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### **The Sons of Westwood: John Wooden, UCLA, and the Dynasty that Changed College Basketball**

By John Matthew Smith. Published in 2013 by University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield. (334 pages).

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*The Sons of Westwood* is a unique blend of biographical information and socio-cultural history. While John Wooden and the impactful players of UCLA's men's basketball teams are the recurring characters of the book, the backdrop consisted of the important events in California and throughout the world during the 1960s and 70s. At times, it did not have the direct overlap of a Forrest Gump-like story, but Smith's description of events such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War in parallel with the formation and subsequent domination of college basketball's greatest dynasty added a one-of-a-kind perspective to the overly-chronicled life of John Wooden.

The first chapter uniquely ties Wooden's journey to the west coast and the uncertainties of leaving home with an account of the bustling and exponential growth of Southern California in the late 1940's. The Los Angeles area was booming economically, but with that came a lack of the regulation and moral rigidity of Wooden's Midwestern roots. As a result, Wooden wrestled with his decision to move, and remain in, California despite unprecedented on-court success. Like most Wooden books, this chapter outlined his humble upbringing in rural Indiana, the lessons bestowed upon him by his father about industriousness and hard work, and the role Ward "Piggy" Lambert played in the development of Wooden's coaching philosophy.

Chapter two, *The Wizard of Westwood*, introduces the characters and process with which Wooden transformed the rag-tag team of unconditioned athletes into a national powerhouse. Interlaced with stories of racial tensions and segregation in the south, Smith re-counts the significance of UCLA's integrated sport culture in the recruitment of Walt Hazzard. The success of Jackie Robinson in football and Willie Naulls in basketball went a long way in securing the effervescent point guard from urban Philadelphia. Like our society's struggle with race relations, this chapter highlights Wooden's struggle to coach the free-wheeling Hazzard, deal with the overt racism when travelling with his team in the Deep South, and ultimately, capture UCLA's first NCAA Championship.

The third chapter covers UCLA's fight for a second NCAA championship and introduces one of the preeminent stars of this dynasty, Lew Alcindor. Starting with upbringing in socially-

charged Harlem and ending with his decision to join Wooden in Westwood, this chapter uncovers the microcosm of Alcindor's choice. It draws the parallel that many had at the time between life on the East coast and perceptions of the laidback, socially-aware life in California.

The previous chapters lay the foundation for the fourth chapter's chronicle of Alcindor's culture shock and failure to live the California dream. Most harrowing, it details Alcindor's realization that no place in America was free from racial tensions witnessed in the South. This realization was compounded by the passing of the historic Civil Rights Act of 1964, Texas Western's victory over Kentucky, and the enormous spotlight placed on him for his on-court performance. Alcindor began to see a national platform to express his opinion on social issues and his discontent with California. This is where notorious booster, Sam Gilbert, is introduced as Smith describes his role in keeping the game-changing Alcindor in Westwood.

Now a theme of the book, Wooden remained not the central figure of chapter five. Alcindor was once again a focus as was athletic director J.D. Morgan. Smith weaved the highly publicized 1968 NCAA tournament loss to Houston with Muhammad Ali's anti-war campaign, the 1968 Olympic boycott, and precipitous commercialization of college basketball. Through the words of the players, Smith began to paint a picture of Wooden struggling to consistently maintain order and discipline among the entire team. Between Alcindor's social agenda and Lucius Allen's misbehaving, it is becoming evident that a double standard was forming.

I applaud Smith for his objective tone in chapter six as he continues to explain the discipline and philosophy schism between Wooden and his players. Assistant coach Jerry Norman, who retired from coaching to work on Wall Street in 1968, also described his belief that it was the recruitment of top talent that formed the UCLA dynasty, not the head coach. This chapter ends with Alcindor's last game, the 1969 NCAA National Championship.

Chapter seven pitted the morally rigid lessons of Wooden against the growing counterculture of college students. Most notably, an antiestablishment among athletes that was new and unnerving for Wooden. No longer would athletes blindly accept his philosophies. In this chapter, Smith did an admirable job showing the microcosm between UCLA basketball and the rest of the country. From on campus violence to direct player dissention, Wooden was portrayed as the establishment of the late 1960s, conservative, inflexible, and unsympathetic

Enter Bill Walton, who Smith slyly tagged the *Red Menace*. In an era where most professional and college sports were dominated by black athletes, Walton appeared at first glance to be a breath of fresh air for the "silent majority." However, "The great white hope" was socially conscious and cared deeply about the fractured race relations across the country including within college basketball. Much to Wooden's chagrin, Walton was another player who received a great deal of individual attention for his play and his politics.

The narrative on Bill Walton continued in chapter nine as Smith described the 1972-73 college basketball season. As the reader learns more of Walton, the dichotomy of his uniqueness becomes more and more evident. That is, on one hand, he desired greatly to be an individual; a giant representation of the growing counterculture of hippies and beatniks of the 1970s. On the other hand, he wanted to win. This personal drive to win clashed with the counterculture's view of America's competitive ethic. As a result, the 6'11 superstar became a paradox, and while he challenged Wooden and provided a great deal of stress to the 62-year old coach, his respect of Wooden and his desire to win gave the duo a common goal which ultimately resulted in another NCAA championship.

In chapter 10, Smith constructs an unmistakable analogy between the crumbling dynasty of UCLA basketball and the growing dissention among Americans. Economic schizophrenia,

Watergate, and an unfortunate end to the Vietnam War paralleled UCLA's up and down 1973-74 season. Four losses for the highly-talented team including an NCAA semi-final to NC State, the increasing involvement of booster Sam Gilbert, and a suddenly tired and weary Wooden set the stage for the final chapter.

The 1974-75 campaign was the final act for Wooden as the team won the NCAA tournament for an unprecedented 10<sup>th</sup> time in 12 seasons. It also signified the end of an era for UCLA basketball as the heat surrounding Sam Gilbert's improprieties reached a fervent boil and the coaching carousel to replace Wooden began. The team never saw the sustained success it once had. In fact, no team has imposed such dominance. The culmination of the book delves into the repercussions of the Dynasty, and recounts Wooden's opinion on the growing commercialization of college sport. In today's highly-publicized college sport landscape, the UCLA teams are viewed as a foreign time period. It is perceived as a period free from boosters, commercialism, selfish athletes, and unscrupulous agents. In *Sons of Westwood*, Smith provides detailed proof that it is not much different than it is now.

In all, Smith portrayed Wooden objectively. The Wizard of Westwood may have been the most consistent figure for UCLA basketball in the 1960s and 70s, but he was not always the most critical. From superstars with an agenda to role players with an attitude, Smith chronicled a locker room that was coming of age with the rest of the Baby Boomers. This transformation was only compounded by the socially-charged time period of race riots and anti-war sit-ins. This book may not provide the X's and O's blueprint some seek when researching Wooden, but it does provide a unique glimpse behind the Wizard's curtain as he not-so-easily navigated the personalities, egos, boosters, racists, and draft dodgers to create a cohesive winning machine.