

# 1935

**Record 14-1, 11-0**

**Winner American Legion Bowl - Atlantic City, N. J.**

**Southeastern Conference Champions**

**Coach Harry Rabenhorst**



(Front Row) Blackie Banker, Wally Wells, Henry Young, Sparky Wade, Nolan Miller, Guy Ottwell, Milford McDonald, Mac Michael. (Back Row) Judge Bryan, Bill Leathers, Shongaloo Lindsey, Sid Adger, Texas Bo Bohannon, Red Beeson, Jack Harris, Ben Journey, Buddy Blair.

It was a different time and a different era. But in 1935, in the days before the NCAA Tournament and the National Invitation Tournament sprung to life and created true March Madness, there was a national championship being claimed on the hardwood at LSU.

Led by the school's first All-American, Sparky Wade, and Buddy Blair, the Tigers of 10th year head coach Harry Rabenhorst pulled off a feat that many people feel is the first magical moment of LSU basketball. The Tigers, after a 13-1 regular season and a co-championship in the Southeastern Conference, went to Atlantic City and played the best team in the East, the Pittsburgh Panthers, and won.

They called Wade the "Little Giant from Jena," and he could make a basketball do almost anything. He was 5-6 and a smaller preview of what would come in the late 1960s with Pete Maravich.

In 1935, the Tigers had a very favorable schedule that saw them play only three of 14 games away from the comfort of the Gym-Armory. The road games weren't bad trips at all, even in those days. One was to Houston to face Rice and the other two were to New Orleans to face Tulane.

The only loss of the season was that game against Rice, 56-47. Wade jokingly said in later years of that game, "The Rice Gym was an old auditorium with one chandelier with twenty-five watt bulbs. You could not see your feet or the color of uniforms. Even the floor was unwaxed."

But that was the only time the Tigers stumbled. Ironically, there was no SEC Tournament that particular year so LSU and Kentucky would not meet in basketball that season. Kentucky, undefeated in the conference, had not lost to LSU in a hoops contest and wouldn't until 26 years later.

So LSU and Pittsburgh were invited to the battle for the American Legion Bowl before some 5,000 at the Atlantic City Auditorium. LSU won by four, 41-37, but that tells so little of the story.

It was April 13, 1935. Doc Carlson's Panthers were 18-5 on the season. The Tigers started out very, very slow at a time when scoring points could be easily at a premium. The Tigers trailed 18-4 and still were down by nine, 26-17, at the half.

Gradually LSU rallied back. Buddy Blair made a long shot to give LSU a 35-33 lead. He then followed it with the next six points for the Tigers. Pittsburgh outscored LSU 17-16 in field goals, but LSU had a 9-3 advantage from the free throw line.

Blair led all scorers with 20 points, Shongaloo Lindsey added eight, Sparky Wade five, Jack Harris four and Arnold Bryan and Ben Journey two apiece. While Wade's point total

was down, his ball handling and court presence meant much to LSU's win.

The Advocate trumpeted the news the next day: "Louisiana State University, power in the Southeastern Conference, came from far behind tonight to defeat the University of Pittsburgh, Eastern Conference champion, 41-37, in their intersectional basketball game.

"The Bayou Tigers from Baton Rouge, trailing 26-17 at the half, smothered Pittsburgh in the second half with their flashy passing and scored goal after goal from the field."

"Pittsburgh used a figure-eight offense," Buddy Blair once said. "We had not seen this before and it hindered us in the first half. In the second half, we got our fast break going and just about ran them crazy."

In the days before Bob Pettit arrived on campus, Harry Rabenhorst said in 1951 that Wade was head and shoulders the best player on campus. "We've had some great boys here at LSU. We've had some great ones, but Sparky Wade was the most spectacular and most colorful. He was a showman and probably the greatest dribbler in basketball. Sparky came to delight the fans. He never came up short on that count."

"I'm not as great as they say I am," Sparky once said. "I'm just a little fellow — five-eight if I stretch — but you know, basketball is the silliest game in the world. You have 10 guys and only one basketball, and if I have the ball, who can beat me?"

In 1935, only one team could beat the Tigers and powerful Pittsburgh couldn't stop a second half onslaught that led to a special moment in LSU basketball: a chance to claim a national championship.

In 1994, the remaining living members of the team were honored and a banner lowered from the Maravich Center to forever honor the accomplishments of this great team in Tiger basketball history.

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