



The Spirit of Rider University

by: Brian J. Kelley '97

Before the academic buildings, library and residence halls, Alumni Gymnasium stood as a new chapter in the history of Rider University. As the first new building completed on the Lawrenceville campus, Alumni Gym represented the first step in Rider's relocation to Lawrenceville and symbolized the growth of the college.

Since first opening its doors in 1958, Alumni Gym has been the site of many thrilling and emotional moments in Rider athletics, as well as hosting musical performances, prominent speakers, and celebrities.

In the '90s, driven by the success of the men's basketball team under the guidance of head coach **Kevin Bannon**, wild and raucous fans packed Alumni Gym to the rafters. This new atmosphere transformed Alumni Gym into what has become known as the Broncs' Zoo.

The Zoo is where Rider athletics enjoyed its shining moment. The Broncs trailed Wagner, 64-63, with just four seconds left to play in the 1993 Northeast Conference Tournament title game. Before a national audience watching on ESPN, **Darrick Suber** ('93) took an inbound pass, dribbled the length of the floor and hoisted a running jumper that dropped through the net as the final buzzer sounded. "The Shot," as it came to be known, gave the Broncs a thrilling 65-64 win that sent them to the NCAA Tournament.

The Glory of the Game

The legendary **Clair Bee** came to Rider in 1926 and began the college's intercollegiate athletic programs. During his second year of coaching the men's basketball team, the Roughriders finished 17-2 and became the nation's first squad to compile



more than 1,000 points in a single season.

Jack Madden ('65) played for the men's basketball team during its first season in Alumni Gym and went on to a Hall of Fame career as an official with the NBA.

Richard 'Digger' Phelps ('63) was a reserve on the men's basketball team for two seasons, but as a graduate assistant coach developed a scouting report that led to the Broncs ending New York University's 23-year homecourt winning streak in 1964. He later enjoyed a successful head coaching career at Notre Dame before becoming a college basketball analyst for ESPN.

Bannon guided the Broncs to six straight seasons of .500 or better finishes

from '91-'92 through '96-'97, compiling a 107-69 mark during that span. Rider reached the NCAA Tournament in '93 and '94, and appeared on national television six times. His successor, **Don Harnum**, took over in '97-'98 - Rider's first season in the MAAC - and guided

the Broncs to an 18-10 record and their first-ever trip to the NIT.

Under Coach **Gary Taylor**, the wrestling team won the ECC championship in 1984, the first conference title for any Rider sport. The squad reached its highest-ever ranking of fifth in the nation in 1997, winning the ECWA title and boasting multiple All Americans for the first time. From '96 to '00, the wrestling team won five straight ECWA titles and produced six All Americans.

The women's volleyball team won three consecutive NEC titles from 1994 to 1997 and became the first women's sport at Rider to play in an NCAA tournament.

An Eye to the Future

Nearly a half century ago, Rider's leaders sought to ensure the survival of the institution by stepping out of Trenton to create a campus in Lawrenceville that would provide room to grow. The spirit of that initiative was captured in Alumni Gym.

This fall, Rider athletics will begin an exciting, new chapter...stay tuned. ▶



(above) This rendering shows the concept for Rider's new Sports and Recreation Center (left) The Alumni Gymnasium