Sports Hall of Fame

NOTE: This article is based on a “history interview” conducted at Flytes Brewhouse in Pleasant View, Tennessee on January 22, 2023. Because of the historic nature of this article, the Lady Cub players are referred to by their legal names from high school days for better perspective. Their current married names are as follows:

Denise Biggs

Kelly Daniel

Tracy Douglas

Jean Lee

Special thanks to Coach Jimmy Harden for corralling players and head coach Phil Carr for the history interview.

Honoring the memory of Jamie Greene and Jennifer Mangrum, players on the team who are now deceased.

Children of 90/91 Lady Cubs who are also Cubs or Lady Cubs (Please let me know if you have additions for this list):

Jean:

Robert “Tristan” Lee, class of 2020

Maverick Rutherford Lee, class of 2023

Montana Evelyn Lee, class of 2025

Tracy:

Ashlee Douglas Taylor, class of 2014

Austin Douglas, class of 2016

Abbi Douglas*, class of 2019

Alli Douglas*, class of 2020

Jennifer Boyte, manager:

Macy Douglas*

* - Member of 2018-2019 state championship team, inducted into the Cheatham County Sports Hall of Fame in 2020.

Coach Phil Carr to Denise Underwood:
 “UNDERWOOD. Get out of here!” OR
 “UNDERWOOD. Start running!”

Coach Jimmy Harden on Kelly Perry:

“During her junior year, if we had told Kelly that we were closing the gym and not playing anymore, she would have said nothing in response. If we had told her the same thing during her senior year, she would merely have asked, ‘Why?’”

Coach Jimmy Harden on point guard Jean Rutherford:

“One time she told me that she was going to stop shooting. I told her that if she wouldn’t shoot, she was coming out of the game.”

Regarding the strong-willed Tracy Head, niece of a legendary coach and parent of two members of the Lady Cub 2018-2019 state title team, the comment was that she was most prone to get into foul trouble.

The 90/91 Lady Cubs were dubbed as “injury riddled” by *The Leaf-Chronicle* in an article describing their 56-51 win over Henry County (which also appeared in the 90/91 state tournament, losing to Dyersburg) at the Dunn Center to capture the District 10-AAA tournament championship. Jean sustained a late-season injury that ended her season. As for the two state tournament games the team played, the team carried a mere ten players on the roster, including “Dawn Johnson”, who cannot be identified (at least for now).

Different? Definitely. Outside the norm? Perhaps.

But woe be unto you if you found yourself on the wrong side of this team. “Wrong side” equals the opposing team for 33 games during the 1990-1991 basketball season. This team didn’t just win. It steamrolled. Only state powerhouses Shelbyville Central Eaglettes (ranked number one in the nation, presumably by *USA Today*) and White County Warriorettes (ranked eleventh in the nation) bested the 1990-1991 Lady Cubs, essentially placing the team as third best in the state. Twenty-nine of thirty-three games were won by double figures, and the average margin of victory was 21.7.

The single-figure games:

Cookeville in a Christmas tournament, December 28, 1990: 59-50

Spring Hill at Pat Summitt Gymnasium, February 12, 1991: 37-30 (defense was obviously strong in this one)

Henry County: District 10-AAA tournament title game at the Dunn Center, 56-51

Henry County: Region 5-AAA title game at Volunteer State Community College, Gallatin, Tennessee, 51-45

(Henry County lost to Dyersburg 49-43 on March 14, 1991 at Murphy Center in the state tournament.)

Head coach Phil Carr was gracious and respectful, even to teams that he comfortably beat. He noted Henry County and even substate opponent Pearl-Cohn of Nashville as strong teams. The final score in the substate game at Pat Summitt Gymnasium was 58-44. As I recall, no one was surprised to see us win and head for Murfreesboro. Coach Carr mentioned that both of these teams were strong.

He was definitely correct about Henry County. At a glance, I don't think any other district in the state had two teams in the "Elite Eight" state tournament round. Our district (10-AAA) did.

After crafting an amazing record at Sycamore Junior High School and Middle School in the late 1980s, Carr saw two or three key players depart Cheatham County for private schools. The most prominent of these was Patricia Williams, who played for Carr at Sycamore Junior High School. Disgruntled that Carr was not hired at a certain point in time to be her high school coach, Williams departed for Madison, Tennessee and private Church of Christ affiliated school Goodpasture.

My father, Alvin Rose, baptized Williams during this era. The Cheatham County fans "baptized her by fire" in 1989 in the Class AA regional final game, played at Goodpasture. The Lady Cubs, led by coach Joey Spalding and players such as Melva Majors and Coach Spalding's daughter Teri, beat the female Cougars. Our fans went wild, and those Lady Cubs went on to their first-ever state tournament following the infamous "bleacher crash" 1989 substate game against Marshall County.

Phil Carr's high school career started with a jolt on November 21, 1989 with a road loss to Goodpasture and Patricia. His 1990-1991 team would make up for it in a sense on November 20, 1990 with a big 59-43 victory at Pat Summitt Gymnasium.

Patricia Williams had graduated by then, but the "jolts" for Phil Carr were few and far between.

I encountered this team in the fall of 1985. It was apparent that my small seventh grade body was not made for sports competition, but I loved sports. Jim Lemons, art teacher and former boys basketball coach, asked me if I would handle the video recording of games. My answer was an emphatic "Yes".

I never got the memo that I was working for a junior high school team. In my mind, it might as well have been the NBA, WNBA, whatever. So I gave it the attention it deserved. No extension cord for a game on the road? Crisis. No tripod for tonight? Crisis. I couldn't stand recording games with "over the shoulder" camera handling. I wanted it to be the best it could be.

Perhaps the moment when I realized the girls basketball potential in this crew came in or about December of 1985. Our girls came, saw, and conquered at a Christmas tournament on Harding Pike in Nashville. Some games were played at Overbrook School. Others were played at St. Cecilia School. If we played at Overbrook, great. If we played at St. Cecilia, YIKES. I had to sit on a heater in the corner of the gym and record the game from floor level. I doubt that those tapes provided much help in analyzing performance and for future game preparation.

One tournament night sits high in my mind. After whipping the competition, we departed Nashville for Pleasant View on the team bus. Someone had a boom box and began playing Lionel Richie's "Say You Say Me". The bus produced a chorus of female voices joining in unison to sing this popular radio hit.

It hit me then: This is something special. My father had been principal at Cheatham County Central High School since I was three years old. My thought was, "I can't wait for this crew to put on the cardinal and white".

They never disappointed.

I had the opportunity to interview Pat Summitt during our high school years as a DJ for J-79 radio. Pat had come into town to speak at an event at the Girl Scout Camp barn off of Highway 49 – very close to my boyhood home. I pulled out my cassette tape recorder and put together a series of questions that I felt was clever. The first one was a "softball" designed to get the legendary coach to start talking about her high school days:

"What do you remember most about your days at Cheatham County Central High School?"

Pat's answer: "My memory is that I never went to a state tournament. We never took a team that far."

Nothing bitter in the answer. Just "matter of fact". Was Coach Summitt challenging me? I will never know for sure. But I appreciate her "curveball". For the record, she did discuss high school memories later in the interview, i.e. building floats for football homecoming.

Jean Rutherford in 2023: "I would switch shoes with her."

And so shall it be. This 90/91 team accomplished something (and the players accomplished it twice with the 1989 state tournament appearance) that Pat Summitt could only dream of.

But they respect their roots.

These ladies came together in the fall of 1985, having been rivals in the junior pro ranks. Coach Carr, whose son Curt was playing for the Pleasant View Panthers in the early 1980s, cleverly began the coaching journey early. He honed skills on junior pro Saturday nights as he had time and conducted practices, too.

This paid dividends for future years.

According to our history interview, Ashland City and Pleasant View met in the girls "A" team junior pro championship game in 1985 at Sycamore Junior High School. The Wildcats beat the Panthers. The rivalry ended there, and the players joined forces at Sycamore.

It seemed like Carr and the seniors of 1991 were a natural fit from the beginning, carrying a focused and fierce philosophy that began years earlier. The arrival of CCCHS alumnus Jimmy Harden as assistant coach in the fall of 1989 made for awesome chemistry.

I commented that it seemed that they all loved their coaches despite the tough, adverse nature of practices and games.

“We love them now,” one of the players sarcastically quipped.

Longtime Cub supporter and Hall of Fame nominee Roy Paul played a key role in the success of this team and many others. Paul coached the girls for the summer Amateur Athletic Union (“AAU”) league. High school varsity coaches were prohibited from coaching these games. Having coached Pleasant View Christian School to state competition in the Tennessee Christian School Association, Paul brought a big heart and a high level of youth sports expertise “behind the scenes” during summer months when most people weren’t paying much attention to basketball.

Coach Carr agreed that his first state tournament appearance was likely delayed by one year. The 1989-1990 team probably would have advanced to the state tournament (and probably would also have beaten Goodpasture) had standout Taunya Treanton not sustained an injury that ended her season before it started. Despite missing her senior year, Treanton went on to play at Tennessee Tech.

Jean, Denise, Kelly, and Laurel Harris went on to play at Volunteer State Community College. The Lady Pioneers advanced to the national junior college tournament during the former Lady Cubs’ sophomore year.

Kelly and Denise went on to Belmont and were on the opposite side of the court a time or three when I was “Big Dave” – mascot for the rival Lipscomb Bisons. Shannon Duke played at Cumberland University, and Tracy Head played one year at Bethel College.

On March 14, 1991, Denise set a state tournament record versus Obion County Central - six three-pointers in one game. She led all scorers with 23 in the 71-50 historic victory, the first state tournament win ever for the Lady Cubs. Her friend Kelly had 22 points. The single-game three pointer record held up for many years.

Laurel and Melissa Arms were two seniors known for tenacious hustle and defense. Shannon Duke, a sophomore, was the “next one up” as point guard when Jean’s season ended with injury.

“All good and well,” Coach Carr said. “But then there was no one to take Shannon’s place off of the bench.”

In recent years, Jimmy Harden commented to me that he still was trying to figure out how to beat Shelbyville and White County.

Coach Carr's comment was that the strategy in the Final Four game versus White County was to get the best player into foul trouble. The strategy worked, but White County was deep enough to "reload" and stay in command.

Honorary Sports Hall of Fame member and famous "tall tale teller" Scott Bullock put it simply as he contemplated the girls basketball team from his senior year of 1990-1991 joining him in the Hall:

"They deserve to go in the Hall of Fame."
I could not agree more.