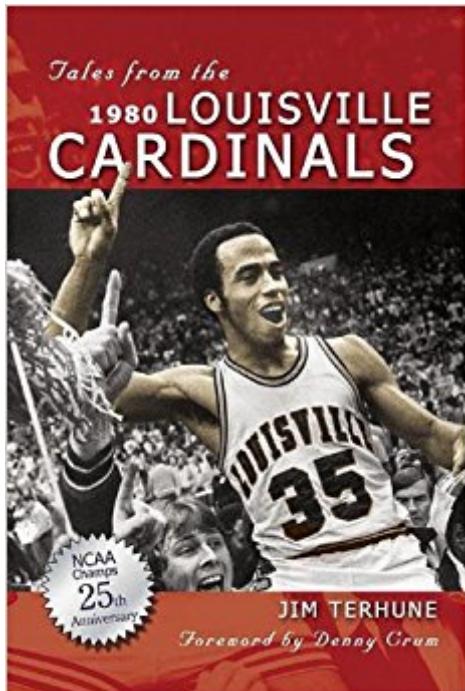


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Tales From The 1980 Louisville Cardinals



Synopsis

Negative vibes echoed through the athletic environs of the University of Louisville campus like claps of thunder in 1979. The coughs and sputters of the engine that had always driven U of L sports—basketball—was concerning to an athletic department that was under fire for the failings of its football team and its athletic director. Basketball coach Denny Crum had taken the Cardinals to two NCAA Final Fours in his first four seasons. Louisville had not been able to win the great prize, but its runs had given rise to great expectations. His next four squads burst out of the blocks with lightning speed, too. When each one wheezed in late February and came to a halt in mid-March, however, great hopes turned into great grumblings. Could Crum ever win "the big one?" Eighty-three minutes and 27 seconds into the season, the fifth starter, Scooter McCray, went out for good with a torn knee ligament. His replacement was brother Rodney, a freshman who had arrived in poor condition and with a poor attitude. "We’ll be lucky to win 15 games," Crum said. He had never won fewer than 20 in any of his eight campaigns, but no one argued with this pronouncement. Yet with a rookie, three sophomores, and star Darrell Griffith and his 48-inch vertical leap in the lineup, strange, zany, and enchanting things began to happen. Wiley Brown was given a bionic thumb, and the prosthesis not only apparently helped his rebounding, but also stayed on most of the time. Manchild small forward Derek Smith talked of being from Jupiter one night and snatched 15 rebounds with his Goliath-sized hands the next. Reserve Roger Burkman’s demolition derby aggression earned him the pen name "Instant Defense," while sub Poncho Wright’s cloud-tickling jumpers and jaw-dropping dunks got him the "Instant Offense" title. Rodney McCray transformed himself into an indispensable man not overnight, but over the course of a few minutes when his sibling went down. Above all this, quite literally and figuratively, was Griffith. He led as an athlete, by his graciousness and classy demeanor. They became a team that put winning above everything. Each of them would have welcomed any of the others into a foxhole. The discombobulated basketball team set an impossibly high standard of bonding through diversity and adversity and promptly answered that question posed by Crum’s peers. Yes, he could win the big one.

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Customer Reviews

Great book, with some interesting insight into the 1980 season

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