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West Virginia and Regional History Collection

NEWSLETTER

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West Virginia's Other "Mr. Basketball" The Clair Bee Collection

To sports fans the world over, the name Jerry West is synonymous with the word basketball. Considered by many to be the greatest player to have ever played the game, the Mountain State native has become so iconic, in fact, that his silhouette is literally the logo of the NBA.

Yet, before West ever donned a jersey, another West Virginian was forging a place in the annals of basketball history that would prove to be every bit as significant as that of the immortal Mr. West, not as a player, but as a coach. In the words of no lesser authority than fellow coaching legend Bobby Knight, "in the first half of the 20th century, Clair Bee was Basketball!"

A collection of research papers, documents and publications by and about Bee, recently acquired by the West Virginia and Regional History Collection, provides ample evidence that such claims are by no means unfounded. Compiled and donated by Rogers McAvoy, a retired WVU faculty member and leading authority on Bee, the donation includes more than four dozen first and rare editions of books written by Bee which have become avidly collected by sports literature enthusiasts since Bee's death in 1983.



Coach Bee discusses strategy with the LIU Blackbirds, ca. 1940. Photo courtesy Long Island University.

Credited with playing a key role in innovations including the 1-3-1 zone defense and the "fast break," as well as the introduction of the 3 second rule and 24 second shot clock, Bee changed the way the game would be played for ever after. His mark was perhaps second only to that of the game's inventor, James Naismith, himself. With a lifetime record of 412-87, Bee was also, and continues to be, the coach with the highest winning percentage (82.6%) in NCAA Division I basketball history.

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Slight of build, short in stature and of average athletic ability, Bee was an unlikely candidate for stardom in the field of athletics. Born in Grafton in 1896, he lived briefly in Parkersburg before moving after 1900 to his great-grandfather's farm in Doddridge County where he was raised primarily by his paternal grandmother and her extended family. Upon her death in 1905, he returned to his birthplace with his father who soon married for a second time and proceeded to start a new family in which young Clair never quite fit.

Gregarious by nature, Bee turned to sports for the companionship that was missing in his home life. Active initially in pickup games on neighborhood sandlots, as the years passed he embraced literally every sport and venue the then booming town of Grafton had to offer. He played quarterback on the Grafton High football team, played on both the high school and YMCA basketball and baseball teams, and served as president of the city's baseball league. Sports columns in the local newspaper of the period routinely laud his play in all sports indicating that what he lacked in natural prowess he more than made up for in hustle, determination and an uncanny knack for devising winning tactics and strategies.

Graduating in 1920, having been interrupted in his education by military service in World War I, Bee played semi-pro football in Ohio for a year or two before enroll-



Bee is second from left in this photo of the 1920 Grafton High team.

ing at Waynesburg College in 1922. Intent on playing both football and basketball at the school, he suffered a serious ankle injury during his third game on the gridiron which, combined with a knee injury suffered in Ohio, brought his playing career to an end. Though he was able to play baseball, tennis and joined the wrestling team, his involvement in the two sports he loved most was limited to serving as a manager, scout and coach.

Despite his injuries, Bee's years at Waynesburg were extraordinarily successful. In addition to his numerous sporting endeavors, he served as student body president, as sports writer for the college newspaper, and as unofficial secretary, chauffeur and ambassador for the college's president.

Graduating from Waynesburg College in just three years, Bee served as a teacher and basketball coach for a single year at a high school in Ohio before landing a job teaching accounting at Rider College in Trenton, New Jersey. The college unwittingly ushered in a new era in the institution's history through this engagement, for in the ensuing three years, Professor Bee would singlehandedly establish intercollegiate athletics at the school. He organized and coached football, basketball and baseball teams, and also served as the school's first athletic director.

The success of Coach Bee's basketball team at Rider, in particular, was nothing short of sensational. The Rider "Broncs," as the team was nicknamed, posted a phenomenal 19-3 record in their very first season. Records of 18-2 followed in seasons two and three. Such magnificent achievements did not go unnoticed in the basketball world.

In 1931, Long Island University, in Brooklyn, New York, hired Coach Bee with the hope that he would be able to repeat the miracle he had achieved at Rider College. Founded just five years earlier, LIU was created with the goal of providing an affordable education to the suburban New York masses who could not afford the city's better known institutions. Limited in both resources and facilities, the institution would expect much of its new faculty member in both the academic and athletic arenas. In addition to teaching accounting and directing physical education, Bee was charged with coaching both baseball and football, and above all with bringing success to the school's floundering basketball team.

LIU was possibly even less equipped to field a successful basketball team than Rider had been. The school did not even have a gymnasium. In its short history, the LIU basketball team's schedule had been limited to only small local schools. Nevertheless, Coach Bee's basketball team got off to a quick start in the fall of 1931, winning 5 of the first 6 games on the way to a 16 and 4 season. Dramatically upgrading the quality of the schedule the following year, Coach Bee suffered the only losing season of his collegiate career at 6 and 11. Undaunted, Bee led his team to an incredible 26 and 1 record in 1933/1934. Overnight, LIU had



Coach Bee's Rider teams were 55 and 7 under his leadership. become a national powerhouse.

The "Blackbirds" would continue their winning ways for many years to come. In 1934/1935, the team lost just twice in 26 contests. They topped this achievement by enjoying a perfect 25-0 season in 1935/1936, winning by an average of more than 20 points per game. Though no post-season tournaments existed at the time, many thought the 1936 "Blackbirds" were the best in the nation.

After finishing 28-3, and 23-5, respectively, in 1937 and 1938, LIU went undefeated once again in 1939. This time the team was able to prove its national dominance by winning the National Invitational Tournament (NIT) which had been established the previous year. LIU would capture another NIT trophy two years later.

Coach Bee was eyeing yet a third NIT trophy in 1942 when his team suffered a stunning overtime upset in the tournament's first round at the hands of the tourney's bottom seed,

West Virginia University. The Mountaineers went on to win the tourney, with Coach Bee likely cheering them on.

In 1944, the now widely celebrated coach took a hiatus from training hoopsters to train soldiers for the U.S. Navy. At the war's end, he returned to pick up where he had left off, posting "rebuilding" records in the ensuing years that would have seemed triumphant to most coaches.

By mid-century, LIU was vying for national pre-eminence once again. The team went 20-5 in 1949/1950 and was sitting on a 20-4 record the following season when, on February 21, 1951, Sporting News hailed LIU's center, Sherman White, as the number one rated player of the publications All-American squad. But as the team aspired to yet another national championship, Coach Bee's world was about to be turned upside down.

That same day, Bee was visited by a New York reporter who informed him that three LIU players, including the team's star center, had been implicated in a points shaving gambling scheme involving dozens of players at seven schools. As an investigation proceeded, LIU officials promptly suspended the basketball season. It would be six long years before the "Blackbirds" would take to the court again. Clair Bee would never coach another college game.

A man of exceptional integrity, Bee was devastated by this turn of events. Initially in denial, when the charges proved to be correct, he concluded that he himself and his colleagues in coaching, deserved much of the blame for promoting a culture in which winning had taken precedence over education and ethics.

In the years that followed, Bee tried his hand at coaching the NBA's short-lived Baltimore Bullets and then



UNDEFEATED 1935-36, 43 VICTORIES

LEFT TO RIGHT: COACH: CLAIR F. BEE, WILLIE SCHWARTZ, JULIE BENDER, BEN KRAMER, KEN NORTON, LEO MERSON, MARIUS RUSSO, ARTHUR HILL HOUSE.



worked for a while as athletic director for a New York military academy. His most significant post-collegiate career endeavor was not in the field of coaching but in the field of literature. He would find superlative success once again as the author of the most popular series of sports fiction novels in American literature – the “Chip” Hilton books.

Bee wrote his first piece of sports fiction when he was just a sophomore at Grafton High. Titled “Bud’s Loyalty,” Bee’s story related the tale of a benchwarmer’s sacrifice in tutoring two teammates whose academic ineligibility would have enabled him (Bud) to play. With Bud’s help, the star players are able to complete their schoolwork and return to the team in time to win the championship game. In gratitude for his selfless act, Bud is hoisted on the crowd’s shoulders at the game’s end. Bee’s inspiring story of team loyalty was so highly regarded that it was published in the Grafton High Yearbook in 1914. The story would foretell great things to come from its author.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Bee wrote extensively about the art of coaching. His landmark four-volume *Clair Bee Basketball Library* (A.S. Barnes 1942), was the leading coaches manual of its era. It was not until the late 1940s that he decided to try his hand once again at producing sports fiction. He submitted his first effort, *Touchdown Pass*, to Grosset & Dunlap, which specialized in books for young readers, in 1948. Featuring “Chip” Hilton, a gifted athlete

and model citizen at Valley Falls High School somewhere in middle America, the book was so well received by the publishers that they prevailed upon Bee develop it into a series.

Between 1948 and 1965, Bee produced twenty-two more “Chip” Hilton novels. Alongside the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew mysteries, also issued by Grossett & Dunlop, these books became a staple of young readers across America. Uplifting in character and message, most follow a similar plot in which “Chip” helps troubled teammates overcome assorted obstacles and attitude problems just in time for the team to gel on the eve of the championship game.

With millions sold in multiple printings during Bee’s lifetime, the series was resurrected and updated during the 1990s by Broadman & Holman, a Nashville-based religious book company which added a twenty-fourth volume to the series, *Fiery Fullback*, which was not published in Bee’s lifetime. That series continues in print to this day.

Though Bee would never fully recover from the blow he suffered at Long Island University, his extraordinary lifetime contributions to athletics won him growing acclaim as years went by and a new generation of writers and coaches began to recognize his achievements. During the 1960s and 1970s, he was showered with honors including induction into Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in 1968.

A very special honor occurred on May 25, 1977, when some five hundred guests gathered in New York City for a testimonial dinner held in honor of “Mr. Basketball,” Clair F. Bee. The event was co-chaired by the celebrated Bobby Knight who Bee had mentored when Knight was a young coach at West Point. President Jimmy Carter observed the event by sending a letter of congratulations, as did other dignitaries including three governors. Among them was West Virginia’s Jay Rockefeller who proclaimed May 25 “Clair Bee Day” in the Mountain State.

It is likely that Coach Bee would have considered his greatest honor to be one which was bestowed upon him posthumously by the National Collegiate Athletic Association in 1996. It was in that year that the NCAA introduced a pair of awards that have become among the most coveted in collegiate basketball -- the “Chip” Hilton Player of the Year Award, and the Clair Bee Coach of the Year Award. These awards are presented by each spring to the Division I player and coach who best exemplify the qualities and character of “Chip” Hilton, and the man who many consider the greatest coach in NCAA history, West Virginia’s other “Mr. Basketball,” Clair F. Bee.

The Zone Defense and Fast Break

While not all sources of basketball history concur, many attribute the invention of the zone defense to a legendary game played between Grafton and Bristol high schools in Harrison County, West Virginia in 1914. The game was played in the latter school’s newly constructed

gymnasium on a poorly cured floor made all the more hazardous by pools of water dripping from a leaky roof. Because navigating the wet floor was so difficult, Bristol's coach, future Marshall coaching legend Eli Camden "Cam" Henderson, instructed his players to defend zones around the basket rather than to try to play man-to-man defense as was the universal custom at the time. Both Henderson and Bee later drew upon this concept, in creating the now widely employed 2-3 zone (Henderson) and 1-3-1 zone (Bee) defenses. The "fast break" allegedly owes its origins to the same game. Recognizing just how difficult it was for his opponents to travel the length of the slippery floor, Henderson instructed his players to break immediately to the hoop upon taking a defensive rebound whenever they saw an opportunity to beat their opponents down court. The idea worked so well, that both Henderson and Bee later refined the technique and added it to their playbooks. The strategy eventually became standard fare among coaches everywhere.



Make a Difference in the Lives That Follow

The unique history and strong heritage of the Mountain State and the Appalachian region are reflected in the varied holdings of the West Virginia and Regional History Collection. A rare surveying tool that once belonged to George Washington, courthouse records, genealogical information, rare books, and papers from famous West Virginians are some examples of the resources found here.

Many appreciate the value of ensuring that the future of the WVRHC is as strong as possible so that the stories of our families, our state, and our culture, among other things, can be told to all who want to learn more.

One helpful way to support the WVRHC is by including a gift provision in your will or revocable trust. Have your attorney use the wording of "to the West Virginia University Foundation, Inc. for the benefit of the WVU Libraries' West Virginia and Regional History Collection." Your gift can be for general purposes or can enhance any aspect of the Collection, such as acquisitions, conservation and staffing. Making the WVU Foundation the owner or beneficiary of a life insurance policy in order to help the Collection is easy to do as well.

Whether the gift is for a specific amount or a percentage of your estate, your choice will support these ongoing efforts to preserve West Virginia's important place in history!

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Selected Recent Acquisitions

Arnett, William. Records of Phi Alpha Theta and Other Material, 1952-1978, 1 ft. 10 1/2 in., Acquired in 2010. A&M 5151.

Records created and accumulated by West Virginia University (WVU) History Professor William Arnett, including primarily administrative records of Phi Alpha Theta, a student organization for history students at WVU. Other material includes information regarding the history of the West Virginia University history department.

Barns, William D. Family History Files, Photographs, and Other Material, ca. 1885-1980, 2 1/2 in., Acquired in 2010. A&M 3748.

Includes family history files, photographs, and other material collected and compiled by William D. Barns. Family history files include extensive notes encompassing the Pennsylvania branch of the Barns family, including notes of interviews with his mother and father, and from secondary sources. There are also notes regarding the Williams family. The few photographs in this collection mostly regard the Barns family, and the history of education in Uniontown and Fayette County, Pennsylvania.

Bolton, Alfred A. Papers Regarding History of Management and Other Material, ca. 1900-2000, 26 ft., Gift in 2010. A&M 3735.

Papers of Alfred A. Bolton, a professor specializing in the field of management history. He completed a dissertation that retrospectively analyzed the historically influential Hawthorne Studies that had been conducted at the Western Electric Hawthorne Works in Chicago from 1927-1932, of which he later wrote and lectured. The collection includes photocopies of original Hawthorne Studies records and

related research material, copies of articles by Bolton, and video tapes related to management theory, history, and practice, among other material. There are also glass cutting tools that he inherited or perhaps used as a journeyman glass cutter in Clarksburg, West Virginia.

Dial, David, Collector. Glass Plate Negatives of West Virginia University Agricultural Experiment Station Projects And Other Subjects, 1891-1912, 5 1/2 in., Gift in 2010. A&M 5152.

Glass plate negatives of West Virginia University Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station projects and other subjects. There are pictures of mostly crops, including potatoes and tobacco, and some of livestock. Other images include single plates of Morgantown, graduation exercises on Woodburn Circle, a bridge, and of the "campus from the Station building."

Haymond, Lewis. Photograph Album of Students and Friends at West Virginia University, ca. 1870-1880, 1 in. (22 items), Acquired in 2010. A&M 5149.

One photo album (2 3/4 in. x 5 in.) dated 1 April 1870, owned by Lewis Haymond (date and name inscribed), including twenty-one portrait photographs of friends and West Virginia University students. Seven of the photographs are tintypes, and the other fourteen are carte de visite or CDV sized images. Twelve CDVs were produced by Morgantown photographer J.P. Shafer. Some of the subjects in the photographs are identified.

Hughes, Benjamin F., Soldier. Civil War Letters and Other Material, ca. 1854-1906, 2 1/2 in., Gift in 2010. A&M 3741.

Transcripts and originals of letters regarding the Civil War in West Virginia authored by Sergeant Benjamin F. Hughes of Company F, West Virginia 3rd Regiment, and of Company D, West Virginia 6th Cavalry (10 items, 11 leaves). Subjects include battle of Allegheny Mountain (1861), battle of Droop Mountain (1863), service as a scout, report on wounded, his health, camp life, the home front, and



West Virginia country and western performers, the Franklin Brothers, ca. 1930s.

opinions regarding the war. These letters were sent from locations mostly in West Virginia. There are also pension records for Hughes (1892-1906), and other material.

Matheny, H.E., Collector. Stereo Cards of West Virginia University and Other Subjects, ca. 1860-1900, 2 in., Gift in 2010. A&M 3732

Collection of 34 stereo cards assembled by H.E. Matheny. There are 22 stereo card photographic views of mostly the buildings and grounds of West Virginia University. In addition, there are two stereo cards of the fair ground at Alderson, West Virginia; and two cards of inland river sternwheel steamships, one of which features vessels named "Pacific No. 2" and "Jim Wood" in port. There are also five cards from Rothrock's "Arizona Scenery" series, and three cards with unidentified locations.

Moreland, William A. Political Papers, World War II Records, and Other Material, ca. 1900-1965, 7 1/2 in., Gift in 2010. Addendum to A&M 2032.

Includes Moreland's World War II (WWII) service records (he served on the home-front), family genealogy, and family photographs (including photos of his father, James Moreland).

Nesius, Ernest J., Professor. Research Papers for History of Extension Services at West Virginia University, ca. 1990-2000, 1 ft., Gift in 2010. A&M 5147.



Labor organizer Mother Jones addresses a crowd in Montgomery, WV, in 1912.

Research papers by Ernest J. Nesius for projected book on history of extension service at West Virginia University, including biography of Nat Frame, former Director of West Virginia Cooperative Extension. Papers include handwritten notes and typescript narratives.

Photograph Album of Residents of Keyser, West Virginia, ca. 1880-1900, 3 in., Acquired in 2010. A&M 3752.

One photograph album of 39 pages containing 40 photographs apparently created by a resident of Keyser, Mineral County, West Virginia, on evidence of the numerous cabinet cards produced by photographers in that city. Although the creator of the album is unknown, many of the pictures have identifications and dates; the subjects of these photos in some cases have been verified as residents of Keyser. These subjects are apparently family and friends of the album's creator. Types of photographs include 19 cabinet cards, 15 tintypes, 3 carte de visite (or CDV), and 3 other.

Olin P. Keyes, Jr., Coal Mine Drawing Reproductions, 1970, 19 items, Acquired in 2010.

Nineteen printed reproductions of pen and ink drawings (10 in. x 13 in.) of coal mining operations featuring individual workers and their equipment by Olin P. Keyes, Jr. Four prints include rescue workers.

Robinson, Carl, Soldier. Photographs from Post-World War I AEF Military Tour in France and Other Material, 1919-1941, 2 1/2 in., Acquisition in 2010. A&M 3737.

Records of Carl Robinson, a West Virginian who, as a member of the U.S. Armed Forces, toured France as a member of an American Expeditionary Force (AEF) military observation tour from 10 July to 26 September, 1919. The collection contains an archive of photographs taken of the tour, apparently by Carl Robinson. There are also service records for Robinson dating from 1919 to 1941. Subjects of photographs include battlefields, grave markers and cemeteries, damaged villages and towns, railroad transportation, Reims Cathedral, weapons, and ship transport (on the vessel "Leviathan").

Sarris, Louis George. Resume and Personal Memoir of a U.S. Foreign Affairs Officer, 2010, 20 pages, Gift in 2010. A&M 3745.

Resume (2 pages) and personal memoir (18 pages) of Louis George Sarris, a West Virginian from Wheeling who worked for the U.S. State Department, serving as Chief of the Southeast Asia Division during the Vietnam War era. The memoir discusses his family's immigrant roots in Greece and their life in America (ca. 1920 to 2000), including his father's work as a coal miner in West Virginia. It also touches on the career of Louis George Sarris.

Teets, Cecil Curtis. World War II Memorabilia, ca. 1930-1945, 1 1/4 in., Gift in 2010. A&M 3744.

World War II memorabilia collected by Cecil Curtis Teets, a West Virginian who grew up in the Buckhannon area, and who served in the medical service of the 443rd Fighter Squadron of U.S. Army Air Forces. Includes ship transport pass, program for Christmas banquet of 1943 for the 443rd, and three photos and clipping regarding major rodeo and air show in occupied Japan; there are also photographs of fellow soldiers and of a U.S. military encampment on Okinawa, among other subjects. There are Japanese postcards apparently collected by Teets when stationed in Japan after the war. The collection also includes two Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) photographs, including a candid shot of three friends at Camp 518 near Parsons, West Virginia; and a picture of a stream near Horseshoe Forest Camp.



*"Mr. Basketball," Clair F. Bee.
Story, page 1.*

Weston State Hospital. Account Ledger, 1866-1887, 3 1/2 in., Acquired in 2010. A&M 3754.

Account ledger of Weston State Hospital (formerly the Trans-Allegheny unatic Asylum at Weston) for the mentally ill. Over 360 pages, it includes transactions listed chrono-

logically by month for the period January 1866 to March 1868, and day by day for 1873-1887. Many of the entries document construction expenses. Although patients were first admitted in 1864, construction of the facility continued until 1881.



Winter at West Virginia University, 1893.