

# A UMED Basketball Story: *Win-or-Go-Home*

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No one gave us a chance. During the zenith of UMED basketball in 1989-90, the University of Maryland European Division (UMED) basketball squad shocked the Campbell Barracks USAREUR Over-30 basketball league. This is a very tiny footnote in history – due in part to the closure in 2013 of Campbell Barracks, home of the United States Army Headquarters Europe (USAREUR) – but to those around and involved, the 1990 UMED basketball playoff run was a remarkable feat.

## Joining UMED

In August 1984, as part of the largest new group of Annually Appointed Faculty cohorts, I joined UMED to teach Computer Studies in support of an expanded military education contract that UMED had just secured. As an Annual lecturer, my initial assignment was Lindsey Air Station in Wiesbaden, Germany with subsequent assignments at other sites in Germany and two terms in Lakenheath, UK.

An Annual lecturer's lifestyle was an imperfect match for introverts. Being assigned for just one 8-week long term, and if lucky, for two consecutive terms, to a base where you know no one going in, was a challenge. The ever-important Field Reps were crucial to settling in and finding a short-term place to



*Dinner with UMED Colleagues at a Heidelberg Restaurant in 1994*

live. And for all but the smallest bases, the built-in UMED community included another Annual faculty or two as well as Term Appointed faculty. Especially during the first couple of years, the customary 10 p.m. dinner after class with other faculty was my social highlight. Being a Computer Studies faculty, I was wowed by dinner conversation topics that were outside my computer and basketball areas of expertise. It became obvious to me later that I had enjoyed the good fortune of

sharing meals with talented people with deep expertise in Philosophy, Psychology,

Sociology, History, Art, and Literature. It would be a challenge to select more engaging dinner guests.

My 10 p.m. dinner companions included faculty such as Bill Kerr, Jean Mandola, David Pugh, Stephen Richards, Jayne Traendly, Pat Glass, Cynthia Gracianette, and Ward Terrell – all of whom I learned from, and they certainly helped an introvert adjust to new surroundings.

Joining a basketball team while an Annual lecturer was merely an aspiration, even for a person like me from basketball happy Indiana. As an Annual, it would be challenging for me to name five people I knew at the base, let alone be in a position to join a basketball team. Besides, I would be moving on to my next teaching assignment in 8 weeks.

Therefore, as an Annual, I pursued individual sports during my leisure time rather than team sports. Running was one such activity, and it was Lecturer Patrick Quinn who introduced me to German forests with kilometers of lovely paths through pine trees. Even today I can recall the refreshing pine scent from freshly logged trees while on five-mile runs.

## Squash

Although weekend skiing trips to the Alps organized by local bases' Activity Centers were superb, my favorite individual sport as an Annual lecturer was Squash, what I thought was a little-known racquet sport I first learned while attending Purdue University. After graduation I never thought I would play it again. In the USA, Racquetball was the dominant indoor racquet sport. Seeing that Europe didn't even appear to have Racquetball courts was an American-centric busting (and learning) moment for me. Instead, it was Squash, the racquet sport from my Purdue days, that reigned.

With good fortune, Stephen Richards – at the time a faculty member – introduced me to “Squash 13,” a German Squash facility not too far from the Abrams Complex in Frankfurt Germany. Over a couple of years, we played countless games of Squash there as a UMED faculty's schedule meshed quite nicely with the morning and afternoon off-peak court availability times.

This brings me to another American-centric learning moment. After a good squash game, we enjoyed Squash 13's sauna room. I enjoyed the sauna not only for its sore muscle rejuvenating benefits, but also for the learning opportunity to realize that clothing optional co-ed saunas were quite common in Germany. The master's level learning opportunity for me was when I had a Squash game as a first date with a German woman. It was very normal for her – but a culturally revealing experience for this introvert – to continue our first date afterwards in the sauna room. Quite the learning moment.

Cultural awareness opportunities like this and the many others I encountered during my Overseas Marylander time are why I – if I had a magic wand – would require every American to live in a foreign country for at least a year. I am certainly richer for it and grateful to have had the opportunity.

## The Heidelberg Office

My life with UMED abruptly changed in 1988 when I accepted the Assistant Computer Studies Coordinator position in the UMED headquarters at Im Bosseldorn 30 in Heidelberg. Rinaldo Vachino was the longtime head of the department but was on sabbatical at that time, and so George Innis was the department head when I joined.

Overnight my social life changed. With around 175 people working at UMED Headquarters office, I found an exceptional camaraderie among staff; something that – at the time – I naively assumed would be a feature of all my future jobs. Naïve indeed. In my career, I discovered my Maryland experience was the rare exception rather than the rule. The source of this unique esprit de corps, and



*At my desk. UMED Heidelberg Office - April 1989*

why it is hard to replicate, would have engendered a lively 10 p.m. after-class dinner conversation if I were still teaching.

We worked hard and had fun together – both at work and outside of work. Bicycle rides after work were especially enjoyable as there were lovely paths through fields, forests, and along the Neckar river – just perfect for rides with colleagues like Denise Sokolowski, John Floyd, Sam Lawrence, and Larry Arnoldy among many others.

(Regarding bicycles, I must confess to a missed opportunity during my UMED adventure. In subsequent years I became a serious bicycle enthusiast, and had the good fortune in 2017 of riding my bicycle every inch of the way across the USA from Los Angeles to Boston, from the Pacific to the Atlantic in 33 days. My missed opportunity was that I was oblivious – as most Americans were in the 1980s – to the 21-day long *Tour de France* bicycle race. By happenstance in July 1989 I accompanied my colleague Tom Crain and Lecturer Barbara Rips on a weekend outing to Luxembourg. (Historical note: Tom and Barbara were married in 1991, and in 1992, when we were all living in the Washington D.C. area, Tom was responsible for me meeting my wife). Upon arrival in Luxembourg, we were perplexed why the city was flooded with people and bicycles. Although we did not know it at the time, Luxembourg was the 1989 TdF *Grand Départ* city, and the TdF was won that year by American Greg LeMond. Oh, to be able to understand the significance of that weekend at the time.)

## **UMED Basketball**

The UMED offices were literally and conveniently at the back gate of Campbell Barracks, and many staff members used Campbell for meals (a military cafeteria, an officer's club, and a tasty German Kaserne). We also frequently used its exercise and gym facilities including occasional pick-up basketball games.

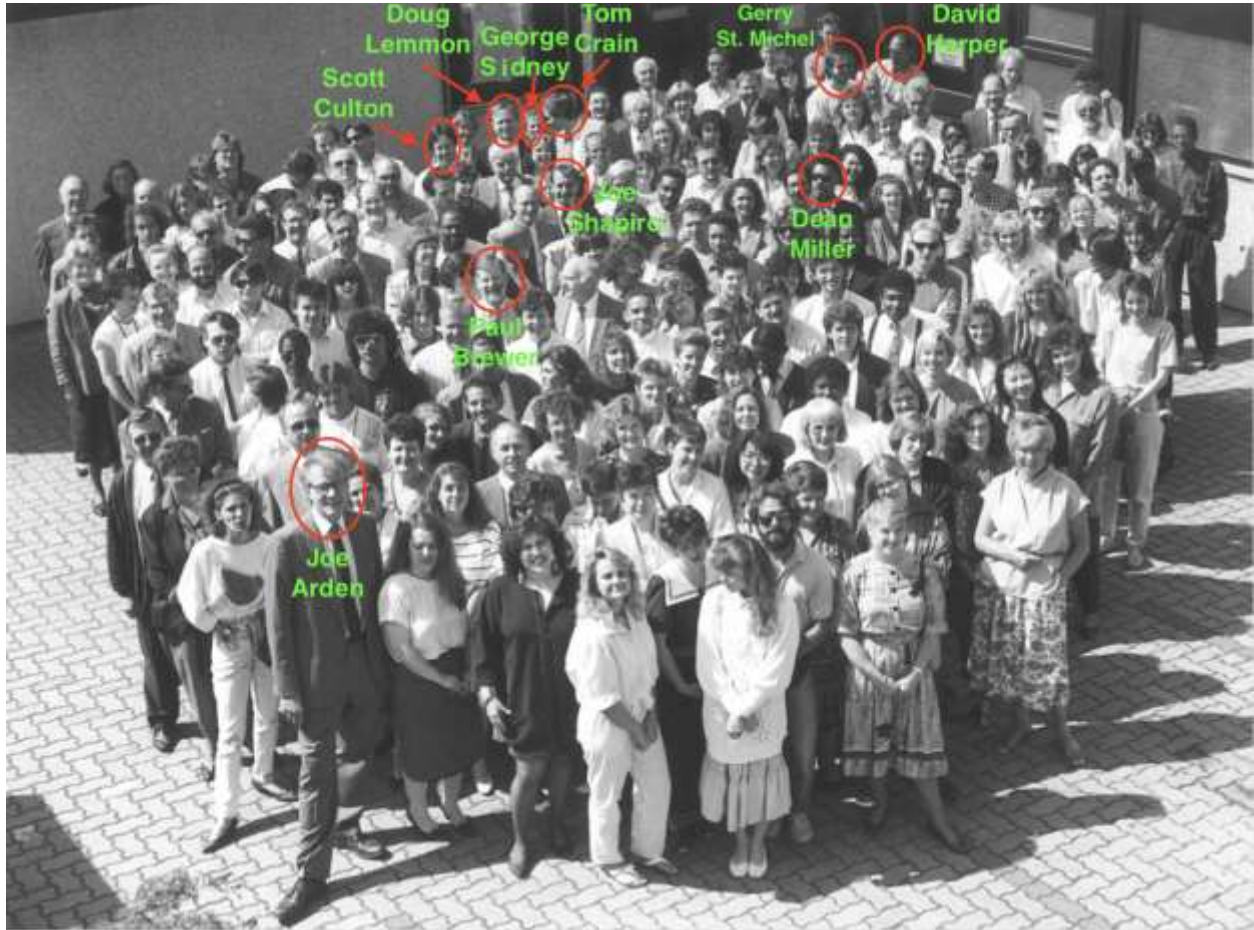
When the Campbell Barracks Over-30 basketball season began in 1989, the idea of forming a UMED basketball team cued a search for possible teammates. It was not assured that we could find enough prospects who were over 30 and interested – or at least had the spirit – to give it a go.

Using moderate to heavy amounts of cajoling, we conscripted 12 people to our cause. The result: UMED had a basketball team! The team included me from Computer Studies, Area Directors Paul Brewer and Joe Shapiro, Assistant Area Director Tom Crain, John Hurdle from ISAC, Scott Culton and Dean Miller from Computer Field Support, David Harper from the Textbooks, and Academic Advisor Gerry St. Michel.

As is common with Overseas Marylanders, there was a surprising amount of talent. For example, David Harper had a stellar basketball career playing for the Dept of Defense Dependents School (DoDDS) high school team in Heidelberg. Tom Crain was forbidden by his high school swimming coach from playing basketball, but at 6' 4" he had a natural advantage and ability for it. The capstone of my high school basketball career was beating future NBA All-Star Larry Bird's high school team. Our team captain and player-coach was UMED Director Joe Arden, our "ringer" due to his successful college basketball career at Hardin Simmons University, where he has been selected to their basketball Hall of Fame. It must be duly noted, however, that Joe's birthday that year made him eligible for an Over-50 league.

We were the only civilian team in this military league, which raised the question, "Is Maryland actually eligible to field a team in a military league?" This question – "Is Maryland actually eligible for ... ?" – regularly popped up as faculty and administrators did their work at military bases throughout Europe. Often there was a work-around or an exception made, but many times not. For this particular situation,

it was helpful that league officials sized us up as easy marks and, therefore, were pleased to have us. And, just like that, we were in a league with well-conditioned military basketball teams, whose players were all early to mid 30s in age. They even had a couple of their own “ringer” players who had played for the West Point basketball team.



*Entire UMED Heidelberg Office 1989 – Basketball teammates identified.*

## 1989 Season

The 1989 season was a building year. We started the season with a roster of 12, and then the carnage began. Scott Culton had a knee injury. Paul Brewer (who would have qualified for an Over-40 league) had an injury as did Joe Shapiro (also an Over-40 candidate). And John Hurdle, Director of ISAC, burst his achilles tendon – painful! – during a game requiring him to wear a cast for a few months.

Fortunately, there were survivors. We had a fair season that first year with tremendous fan support from the office, including Ruby Kelly-King from the Registration Office, Linda O’Reily from the Director’s Office, Franny Kollenz from Logistics, Lisa Castro from the Switchboard, Arlene Pyatok, and Rob & Denise Sokolowski from the UMED Library among the 15 or so loyal supporters. Denise and Rob earned the title of “super fans” because they hosted our team’s awards banquet in their apartment after each of the two seasons.

Our fans made good use of “whizzers” and cheers to bring excitement to the stark Campbell Barracks gym. And it must be noted that George Sidney, who had not played serious basketball in over a decade, was a hero at one game when he was called into service – on very short notice – to avoid a forfeit. Due to our depleted roster and work commitments, George (eligible for the Over-50 league) was our 5<sup>th</sup> player at one game, although it is rumored that he never actually touched the basketball the entire game, and if he had, he would have launched a “set shot.” (Inside joke) Actually, we were quite pleased that George did not join our lengthy casualty list that night.

## 1990 Season

A new year brings optimism. And new recruits. And healing from injuries. We had a cohesive, experienced group of returning players. For 1990, the 10<sup>th</sup> player on our 10-person roster was a bit of a bonus as he was Annually Appointed Lecturer, Rob Hepler, assigned to the Heidelberg area. Hmm. Coincidence, or fate?

The core players were guards David Harper (Textbooks) and Doug Lemmon (Computer Studies), forwards Joe Arden (UMED Director), Dean Miller (Computer Field Support), Rob Hepler (Lecturer), and dominating the center position, Tom Crain (Asst Director–Mediterranean).

Improving each game as the season progressed, we peaked right at tourney time. Our super power was our looks. Longer hair and our over-40 and over-50 aged players were effective camouflage against our crew-cut 30-something military opponents. They continually mis-judged our competitiveness. HOO-AH!!



*UMED Teammates in 2013: Joe Arden, Tom Crain, Doug Lemmon*

The single-elimination “Win-or-Go-Home” tourney began with us winning the first game. Not unexpected given our good year, yet consensus had us losing the next game. The next night we beat expectations and won round 2. That surely was the end; no way for us to go further. But we were not yet ready to Go Home. Our next game was the tourney semi-finals game the following night. By this time our super power had been discovered, and we were now assessed to be the formidable opponents we were. Too late. Our momentum propelled us to victory in Friday night’s semi-finals game! On to the finals!!! But first a well-earned good night’s sleep to recharge.

Hold on. League officials wanted to conclude the tourney that same evening. They did not want the tourney to run into the weekend. The other team in the championship game had won their semi-finals game earlier in the day and was ready to play that night. We had just completed a hard-fought, exhausting semi-finals game and preferred playing the championship game the following day. A reasonable request ... that was reasonably denied. The USAREUR Campbell Barracks Over-30 Championship game would begin in 30 minutes.

I would like to write that we won the championship game, on a last second shot like in the basketball movie, *Hoosiers*. In reality, our super power became our weakness. Our over-30, over-40, and over-50 aged legs did not have enough juice left to win a second time that day. Might have been different with a night's rest. Regardless of the outcome, however, we knew we were a championship team.

## Epilogue

For the few of you who have made it this far, I hope you have grasped a sense of the magic that made our Overseas Marylander time so unique, special, and wonderful. Of course, I know this story about a basketball team of 30 years ago is of no consequence. But in basketball, one learns about a person's character during hard fought struggles. Focus, intensity, and graciousness can be their own super powers when wielded for good.

Our coach and team captain played with such a notable focus and intensity and graciousness that he was the person one would want leading the development of a high stakes "*Win-or-Go-Home*" military education contract proposal. Literally, if the UMED did not win the military education contract, then UMED would have to cease operations and go home. And, indeed, Joe assembled his proposal writing teams and guided them to a perfect, undefeated record spanning several decades – both in Europe and in Asia. All time. Undefeated. And because of that, we Overseas Marylanders were able to be champions in providing educational opportunities to military members around the world. And to make lifelong friends.

That is what really is of consequence.