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Indiana cage hall of fame calls for Tom Heitz

By Ken Fillmore

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It will be a year full of special reminders in 2004 for Tom Heitz; reminders of two of the greatest moments of his basketball life: becoming an Indiana All-Star and playing for the University of Kentucky Wildcats.

One major reminder might get in the way of watching his nephew and his team face their most-hated rival, but Heitz will find a place to sit down and watch that eventually on March 24.

That's because Heitz, a 1979 graduate of Hamilton High School, was selected by the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame to its 2004 Silver Anniversary Team. The induction ceremony will take place at Primo's Banquet Hall in Indianapolis on March 24.

"To be reminded of what happened 25 years ago is a neat thing," Heitz said by phone Tuesday night on his Heitz way to Fort Wayne on business. "It's an honor I'm very proud of."

Heitz is one of the nine 1979 Indiana All-Stars to be selected to this 16-person team. The other eight were 1979 Mr. Basketball Steve Bouchie from Washington, former Indiana University football coach Cam Cameron from Terre Haute South, South Bend Adams' Lynn Mitchem and Leroy Sutton, David Bastian of Indianapolis North Central, Chuck Franz of Clarksville, Dan Glanders of Elkhart Central and Dennis Goins of Rushville.

"The two things that epitomized Indiana basketball is being an Indiana All-Star and winning a state championship," said Heitz, 42. "To at least be one of those is awesome. It will be fun to see those All-Stars again. Like my team at Kentucky, it's another extended family.

"But it's all a community thing."

But the passion within Tom came from a group of Heitzes who loved basketball, starting with older brothers Jim and Mike, who both starred at Garrett in the late 1960s. The Heitz family moved to Hamilton when Tom was 12.

Tom Heitz was thankful for the communities he grew up in and the Hamilton basketball program for making him the player he was and the person he still is today.

Referring to himself as the "star" came out uncomfortably. But the team around Heitz was a special one under head coach Steve Grill, Angola High School's current principal, and assistant coach Roy Charleswood, Hamilton's current assistant girls basketball coach.

The 1978-79 Marine boys were ranked among the top 20 in the state, and also included key contributors like Dave Aldrich and Gary Martin.

"We were a team. We were a great team. My teammates should get all of the credit," Heitz said. "Roy Charleswood would play as the (junior varsity) center against the varsity center and beat the snot out of me in practice. He was very valuable."

Heitz then went on to Kentucky, and was a part of the 1984 Final Four team that will reunite for a special ceremony later this season at Rupp Arena.

Heitz now lives in Munster with wife Carmen and son Tom Jr., 10, and Robert, 8.

Tom Heitz was a commodity floor trader before merging into a financial services position. But he has never drifted away from basketball.

Heitz is a consultant who visits with NCAA coaches and student-athletes. He mainly deals with the behavior and psychology of kids and keeps them doing the right thing and setting a proper example for young people to follow.

“Athletes are role models and the amount of their impact can either be positive or negative. And it goes beyond being just athletes. They are influential leaders, even in high school,” Heitz said. “It is up to them to use that ability to either make a good impression or be an idiot.”

Heitz plans on writing a book regarding the influence of sports on young people and the crime of being a little league dad. He will also join forces with nephew and NBA star Brad Miller to give back to people in Northeast Indiana.

Heitz never misses Miller on the hardwood. Heitz hopes to not miss too much of the Sacramento-Los Angeles game on March 24 because of the Silver Anniversary Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

Heitz said that he’ll understand if his mother, Mary Ann, would prefer to watch the Kings-Lakers game. Carmen and the boys will be at the induction.

“There’s no way on God’s green earth that my mom would not want to see her grandson play. She might get me for saying this, but that’s okay. She was there for me over the years,” Tom said. “She is the matriarch of our family.”

“I want to get back and watch the game. There needs to be a satellite hook-up at the induction,” he added. “I can also go to Brad’s house afterwards (in suburban Indianapolis).”

Heitz is Hamilton’s all-time leader in scoring (1,437 points) and field goals (538). He played in 94 games at UK from 1979 to 1984, averaging just under two points per game. He was also drafted by the Indiana Pacers in the eighth round of the 1984 NBA Draft. He was the 163rd overall selection.

Other members of the Silver Anniversary All-Star team were Eric Williams of South Bend Washington, Bill O’Dell of Argos, Frank Smith Jr. of Gary Wallace, Michael Isrigg of Frankfort, Rick McKinstry of Indianapolis Howe, James Fisher of Lebanon and Raynard Malaine of Gary Wert.