

# 1981 Basketball Season Summary

The skeptics said it couldn't be done. Not after losing three starters from the 24-5 team of 1980.

But the BYU basketball team's accomplishments in 1981 silenced the critics and became engraved in the record books for coaches and players to envy and for historians to cherish.

Despite wearing the "underdog" label against nearly one-third of their opponents, the Cougars managed to win 25 games—more than any other BYU team in history—while losing only seven.

Four losses by a total margin of nine points prevented the Cougars from having an unblemished Western Athletic Conference season and repeating as champion for the third consecutive year. As it turned out, BYU finished third in the Conference, one game behind co-champions Utah and Wyoming.

Sent to the Eastern Regionals, BYU was destined to play in arenas it had never before seen and entertain fans who knew little, if anything, about Brigham Young University.

It turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The boys from Provo toppled Ivy League champion Princeton before stunning the basketball world by giving UCLA its worst thrashing in years. A miracle basket by Danny Ainge gave the Cougars a last-second victory over Notre Dame, and it wasn't until 7-4 Ralph Sampson and Virginia came along in the finals of the Eastern Regionals that the Cougars succumbed.

Along the way, several national and regional television audiences watched BYU, led by consensus

All-American, Danny Ainge, win the big games. Newspapers heralded the team's actions on and off the court.

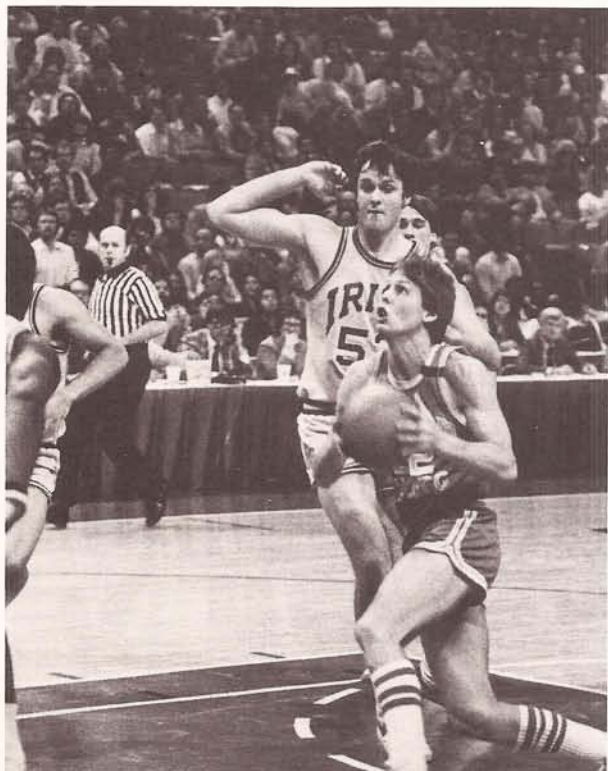
When the dust had finally cleared, BYU boasted a 16th-place national ranking and a place among the "elite eight" in the NCAA tourney. Individually, Ainge was given the Eastman and Wooden Awards as college basketball's outstanding player. He was also the ninth leading scorer in the NCAA, averaging 24.4 points per game.

Forward Fred Roberts earned All-WAC honors for his steady performance throughout the season. His average of 18.8 points per game was second best on the team. At the other forward, Steve Trumbo turned out to be a gem in the rebounding department, averaging 10.7 caroms per contest—24th best in the country. His 10.1 points per game placed him third on the scoring list.

Regulars Greg Kite, Steve Craig, Greg Ballif and Timo Saarelainen provided the depth necessary for the Cougars' success.

Early in the season, the BYU team showed promise by winning the Cougar Classic and finishing runnerup in the Volunteer Classic. Nationally ranked opponents Illinois, Utah, Wyoming, UCLA and Notre Dame fell to the Cougars during the season. Of the seven losses, five were to ranked teams and all were on the road.

Replacing All-WAC center Alan Taylor, guard Scott Runia and forward Devin Durrant were Coach Arnold's biggest worries to start the year. Kite, Trumbo and Craig filled in exceptionally.



Photos by Doug Martin



Danny Ainge's last-second, full court drive for the winning layup against Notre Dame.