

Exclusive Interview: Wilt Chamberlain

The Sports staff of the W&L Law News, acting on behalf of the Law School basketball team, presented Wilt Chamberlain with a challenge to play one game for the world's championship this past Sunday at Cole Field House, College Park, Maryland.

Of secondary import was the fact that two months of frantic and often

under the influence of peyote when he declared that this grandiose venture would have to be recorded for posterity. One who could believe that there would be anything to record was given a skeptical welcome.

But then the light was seen at the end of the tunnel (apologies to LBJ) and press passes appeared. Armed with these papers and a bogus letter from the Laker's publicity director, the entire sports staff sallied forth to Cole Field House in a manner which filled the mind's eye with visions of the Keystone Cops.

The arrival at Cole was marred by the renewed incompetence of Law News staffers. While Rich Grimes and John Gee sought out their contact for the floor passes and to ascertain pre-game interview policy, Wimbrow and Twardy remained at the players' entrance where all the action was taking place. Jim McMillan and Jim Price arrived but received only cursory nods from the W&L journalists. Then the team bus pulled to the gate, from which emerged a brooding, black giant. Wimbrow nervously shouted to Twardy to get a picture of Wilt and this was done. Euphoria!

Grimes and Gee returned with the news that pre-game interviews were permitted up until 45 minutes before game time. Sports Editor Wimbrow and his assistant Gee walked to the locker room door, paused while Gee prayed for divine guidance and entered the Inner Sanctum. Just inside the door, seated on a bench at the left, was the target of the quest, the monstrous hulk of man that is Wilt Chamberlain. Gee's legs turned to mush and his mouth felt as if he had just consumed ten peanut butter sandwiches. Wilt ignored them completely and spoke only to demand that morning's paper from Gail Goodrich. Finally, Wimbrow recovered and timidly said, "Pardon me, Mr. Chamberlain, may we ask you a few questions?" The response seemed to come from the depths of a volcano and demanded, "Who are you?" Wimbrow identified both himself and Gee, who had not yet found his tongue, and Wilt replied "Sure, man." By this time Gee recovered and the interview with Wilt was on.

Following the interview the staff returned to the gym to prepare for the game. But then Gee got carried away. He spotted Bill Russell nemesis of the interviewee for so many years.

Sports Feature

futile efforts culminated in a pre-game and post-game interview with Wilt Chamberlain. At stake was journalistic supremacy on the W&L campus.

That Wilt would deign to lower himself to the indignities of the staff's knowledgeable queries seemed incredible to the most optimistic of minds. Shunting aside the dubious reactions of brothers at bar, Sports Editor Wimbrow secured three tickets to the game over the Christmas break. The tickets were stark reminders to the staff that great expectations lurked in the collective mind of the law school.

The next obstacle to overcome was to gain admittance to the hallowed area of the Laker's locker room, where surely legend loomed larger than life. What chance would three law students have of entering this sacred Valhalla? Following a tumultuous staff meeting, letters were drafted to Wilt and the Lakers, pleading for an audience with the game's most imposing figure. For the next two weeks spirits ebbed as Sports Editor Wimbrow kept a vigil on the Law News mail box which surpassed President Nixon's prior scrutiny over Communists.

As time passed without reply, the staff was thrown into panic. The epistles of supplication had gone unanswered. The only solution seemed to be to contribute to the coffers of Ma Bell and seek immediate results. All that became of this tactic was information concerning Wilt's "prior commitments" on the day in question, news that the expense account had been exceeded, and that the Dean was going to audit the paper's books.

Into the midst of this stygian gloom came Law News photographer Jeff Twardy, who must have been



Wilt Chamberlain

Law News staffer John Gee shoots the breeze with Laker's star Wilt Chamberlain last Sunday. After talking with Gee, Pete Wimbrow, and Rick Grimes, Chamberlain led the Lakers to victory over the Baltimore Bullets.

—Photo by Twardy

With egotistical bravado rivaling that of Howard Cosell, Gee brazenly inquired as to whether Bill Russell was the cause of the rift between ABC and Wilt. Big Bill glared at Gee in a manner which under normal circumstances would have sent him scampering to the nickel seats. But ego had outgrown fear and Gee intrepidly waited for reply. At last,

fleck faced Keith Jackson snapped "It has nothing to do with Bill."

The Law News journalists were then forced to sit through one hell of an exhibition of fast-break basketball by the Lakers, who prevailed over the Baltimore Bullets 125-115. Immediately upon conclusion of the game they returned to the winners' locker room where Sports Editor

Wimbrow and Laker Coach Bill Sharman discussed playoff strategy and the state of relations between Wilt and Kareem. Then it was into the locker room for a final handshake with Wilt.

The staff then returned to Lexington, recounting the day's events and savoring the journalistic coup of the year.

Text of Chamberlain-Law News Interview

Law News: Why do centers in the NBA allow the ball to come into the low post without contest?

Wilt: A center who did contest the pass would draw defensive fouls. The ideal way to play defense in the low post is for the offensive center to be unaware of where the defensive man is. Once an offensive center is aware of the tactic he can sucker the other center into fouls. Finally, the defensive center cannot afford to gamble because if he loses the result is an easy layup.

Law News: What is your opinion of the reserve clause?

Wilt: Horseshit!
Law News: When did you learn the finger roll?
Wilt: I started using it 7-8 years ago because my knees were extremely painful and were sapping my strength and preventing me from going strong to the hoop. The finger roll compensates for lack of body strength. It's a method of getting the ball close to the basket when the body can't make it.

Law News: Why don't you use your hook shot, which is more than adequate?

Wilt: I'm not comfortable taking the hook. I learned the hook as a kid but became the victim of the trend to jump shooting. The jump shot was a more potent weapon and I can jump, so I went to that.

Law News: Do you intend to negotiate Bill Walton's contract?

Wilt: Anybody would like to! He'll probably be the greatest center in basketball, but there is no basis in fact to the Sporting News story to that effect.

Law News: Have you ever played against him?

Wilt: No.

Law News: What do you want to accomplish in the rest of your career?

Wilt: There is the personal challenge of being the oldest and still among the best. Also the personal satisfaction of doing what I do with excellence. I don't know how much longer I will play, for several reasons. The schedule is getting to me. But more than that is the fact that basketball takes up 8 months a year. Also the regimentation is bad. Our coach is a hard coach although practice isn't too bad. It's the hassle of driving to practice and back.

Law News: Do you want to coach when you retire?

What type of coach would you be?

Wilt: I'd rather play than coach. But if I were coaching I would analyze the type of club that I have and coach accordingly. I would like to cut down on some of the unnecessary regimentation. For example on a veteran team like ours you can give the players a little more leeway.

Law News: Do you still weight-train? Has it adversely affected your play?

Wilt: I still work out during the summer but lift only spasmodically during the season. I lift during the season when I feel the need for improved muscle tone. It has not adversely affected my game. When I first started lifting it was taboo for basketball players. Not all athletes do it. I have been weight training since 1953.

Law News: Why are you never interviewed during or after the game?

Wilt: ABC sports and I do not see eye to eye.

Law News: Do you think the ABA will ever reach parity with the NBA?

Wilt: Never. Three or four years ago the ABA had the chance but they blew it by letting good players get away and failing to sign others.

Law News: Do the officials still let the other centers in the league shove you as much as they used to?

Wilt: Yes, they still do it. But now I handle it a lot better. Kareem has the same problem. In fact the officials let me push Kareem a lot more than other centers in the league. Nevertheless, I don't appreciate the shoving.

Law News: Will Hap Hariston be back for the playoffs? Can you give him any tips from your speedy recovery?

Wilt: I don't know if he'll be back in time. He's getting a new cast next week. His injury is different from mine. He has a cartilage injury like Jerry (West) and Keith Erickson had. My injury was a tendon. Whether he recovers depends on how motivated he is, and how much pain he's willing to endure.

Law News: Wilt, why do you fake before shooting after you get an offensive rebound?

Wilt: To avoid the offensive fouls.

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