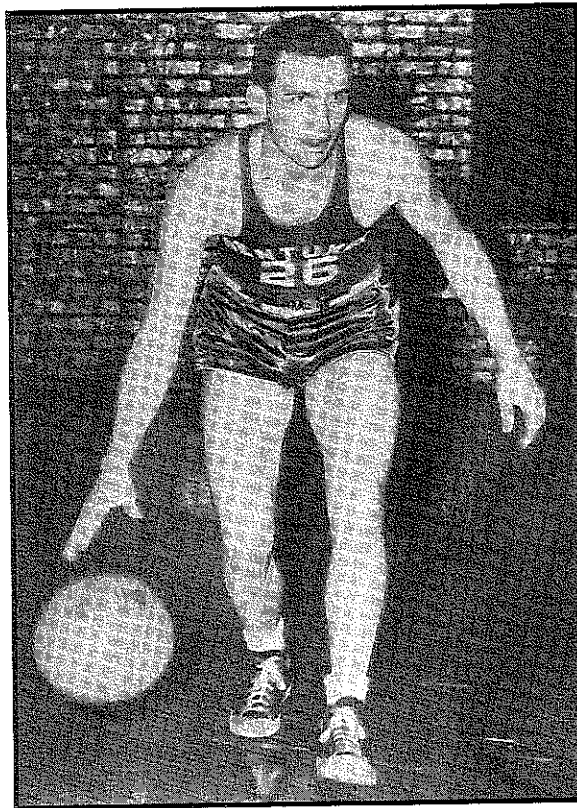


# KENNY ROLLINS

By Billy Reed



**W**hen I called Kenny Rollins to interview him for this story, I mentioned that he always seemed to be the forgotten member of the "Fabulous Five," the fabled University of Kentucky basketball team that won the 1948 NCAA championship and helped the U.S. win a gold medal in that year's Olympics

"Don't write that," Rollins said, laughing. "You'll upstage my acceptance speech. I've got some stories to tell about that."

He does, too. He told me some, and they're fascinating. Can you imagine, in this day and age, the captain of a great Kentucky team going unrecognized at home?

Well, it happened to Kenny. But I'll let him tell it. Far be it from me to take anything away from his remarks on this special night that's been so long in coming.

"I'm so exciting I just don't know what to do," said Rollins, who will be 72 in September. "I always hoped to make it, but I never counted on it."

No wonder.

A 6-foot guard, Rollins was an unselfish player who never received the adulation that belong to All-Americans Ralph Beard, Alex Groza, and Wallace "Wah Wah" Jones. He also didn't have the touching background of Cliff Barker, who handled a ball so much during his time in a World War II concentration camp that he was a passing wizard when he got out.

More steady than spectacular, Rollins was known mainly for his defense and his ability to find the open man. He was the team's catalyst, the guy whose contributions didn't always show up in a boxscore.

"Most of the teams back then, or even now, had to

1948 H.K. Picture - Note "Kentucky" spelled wrong on Traveling uniform. "Kentakey" but no one noticed it.

have one individual on the floor who was unselfish and would feed the other guys," Rollins said. "We were lucky. We had two — me and Barker. Cliff was just like me."

At Wickliffe High, where he graduated in 1940, Kenny had been as big a scorer as there was in those low-scoring days. He had hoped to go to Western Kentucky to play for Uncle Ed Diddle, but Diddle declined to offer him a scholarship after watching him try out.

"Diddle liked big men all over, and he said I was a little too small," Rollins said. "I went home and cried. I had to have a scholarship because we didn't have enough money to send me to college for a day, much less a year."

But through the intervention of a family friend who knew both Diddle and Kentucky coach Adolph Rupp, Barker was invited to Lexington in August, 1940, to try out for the Wildcats.

"I was one of four who got one," Barker said, "and I was absolutely overjoyed."

After playing under Paul McBrayer on the UK freshman team of 1941-42, Rollins earned a starting role on Rupp's varsity as a sophomore, only to have his career interrupted by World War II.

After two years in the Navy, Rollins returned to UK in the fall of 1946 only after giving serious thought to transferring to Eastern Kentucky, where McBrayer had become head coach.

"I loved that man (McBrayer)," Rollins said. "All of us really admired and respected him."

Besides that, UK had so much talent that Barker wondered if he could regain his old starting spot as a junior. But he finally decided that he had to find out, much to the delight of Rupp and Harry Lancaster, his new assistant.

As a junior, Rollins was named captain of the 1946-47 UK team that finished with a 34-3 record, losing to Utah in the final game of the National Invitation Tournament. How deep was that team? This deep: Three former All-Americans were on the bench, unable to crack the starting five.

Then came the magic season when the Wildcats evolved from just another good team into the "Fabulous Five," the quickest and slickest team the college game had ever seen.

Everywhere the Wildcats went — the Garden in New York, Chicago Stadium, the big cities of the South — they played to S.R.O. crowds. Nobody had ever seen a big man who could run the floor like Groza, a guard as quick and fierce as Beard, a forward who could sweep the boards like Jones, or anybody — except Bob Cousy, of course — who could pass like Barker.

But the man who quietly made it all work was Rollins.

"He was absolutely outstanding on defense," wrote Lancaster in his autobiography. "He had perhaps the best mind of any player we ever had, and was the most underrated member of the 'Fabulous Five.'"

Underrated?

Boy, Harry didn't know the half of it. There was this time, for example, when Rollins had this jersey that . . . uh, sorry. That's one of Kenny's stories.

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## Email Message

(Page 1 of 1)

X-Logic:0006

Return-Path: <Stats.UKMR@uky.edu>

Delivered-To: 3-bcope@khsaa.org

Received: (qmail 4736 invoked from network); 27 Jan 2006 05:10:56 -0000

Received: from uksmtpl1.uky.edu (HELO nm.uky.edu) (128.163.184.22)

by khsaa.org with DES-CBC3-SHA encrypted SMTP; 27 Jan 2006 05:10:56 -0000

Received: from rssamp2 [128.163.184.25] by nm.uky.edu

with NetMail ModWeb Module; Fri, 27 Jan 2006 00:10:56 -0500

Subject: Ken Rollins

From: "Robert Scott Sampson" <Stats.UKMR@uky.edu>

To: bcope@khsaa.org

Date: Fri, 27 Jan 2006 00:10:56 -0500

X-Mailer: NetMail ModWeb Module

X-Sender: rssamp2

MIME-Version: 1.0

Message-ID: <1138338656.452198a4Stats.UKMR@uky.edu>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="UTF-8"

Content-Transfer-Encoding: quoted-printable

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ipdaee0510atl2.usa.prod.interland.net

X-Spam-Level:

X-Spam-Status: No, hits=-4.9 required=7.0 tests=BAYES\_00 autolearn=ham  
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Butch:

Here is a bit of info....

Hometown: Wickliffe, KY

Position: G

Playing Height: 6-0

Playing Weight: 175

Date of Birth: July 14, 1923

Legal Name: Kenneth Herman Rollins

Olympic Champion

Retired Jersey #26

1946-47: First Team All-SEC; All-SEC Tournament

1947-48: First Team All-SEC; All-SEC Tournament

Drafted in the 1948 NBA Draft by Fort Wayne

I will see if I can find some more. Sorry it has taken me so long to start, but its been crazy!

Stats

Butch,

Played on Varsity at Wickliffe High School, Wickliffe Ky. 4 yrs. 1937-38, 38-39, 39-40, and 40-41. I had Three Coaches in that time, but remember only my eighth grade + Freshman Coach, Bob Phillips. Led scoring in my junior and senior yrs, and was captain my senior yr. Made all-district + all county my junior + Senior yrs. but no all state appearances and/or championships.

Feel free to use any of the photos you need and give what you don't use to my presenter, Phil Rollins, brother.

Sorry I don't have more to offer.

Kenny Rollins

Kenay Rollins

(Son's) 765-653-6233

Kevin/Videy



**Kenny Rollins**

1943, 1947-1948

*Guard*

*Member Of Fabulous Five,  
1948 NCAA National  
Championship Team,  
1948 Olympic Team,  
Captain of 1948 team*