




# 100 YEARS

# of Ho

Men's Basketball at Canisius Marks a Century of  
Buzzer Beaters,

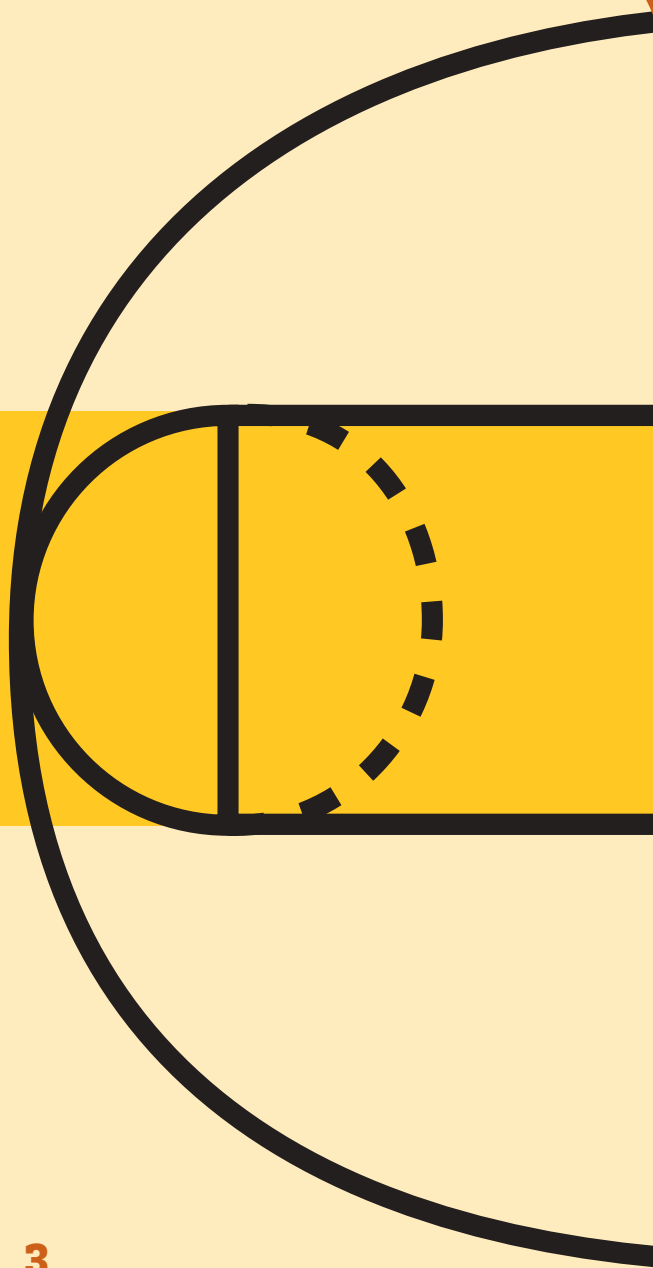
**EVER SINCE ITS FIR**

Canisius College Men's Basketball has thrilled countless sports fans in and around Western New York. The hype on the hardwoods all began when a team of men representing both Canisius College and Canisius Prep upended a squad named Gordon's to the tune of 14-6. The Golden Griffins have since scored tiebreaking triumphs, netted unimaginable upsets and courted nine postseason appearances to intercollegiate tournaments.



# 100 YEARS

# of Basketball



## Riveting Rivalries and Fanatic Fanfare

### ST TIP OFF IN 1903,

This exhilarating, 100-year history is what makes basketball the premier sport at Canisius today. So, as the Golden Griffins celebrate a century of games and become the first Division I school in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference to mark such a milestone, *Canisius College Magazine* offers its own play-by-play of the past 100 years.

# Our Forever Team

by Erik Brady '76

*Once upon a time, when Canisius was the little college that could, a basketball spun in the air and all things seemed possible.*

Close your eyes even now and perhaps you can conjure an image of that long-ago long shot, rotating gorgeously like the earth on its axis, floating in the charged atmosphere of Madison Square Garden in 1956.

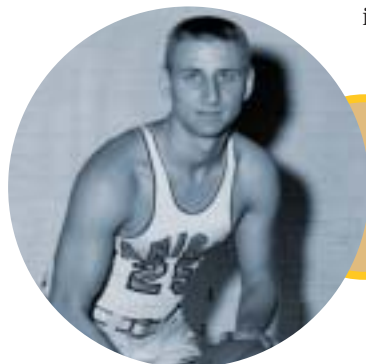
**Fran Corcoran '56**, who had missed his only other shot from the field in the first half, released this 18-foot jumper from the right side of the key with six seconds to play and Canisius trailing by one point in the fourth overtime of a first-round NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) tournament game against North Carolina State, ranked No. 2 in all the land.

The orange orb arced gracefully toward the basket — and splashed cleanly through, sealing a Forever Game for Forever's Team: Canisius 79, N.C. State 78, 4 OT. That spinning ball, and the still-startling series of events that came before and after its fingertip release, stand as the crowning moments of the first 100 years of Canisius College basketball.

This is the story of the golden age of the

Golden Griffins. Canisius made the NCAA tournament three times in the mid-1950s, twice coming within a game of the Final Four and once pulling an upset in four overtimes that ranks among the greatest in the history of a tournament that is defined by its roster of great upsets.

Oddly, it is a story that Canisians somehow do not know by rote. For a school that uses a mythological beast as its mascot, we are not very good at celebrating our own mythology. Maybe it is because



*"We were one game from the Final Four two years in a row."*

— HANK NOWAK '57

Canisius made its March madness before the television age that we have allowed some of our history to leak away, like air from an old ball.

If film could be found, Corcoran's magical mystery ball would spin anew each March in a montage of the all-time great buzzer beaters. Instead, it spins only in our

collective imagination. It is enough.

Cue the theme song from "Happy Days." Slip on that old letter sweater. And return with us now to those heroic days of yesteryear, an era when the little Jesuit school from Buffalo not only played and beat nationally ranked teams but was itself sometimes ranked in the Top 10.

Even now, Canisius is ranked in a particular Top 10: Last spring, ESPN.com named the 10 greatest upsets in NCAA tournament history. Sixth on that list is the N.C. State game, when the undersized

underdogs from the school with the funny name knocked off the mighty champions of the Atlantic Coast Conference.

The game remains the longest played in NCAA tournament history. (St. Joseph's beat Utah in four overtimes in the consolation game of the 1961 Final Four but that game was expunged when St. Joe's third-place finish was vacated in a gambling scandal.)

*Buffalo Evening News* Sportswriter Dick Johnston caught up with N.C. State Coach Everett Case walking the streets of New



1955-56 team

York in a wet spring snow after the most bitter loss of his career. Case credited the Griffs for their hustle and their fight, then added a fitting benediction. "Basketball is a funny game," he said. "You never know."

True enough. The Griffs would find out about that themselves in excruciating fashion two games later, when they lost to Temple in a controversial finish in the East Regional final. But more about that later.

"We were one game from the Final Four two years in a row," says **Hank Nowak '57**, a stalwart on all three of those NCAA tournament teams. "We thought at the time that Canisius would have a chance like that every few years."

### THOSE FABULOUS '50s

Canisius won six games and lost three in NCAA tournament play in 1955, '56 and '57. They played in the East Regional finals, one step from the Final Four, in '55 and '56. And the 1956-57 Griffs went 22-6 and were rated as high as No. 6 in the nation before finishing No. 19.

That team's 20-5 regular season included wins against Louisville, Notre Dame, Minnesota and Alabama, in addition to Little Three rivals St. Bonaventure and Niagara. The Griffs lost in the second round

of the NCAA tournament to North Carolina, which was on its way to a 32-0 record and a triple overtime win in the finals against Kansas and Wilt Chamberlain.

Canisius had beaten West Virginia and star Hot Rod Hundley, 64-56, in the first round. The Griffs' loss to North Carolina came by 87-75 against one of the great teams in college hoops history. Canisius then won a consolation game against Lafayette, which remains its last victory in the NCAA tournament. (Canisius has played just one other NCAA tournament game, losing to Utah in 1996. The Griffs have also appeared in the National Invitation Tournament five times, including two trips to the NIT Final Four, where they finished second in 1963 and fourth in '95.)

The 1954-55 Griffs finished the regular season 16-6, including wins against Georgia Tech, Villanova and Boston College — and three against St. Bona, one of those in the Queen City Tournament. They beat Williams in the first round of the NCAA tournament, which set up a rematch against Villanova.

Canisius had won the earlier game 86-63 at the Palestra in Philadelphia. This time,

on the same court, the score was tied at 71 with 2:02 to play. **Johnny McCarthy '56**, a broth of a boy from South Buffalo, dribbled away almost two solid minutes before breaking to the basket, where he was fouled with three seconds left. McCarthy hit both free throws: Canisius 73, Villanova 71.

That set up an East Regional final against defending national champion LaSalle and star Tom Gola. LaSalle romped 99-64. Canisius ached for another chance.

Fran "Swish" Corcoran '56





*"Some would say we got a bad call. I never do. No game is decided on one call."*

— COACH JOE CURRAN

The 1955-56 Griffis — our Forever Team — finished 17-6 in the regular season, including two wins each against Bona, Niagara and Syracuse and single wins against Holy Cross, Boston College and Villanova.

Canisius was ranked in the Top 10 for the first time that season but had fallen out of the Associated Press poll by the time the Griffis played second-ranked N.C. State at the Garden. The score was knotted at 65 at the end of regulation, 69 at the end of the first overtime and 71 at the end of the second and third OTs.

N.C. State led 78-77 with 14 seconds to play when Canisius co-captain **Bob Kelly '56** wisely fouled John Maglio, who stepped to the line for a one-and-one — and missed. **Dave Markey '57**, at 5-10, ripped down the rebound for Canisius and passed to **Jim McCarthy '57** at mid-court, who found

Corcoran near the top of the key. Corcoran dribbled once and uncorked a pretty jump shot with six seconds left. Swish! N.C. State quickly in-bounded the ball under Canisius pressure but

Nowak played all 60 minutes and scored 29 points, besting N.C. State All-America Ron Shavlik, who had 25. Co-captains McCarthy and Kelly added 16 and 14 respectively.

Corcoran, the Griffis' sixth man, had taken only one shot from the field in the game's first 59 minutes and 54 seconds but he was by nature not shy about shooting. His friends sometimes bet beers on how soon he would fire away after entering a game and the winning bet was often under 20 seconds.

"I took that last shot because I wanted us to have time for a rebound if I missed,"

Corcoran says. "If I'd had time to think about what that shot meant I probably would have air-balled it. But it went through and I can still hear the crowd. It wasn't a cheer, more like a gasp — like the crowd couldn't believe what it was seeing."



Bill Mazer, who broadcast the game on Buffalo radio, lost his voice in the excitement. And a boy listening at home in Niagara Falls found the game so enchanting that he decided on the spot to become a sportswriter, as Curry Kirkpatrick would tell the world in a 1986 story in *Sports Illustrated*.

Canisius beat Ivy League champ Dartmouth, 66-58, in the second round. That set the stage for a second consecutive Eastern Regional final, again against a Philadelphia team on its home court at the Palestra. (Under current rules, teams can't play regional games on their home courts.) This time there would be no blowout.

### SO CLOSE, YET SO FAR

Canisius raced out to a 26-13 lead over Temple, fell behind 29-28 and led at the half 30-29. Markey, who hit all seven of his shots from the field, gave Canisius its last lead at 58-56. Jay Norman tied it for the Owls on a tip-in with 1:37 left to play.

Everyone in the gym knew the Griffis would stall for the last shot. They melted away more than a minute when Norman charged at Kelly near midcourt with 24 seconds left. The ball came loose, Kelly retrieved it — and a whistle blew. Canisius was called for a backcourt violation by Tommy Bell, who was also an NFL official and 10 years later was named referee for the first Super Bowl.

Canisius partisans argued that the call was plainly wrong on three counts. First, they argued Norman should have been called for a foul. Second, even if no foul was called, they argued that once Norman knocked the ball out, it was a loose ball, negating an over-and-back violation. And third, they argued that in any case Kelly's sneaker never landed on the line.

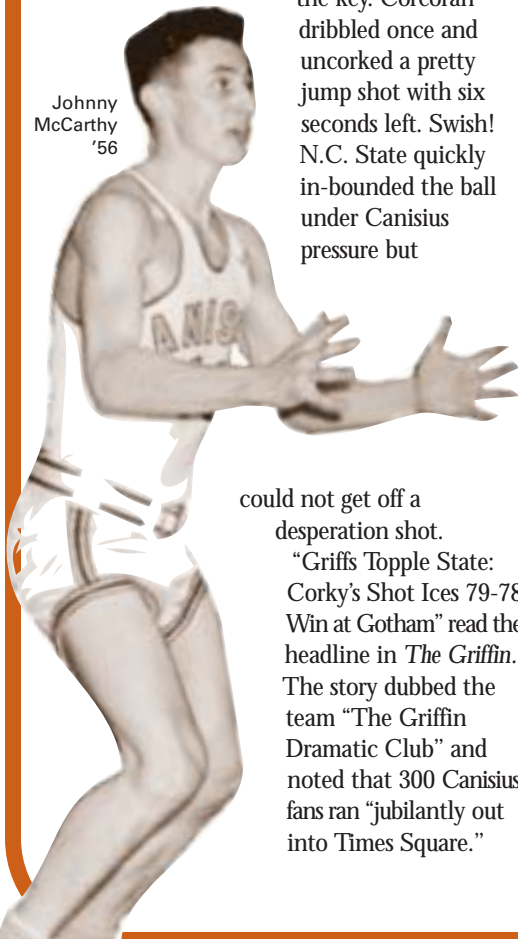
"I did not step on that line," Kelly insists. "I'm sure of it. The official was out of position."

**Joe Curran**, the Forever Coach, will have none of it. He is 81 now and retired in

## "Basketball is a funny game."

Florida. "Many people told us Canisius got robbed," Curran says. "But we had two very capable officials. We thought Bob got the ball all right but it is a matter of opinion. Some would say we got a bad call. I never do. No game is decided on one call. If we had a three-point lead at the time, the call wouldn't have mattered."

Johnny McCarthy '56



could not get off a desperation shot. "Griffs Topple State: Corky's Shot Ices 79-78 Win at Gotham" read the headline in *The Griffin*. The story dubbed the team "The Griffin Dramatic Club" and noted that 300 Canisius fans ran "jubilantly out into Times Square."

A M E R I C A N

# Griff-iti

These are the words of a gentleman-coach, who recalls proudly that those NCAA tournament teams played 77 games over three seasons and were never once whistled for a technical foul for berating officials.

Temple could now hold for the last shot. Hal Lear drove the baseline and with two seconds to play, another whistle blew. **Joe Leone '57** blocked the ball cleanly but Bell ruled that Leone had gotten Lear with the body. "That's the call that bothers me more," John McCarthy says.

Lear sank two free throws. Kelly passed to John McCarthy, who quickly launched a shot from the deep left corner. The buzzer sounded with the ball in the air. But on this St. Patrick's Day, the luck of the Irish ran out on the Griffs of Curran, Kelly, Corcoran and a pair of McCarthys. The ball caught side rim and bounded away.

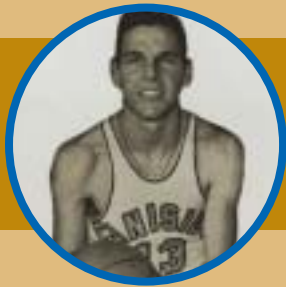
"Time Runs Out on Gallant Griffs," read the banner headline in the Sunday *Courier Express* over a stirring story by Ray Ryan. It was true: Time had run out for that game and for that season. But new gallant Griffs come back to play every year. Time is on their side: More magic will be made in the next 100 years.

The days of doubleheaders in the Aud and Top 10 rankings are gone. But great things are still possible. Basketball is a funny game. You never know.

Canisius plays in the competitive Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference. An automatic NCAA bid goes to the winner of the conference

## You never know."

tournament every year. Canisius won it in 1996. It will happen again some day. And when that day comes, the gallant Griffs are certain to be matched against one of the top teams in the country. Which means once upon a time can happen again — with a ball spinning in air and all things possible. •



"One stinkin' shot," Corcoran recalls telling Kelly. "I made one stinkin' shot and they'll always remember me."

One evening shortly before they would graduate from Canisius in 1956, Bob Kelly '56 and Fran Corcoran '56, high school pals from Philadelphia, sat at the bar in the Park Meadow.

"One stinkin' shot," Corcoran recalls telling Kelly. "I made one stinkin' shot and they'll always remember me."

Corcoran swished that stinkin' shot two months earlier to beat North Carolina State 79-78 in four overtimes in the NCAA tournament. Kelly had been by far the better player over their college careers but Corcoran had a point.

Kelly and John McCarthy '56 were co-captains of the 1955-56 Griffs; Kelly and Hank Nowak '57 were named to the all-tournament team for the 1956 East Regional. Kelly, known as "The Cop" for his stifling defense, was a starter and a star. Corcoran, known as "The Fireman" for his ability to bring a spark off the bench, was the team's sixth man.

Just then a patron walked in to the PM and spied the two gents at the bar. "Corky, great shot!" the man called. "Barkeep, get Corky a beer — and get one for his friend, too."

Corcoran looked at Kelly and said, "Bob, it's just starting."

Kelly doesn't remember that night at the PM but concedes it could have happened. McCarthy says it doesn't matter if it happened or not. "Corcoran tells that story every time we get together," McCarthy says. "By now it has to be true."

"Fran" is the way Corcoran is remembered in Canisius lore but he says only his mother and the sportswriters ever called him that. His Jesuit teachers called him Francis. His teammates called him Corky or Frank. And today some of his golfing buddies at Pinehurst, about 75 miles from N.C. State's campus, have yet another name for him. They call him Swish.

Forever's Team played in the era romanticized by *American Graffiti*, a movie made in the 1970s about the 1950s. That film ends with a thumbnail sketch telling how each character fared in life. Here now is a look at what happened to some other members of our own American Griff-iti: ►►

Mike Smrek '85

a tradition of

# Talented

**PIONEERS:**  
**Herm Hedderick ('49 - '52)**  
**and Larry O'Connor ('50 - '53)**

These Canisius Hall of Famers played in an era that defined unselfish basketball. According to O'Connor '53, "A good teammate has to be very willing to sacrifice himself. It could be passing the ball to someone who has a better shot, or hitting the floor for a loose ball and taking bumps and bruises for the sake of the team." One of the teammates O'Connor speaks so highly of is Hedderick '52, a talented forward who never experienced a losing season and still holds the record for rebounds in a year. Hedderick attributes this success to cooperation. "I think it was the team concept because we didn't really have an outstanding star. Some of the teams that came in from the West Coast had big stars...but we beat teams like Duke and Arizona."

O'Connor likens the ups and downs of building a business career to the ebb and flow of winning and losing. "You cannot exist in business without solid teamwork," O'Connor says. He should know. O'Connor parlayed his signature determination into considerable professional success, holding positions with IBM and Ford before launching his own company, Business Form Consultants. Hedderick was drafted by the Boston Celtics, then traded to New York where he appeared in five games during the '54 - '55 season. He returned to the Erie area where he worked for Pennsylvania Electric for 34 years. Hedderick says, "In basketball, you have to get along. You bring that into the

workplace. I always tried to treat other people the way I wanted to be treated."

**BUDDIES:**  
**Bob Kelly ('53 - '56)**  
**and Fran Corcoran ('53 - '56)**

Boyhood pals since third grade, Kelly '56 and Corcoran '56 are the quintessential teammates. The pair was part of the team that shocked second-ranked North Carolina State in 1956 and also played in two straight Eastern regional finals together. Kelly, a stellar floor leader and defensive guard, reflects on the team's tremendous success. "The main ingredient was a terrific camaraderie, what you call in sports 'chemistry.' All the guys liked each other and worked well together." Of his old friend, Kelly recalls with a laugh, "Fran was called 'The Fireman.'" His job when he got in was to fire up a couple shots. It was like turning the hose on a fire. If it worked, great, the fire was out. If it didn't, he came out of the game."

Corcoran, known for his one-handed jump shot, echoes his close friend's thoughts nearly verbatim, saying, "We all liked each other. We were willing to sacrifice anything for a victory — especially Bob Kelly. I don't think you find that too often." To illustrate

Herm Hedderick '52

Larry O'Connor '53

Fran Corcoran '56

Bob Kelly '56

# Tandems

by William E. Paterson '93

additional research by Jay Moran

his point, Corcoran recounts a discussion with Canisius great John McCarthy shortly after the latter began his pro career. "McCarthy said, 'I never realized how much everybody sacrificed for me.' In the pros, once you pass the ball, you don't get it back."

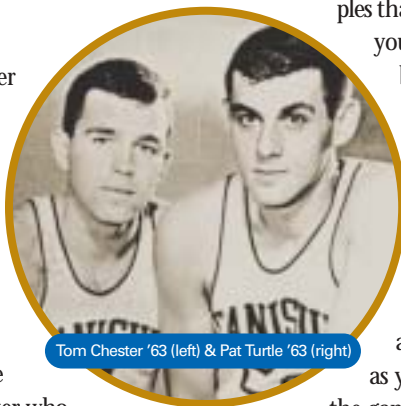
The pair's education on and off the court served them well. Kelly prospered in the computer business field, while Corcoran enjoyed a long career at Merrill Lynch. The long-time friends are both now retired.

## SOLDIERS:

**Tom Chester ('60 - '63)  
and Pat Turtle ('60 - '63)**

Both members of ROTC, Chester '63 and Turtle '63 dismantled opponents with military-like precision. Their three varsity teams never had a losing season. In their senior year, the Griffs won two games in the NIT before losing the championship to Providence. Says Chester, "We played teams that were taller than us but we played as a team. We were very unselfish. It shouldn't matter who scores the basket. The only thing that matters is the score at the end of the ballgame."

Turtle was the team's point guard and one of its captains. During his senior year, he broke his ankle midway through the season and missed nine straight games before heroically coming off the bench in the second half of the NIT semifinal against Villanova. Turtle says, "We were often out-sized and sometimes out-talented but we played together as a team so well that we were able to beat teams who may have had better talent than ours."



Tom Chester '63 (left) & Pat Turtle '63 (right)

The two men went on to long careers in dangerous fields. Chester, who spent 20 years in the military and retired as a lieutenant colonel says, "If I could see any one-to-one correlation, it would be with sports and the military. Basketball is a team sport. The military, it's not a sport, but I guarantee you that it exists solely on the confidence in the person to your left and to your right."

Turtle served his military commitment then returned home and joined the FBI. Of his athletic background, he says without hesitation,

"It was essential. The same principles that you learn as you play are applicable in life. In the FBI it was important because there were a lot of things you had to investigate. You would attack a situation as you would playing the game."

## CO-CAPTAINS:

**Tony Masiello ('67 - '69)  
and Terry Connors ('66 - '68)**

High-scoring forward Tony Masiello '69 and steady floor leader Terry Connors '68 still trade barbs today as if they were ready to lace up their sneakers at any moment. Connors jokingly refers to his old friend as a "shoot-first, pass-never" type of player. But he's quick to add, "These are not passing acquaintances. What you go through, what you achieve together, is a bond that stays with you forever."



Canisius Hall-of-Famer Masiello agrees. "Obviously, Terry and I are very close. We see each other and talk to each other all the time. But last night I got a call from a teammate who I may have seen five times since I graduated and it was just like old times. The fact is, these are relationships that will last a lifetime."

Connors, who moved from the court to the courtroom as a distinguished criminal defense attorney, says, "In sports you learn the kind of life lessons that you need to succeed. Believe me, when you had to compete every Saturday night in front of 13,000 people, you began to understand a little bit about pressure." Though drafted by the Indiana Pacers in 1969, Masiello put his playing days behind him and began a long career in public service that now has him serving as mayor of Buffalo. The mayor reflects, "Learning to play under pressure solidifies you as an adult. The more exposure you have to performing under pressure, the better you handle it." On reminiscing with old teammates like Masiello decades later Connors says, "The same nicknames, the same chidings are back in a flash." The mayor adds one more benefit, quipping, "The stories get a little better."

**OPPOSITES:**  
**Ray Hall ('81 - '85)**  
**and Mike Smrek ('81 - '85)**

A potent combination was born when "Sugar Ray" Hall '85, a sleek 6-5 guard from Buffalo's McKinley High School, met up with Mike Smrek '85, a seven-footer from Canada who had only recently learned the game. Together, their contrasting styles gave Canisius its most competitive teams of the 1980s, bringing the Griffins back into postseason play with an NIT appearance against Nebraska in 1985. The rock-steady Smrek owned the interior with his shot-blocking and is

still the school's leader in career field goal percentage. A truly complete basketball player, Hall remains the leading scorer in team history and also claims the school career mark for steals.

Smrek, who later earned two championship rings with the Los Angeles Lakers, defers to his gifted teammate when discussing the Golden Griffins of the early '80s. "You really realize how talented Ray was - the numbers he put up. Ray was a great, great player. But still, he played within the team game."

On the lessons he remembers from his playing days, Smrek says, "They still come into your mind today; the discipline, the commitment. Canisius will be valuable to me for the rest of my life, no matter what I do." After playing on and off in the NBA and Europe until 1997, Smrek is now concentrating on raising a family in his native Canada. Hall, who was drafted by the NBA's Utah Jazz, currently works for Ingram-Micro in Buffalo. Both Smrek and Hall are members of the Canisius Hall of Fame.

**LOCALS:**  
**Brian Dux ('00 - '03) and**  
**Hodari Mallory ('00 - '03)**

Each recruited from the Western New York area, Dux '03 and Mallory '03 were four-year teammates as well as roommates. Dux is effusive in describing the clutch-shooting Mallory, characterizing him as highly excitable on the court yet soft spoken off the court. "Dari was great. He always brought a lot of energy; on defense and on the break. He's a great guy and a great friend." Dux finished his career as the only player in team history with 1,000 points and 500 assists. The recipient of his 500th assist? Mallory, of course.

Dux reflects on the team's run through the MAAC Tournament in 2001, during his and Mallory's sophomore season. Although

they lost in the championship game, the Griffins' all-time leader in free-throw percentage counts the experience as his finest hour. "It didn't go our way in the end but those four days were great."

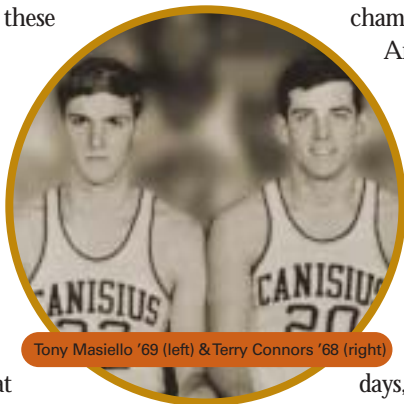
As for what he's taken away from the experience of relying on his teammates, Dux says, "You go through a lot of adversity together and you learn to deal with it." While Dux eventually wants to go into teaching and coaching, he hopes his playing days are not yet behind him. Mallory is currently playing in Holland and Dux is waiting for his opportunity to join his friend overseas. They just may be teammates again one day.

**MORE DYNAMIC DUOS**

The history of the Golden Griffins is rich with memorable teammates. Subsequent NBA star **John McCarthy** and eventual U.S. Congressman **Hank Nowak** led the exciting teams of the 1950s. The duo of **Darrel Barley '96** and **Micheal Meeks '96** sparked a renaissance in Canisius hoops, as the team reached the NIT Final Four in '95 and earned an NCAA tournament berth a year later. And seniors **Clive Bentick '01** and **Darren Fenn '01** led Canisius to a 20-win season in 2001.

While each of these legendary court combos are teammates in the literal sense, every young man who has worn the Blue and Gold since 1903 is part of a larger team that transcends time and place. Some of those relationships run as deep as any on-court pairing ever could. For instance, the lineage of former head coach **Tom Beilein** traces back to his uncles, '40s legends **Joe '46** and **Tom Niland '47**. Meanwhile, current Golden Griffin **Andrew Spittler '04** is the fourth member of his family to play for Canisius, following his father, **Kevin '71**; uncle, **Mark '78**; and brother, **Pat '02**.

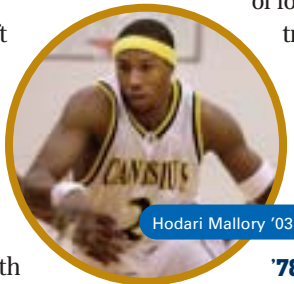
Regardless of whether they've ever shared a court, each member of the Canisius College basketball family shares something much more - a 100-year tradition of integrity, leadership and teamwork. ●



Tony Masiello '69 (left) & Terry Connors '68 (right)



Brian Dux '03



Hodari Mallory '03



Former Griff and LA Laker Mike Smrek '85 with Pat Riley



# Griff-Fan Fare

Win or lose, Golden Griff-fans have been among the most loyal of college basketball aficionados, ever since Canisius entered into the game a century ago. Some attribute their devotions to star teammates, whose talent, discipline and commitment puts little Canisius on equal footing with larger colleges and universities. Others contend their allegiances are the result of individual relationships forged with players, who were also their classmates.

No matter what the rationale, one thing is certain: The vast tradition of men's basketball at this small, private college can be called fanatic, considering very few alumni pause longer than the time it takes to make a jump shot, when asked to recall their most memorable moment on the hardwoods. At least that's what the editors of *Canisius College Magazine* discovered when they appealed to Griff-fans for their favorite basketball stories.

## Donald K. McMahon '55

Has been attending Canisius games for 58 years



I remember coming out of Madison Square Garden after Canisius beat North Carolina State, which was ranked second in the nation, in the 1956 NCAA Tournament. The game lasted four overtimes. It was the first, four-overtime game in both the NCAA Tournament and the Garden's history. The crowd coming out of the Garden onto Eighth Avenue was stunned, and many Canisius students and Buffalonians who made the trip were chanting, "we're number one!" Some people had those fake newspapers made up that had the headline CANISIUS NO. 1.

## George Dixon '58

A 42-year season ticket holder



My wife, Dorothy, and I took a trip to the Kentucky game, when John Beilein was the coach in 1997. About 20 of us flew into Lexington and stayed over night. After the game, we flew out about two hours behind the Canisius team and we had a connecting flight in Pittsburgh. When we got to Pittsburgh, we found out our flight to Buffalo was canceled because of a major snowstorm and that the next flight was at 9:30 p.m. Then we bumped into John Beilein and the team, and he mentioned they had ordered a bus to get back and that they had some extra room if

some of us wanted to go back with the team. So Dorothy and I decided to go on the bus.

She and I sat in the third seat on the right-hand side. Beilein sat right in front of us and he had game tapes to go through to get ready for the next game, which was Manhattan. Well, I was absolutely in my glory! Here's Beilein reviewing tape. My wife fell asleep but I'm watching and of course, giving advice as to what we should do against Manhattan. We didn't hit any snow until we got to Hamburg but once we did, it was like coming into another world.

**David M. Fronczak '83**

President of the Cage Club

My favorite moment as a Griff-fan occurred on March 23, 1995, when the Griffs upset a strong Washington State team in the third round of the NIT. The game was at the Aud and the place was rocking. For the first time I knew what the Little Three must have felt like. The Aud was the place to be that night. The team just came off an invite to the preseason NIT in 1994 and an NIT game against Villanova in 1994. One year later, the three "Wise Men," Craig Wise '95, Darrell Barley '96 (arguably the greatest Griff ever) and Micheal Meeks '96, led the Griffs to Madison Square Garden. More than 9,000 fans were there that night and it sounded like 18,000. I can still feel the emotion in the crowd. When Chris Young banked in a three pointer late in the game, you knew this was the Griffs' night. The following year, the Griffs went to the NCAA and opened up the Marine Midland Arena with the advent of the Big Four. Something positive was happening with the program. It was an exciting time for sure.



**Dr. Daniel P. Starr '58**

Associate professor of history at Canisius and former director of athletics

It's March of 1956. I am lying on my bunk in my tent in Korea near the 38th parallel and a sergeant rushed in with a copy of the *Stars and Stripes* (that was the daily Armed Forces newspaper distributed throughout the world to all American troops



since WWII). I said, in modern parlance, "What's up?" and he yelled, "Your college made the headlines. Canisius beat N.C. State, four overtimes in the Garden." Eleven hundred miles from Main Street, Buffalo and Canisius basketball is on the map. Adding to my excitement was the fact that three of my classmates, namely, Fran Corcoran '56, Bob Kelly '56 and Johnny McCarthy '56, were on the team.



**Peter M. Koehneke**

Chair of sports medicine and former Canisius basketball athletic trainer (1978-2003)

Beating Cincinnati (No. 13 in the country) at their place in 1994 in front of all those screaming fans, and there were a lot of them, is my favorite memory. Watching the stunned crowd walk out of the building, especially after we were down 20 points with 16 minutes to go, was great. That one and winning at the Palestra against Penn in the 1994 preseason NIT because we'd been pummeled in the Palestra so many times before.

**Robert F. King**

Longtime Griff-fan and current equipment manager at Canisius

My favorite memory of Canisius basketball was watching Leroy Chollet '50. He was very smooth and handled the ball well – a very good finesse player. He was consistently good. He probably never scored more than 30 points but never scored less than 15 points either. I remember being in high school and going to doubleheaders at the Aud. Ned Irish, who also ran basketball at Madison Square Garden, ran it for the Aud. So he'd have teams from the West stop in Buffalo on their way to New York City. I don't think Leroy's teams ever made it to the tournament but they sure helped the program become what it was in the 1950s.



**Rev. Paul J. Dugan '45, S.J.**

Moderator of athletics and chaplain to Canisius College alumni



I remember that famous four-overtime win against North Carolina State. I was in the seminary at Woodstock College at the time and there was a group of about 25 or 30 of us who went into the science lab to listen to the game. We weren't supposed to be in there but somebody had gotten a key. The lab had the best radio so we knew we'd be able to listen to the game. We snuck in there before to listen to games. So there we were, sitting in the dark, listening to the game and trying to keep quiet amid all the excitement.

**Thomas J. Peltz '74, MBA '85**

A 29-year season ticket holder. Hasn't missed a game since 1970.

I think one of the greatest basketball games in Canisius history was the first time we beat St. Bonaventure at the Reilly Center in Olean. It was December 1994. That was a big win because I don't think we won in Olean since the early 40s. I remember there was a big group of us season ticket holders and Cage Club members who took a bus to the game. We always went on the road trip to the Reilly Center but never won until then. It was a nice ride home and I remember we stopped on the way back to buy champagne and toast Father Demske for the win. He had recently passed away and like all of us, he would have enjoyed seeing Canisius beat Bona.



**Paul Peltz '71**

Brother to Tom Peltz '74 and a 29-year season ticket holder.



I can list about 100 most-memorable moments of Canisius basketball. One of my most memorable was just two years ago, in 2001. Canisius was playing Niagara in the MAAC quarterfinals. We were up but the Eagles tied the game with maybe eight seconds left. Clive Bentick '01 drove

the length of the floor. He missed the shot but tipped it in with something like two-tenths of a second left in the game. The only word I can think of to describe the game that night is bedlam. It was just one of those last second shots that survive the test of time; a real buzzer beater.

photo to  
come

### Leo J. Glynn '54

A 49-year season ticket holder

The one game that sticks out most in my mind is Canisius upsetting Niagara in January 1954 at the old Memorial Auditorium. We weren't given much of a chance in the game. Our record was very poor and Niagara was the heavy favorite but the Griffins upset the Purple Eagles (53-46). I still don't know what happened to Niagara that day but the rumor was that they (the Niagara fans) were calling the priests in the middle of the night for an explanation.

### Edward C. Gelia '54

A 48-year season ticket holder.



When I was at Canisius, the thing to do on Saturday nights was go to the basketball games at the Aud. Back then, Canisius played a lot of big-time basketball and it really put the college on the map. So after I graduated, I bought season tickets next to my cousin, Charlie Eppolito. I've had season tickets ever since; it's nearly 50 years now. My three sons (Ed Jr. '77, Maurie '79 and David '83), also have season tickets so the four of us go and if I can't (Gelia lives in Florida), then my grandchildren go to the games. Men's basketball at Canisius has really become somewhat of a family tradition in our family. I think because it's been so entertaining over the years. Having season tickets is our way of supporting and rooting for the team.

### David M. Gelia '83

A 23-year season ticket holder, David attends home games with his father, Ed '54 and two brothers: Ed Jr. '77 and Maurie '79 (also season ticket holders).



I can remember the very first Canisius basketball game my father (Edward C. Gelia '54) ever took me to. It was in the 60s. Tony Masiello and Billy DeMars were playing for the Griffins at the time. We were playing a double header in the Aud; first against Niagara and then Cornell and I remember there were two seconds left in the final game (against Cornell) when DeMars made the shot to win the game. I was only four or five years old at the time but to this day I can close my eyes, and see and smell the old Aud like it was yesterday. What made the day even more memorable was I was there with my father, my brothers and my uncle, Charlie Eppolito, who lived and died Canisius basketball. After the game, he took me down to meet the players and as a four or five year old kid, that was such a huge thrill.

## Courting the Future

by Marc Gignac MS '00

Director of Athletic Communications

The "Glory Days" of the 1950s are a fantastic piece of Canisius history that should be cherished and celebrated but it's also important to keep in mind that it is history. College basketball has undergone dramatic changes over the last 50 years, as has Canisius basketball.

For instance, there are now more than 320 Division I schools that sponsor men's and women's basketball, making for a much more competitive landscape. Almost every school in the country is a member of a conference, which puts restrictions on non-conference scheduling opportunities. The best basketball player at Canisius in 2003 is Jenel Stevens, a 5-foot-9 senior guard on the women's team, a sport that was not sponsored in the 1950s.

Many schools in the power conferences play few or none of their non-conference games away from home because it benefits them financially. That means mid-majors have to play and beat the power teams in their arenas — not an easy task — and if you win a few of those, the big

glue holding college basketball together is the NCAA Tournament with its automatic berths for mid-major conferences, the multi-million dollar television deal with CBS, and the "Cinderella Story." Sports fans love to root for the underdog, CBS loves the advertising revenue it gains by showing the first and second round upsets and mid-major schools love the idea that once they make it to the Big Dance, anything can happen.

That's the goal of men's and women's basketball at Canisius, as it heads into the next century: Win the conference, advance to the NCAA Tournament and see if the glass slipper fits.

"Our goal is to compete in the top third of the MAAC every year. After that, the goal is to go to the NCAA Tournament each year and then win a game or two in the tourney," said Canisius Director of Athletics Timothy J. Dillon.

Though a lot has changed over the past 50 years, many qualities

Jenel Stevens '04



boys are even more reluctant to play you because it hurts their Ratings Percentage Index (RPI). The overall result of these developments is a widening chasm between the power conferences and mid-major conferences. Throw in money from conference television deals and the gap grows.

"The two biggest changes in college basketball over the last 50 years are conferences and television," agrees Mike Harrington '87, who covers college basketball for *The Buffalo News*. "The greatest change in the history of college sports, not just basketball, is ESPN. The exposure it has created has helped some schools and hurt others."

that make Canisius basketball great are still present. Coaches and players are accessible to their fans. The games provide a family friendly atmosphere. Rivalries against Little Three opponents St. Bonaventure and Niagara still exist. And from top to bottom, the MAAC is as strong as it's ever been.

"It's easy to get caught up in wins and losses but you can't define the success of the program solely on that," said Head Coach Mike MacDonald MS '94. "Canisius basketball has a tradition of graduating players and producing great people as well as great players, and that's still the case today." •