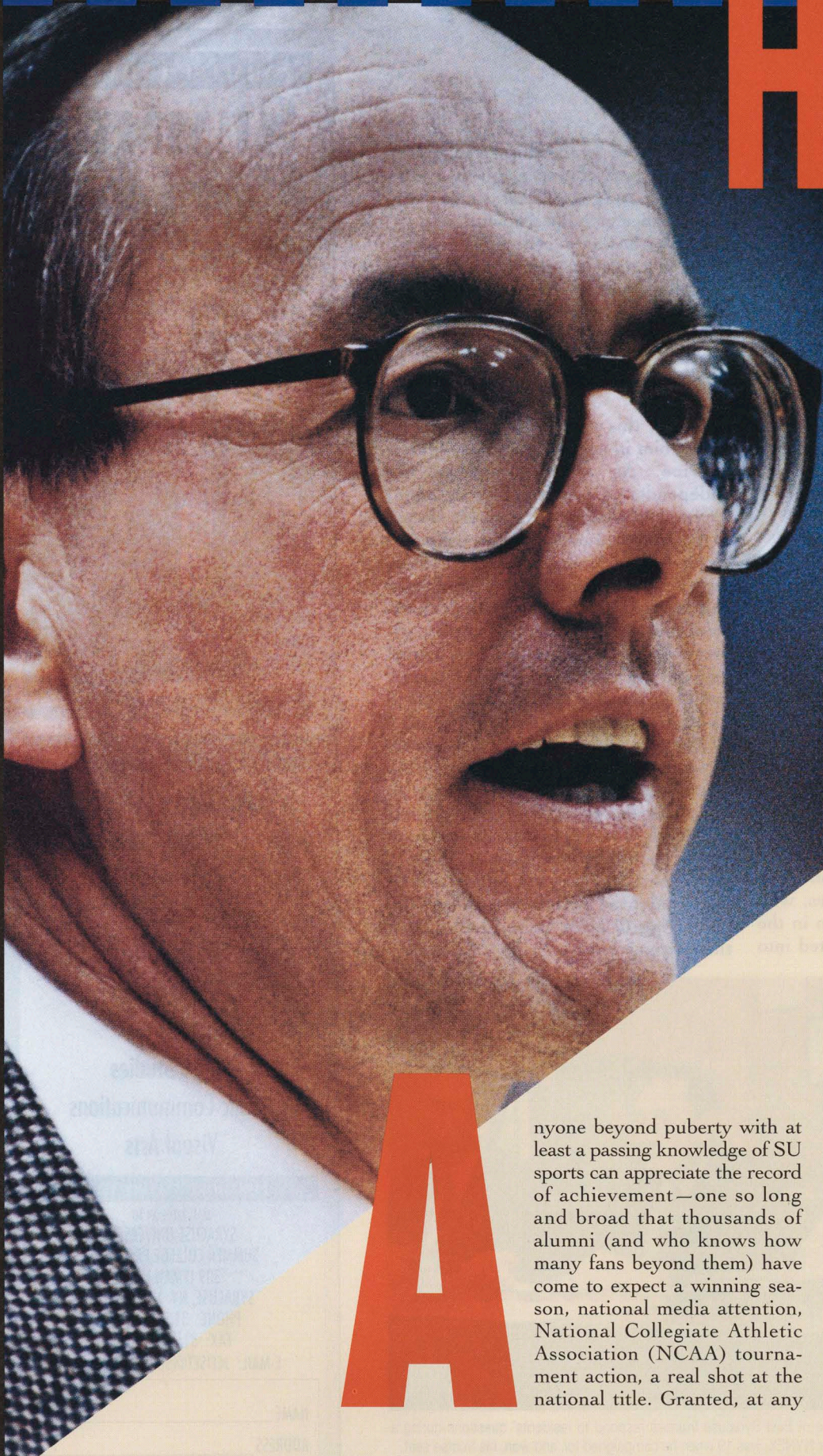


Hoop



given moment large numbers of them may complain about the star prospect who got away, the big game lost in the closing seconds, the free throw that didn't fall right, those damn Hoyas. But in their heart of hearts they know they will end up winners, as always, because that's just the way it is, and shall be, forever and ever, amen.

This is the story of Orangemen basketball—for the past 33 years, at least. Likewise, this is the story of Jim Boeheim. It's been nearly 20 years since he took charge, an eventful 20 years.

The Orange racked up at least 20 wins in all but one of Boeheim's 19 completed seasons. In three of the first four years they went 26-4, propelling

Anyone beyond puberty with at least a passing knowledge of SU sports can appreciate the record of achievement—one so long and broad that thousands of alumni (and who knows how many fans beyond them) have come to expect a winning season, national media attention, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) tournament action, a real shot at the national title. Granted, at any

by l a u r i e h a r r i n g t o n

DREAMS

For nearly two decades, head coach Jim Boeheim has kept Syracuse University men's basketball a player's game.

Boeheim to 100 wins faster than any other coach in NCAA history. He reached 200 and 300 and 400 wins faster than any other coach, too. At the end of the 1994-95 season, his career record stood at 454-150 for a winning percentage of .752, fifth best among active coaches.

The Orange finished the regular season as Big East champions in five of the league's 17 years. In three additional years they won Big East tournaments. Boeheim's taken the Orange into post-season play 18 times—16 times to the NCAA tournament, twice to the National Invitational Tournament. It took NCAA probation to keep the team out in 1992-93.

Probation also interrupted Boeheim's streak of NCAA tourney appearances at 10, still good enough to stand as the fourth longest streak of all time. Boeheim's 16 total NCAA tourney appearances put him in a tie for 10th place on the all-time list. Among active coaches, he's tied at seventh. Every coach with better career stats has been coaching longer than Boeheim.

The National Association of Basketball Coaches named

Boeheim District II Coach of the Year five times. The U.S. Basketball Writers Association picked him three times. In 1984 and 1991, he won Big East Coach of the Year honors.

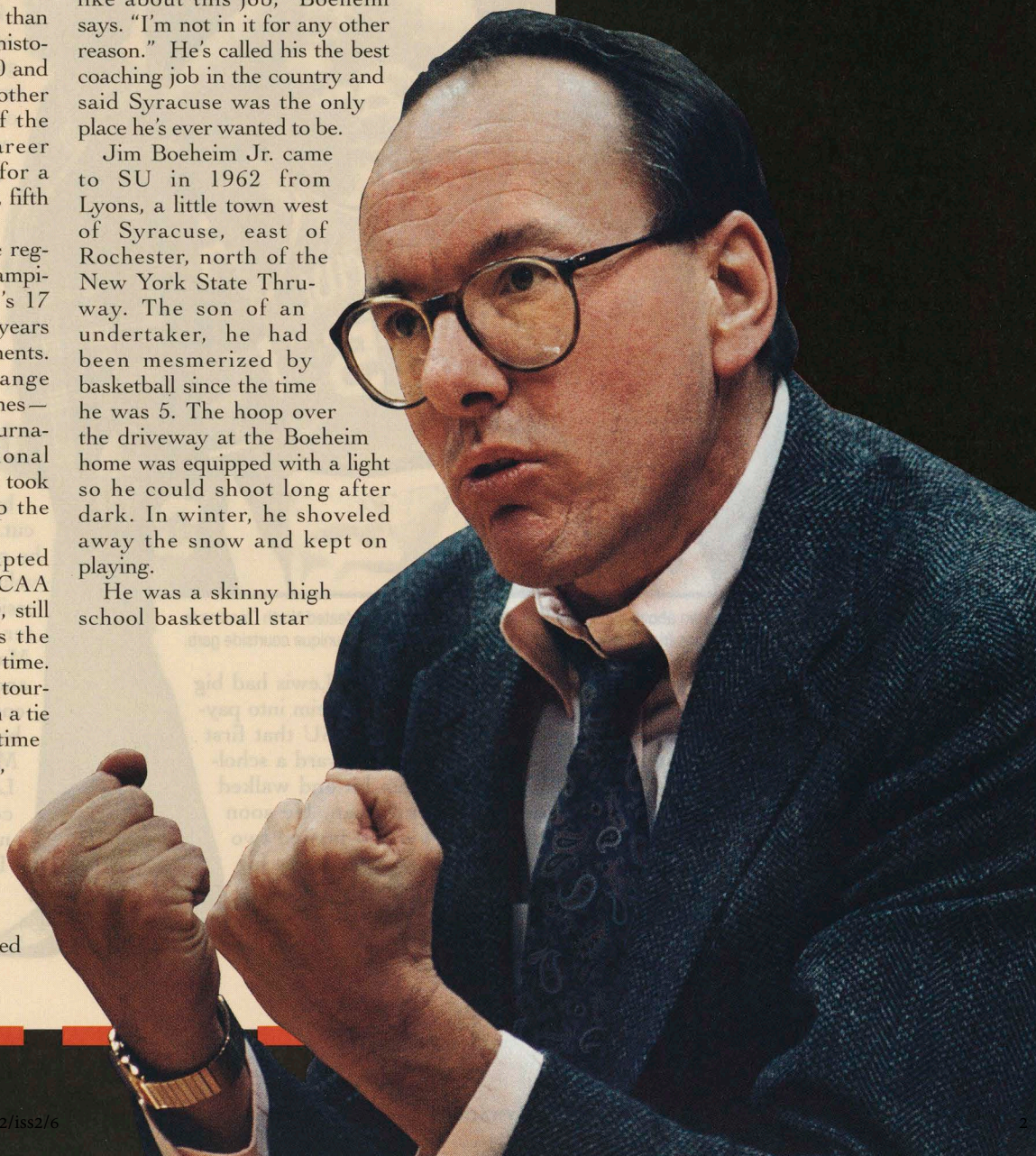
"I like watching the game, trying to get the game to be played right, and that's what I like about this job," Boeheim says. "I'm not in it for any other reason." He's called his the best coaching job in the country and said Syracuse was the only place he's ever wanted to be.

Jim Boeheim Jr. came to SU in 1962 from Lyons, a little town west of Syracuse, east of Rochester, north of the New York State Thruway. The son of an undertaker, he had been mesmerized by basketball since the time he was 5. The hoop over the driveway at the Boeheim home was equipped with a light so he could shoot long after dark. In winter, he shoveled away the snow and kept on playing.

He was a skinny high school basketball star

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"I like watching the game, trying to get the game to be played right, and that's what I like about this job. I'm not in it for any other reason."—Jim Boeheim



Victory is always sweet, as demonstrated above during the 1986-87 season, after SU defeated North Carolina to advance to the Final Four. During the '70s (right), Boeheim drew a lot of attention with his unique courtside garb.

who failed to draw much attention from college coaches. Colgate and Cornell offered partial scholarships, but Boeheim had something else in mind. He called on SU.

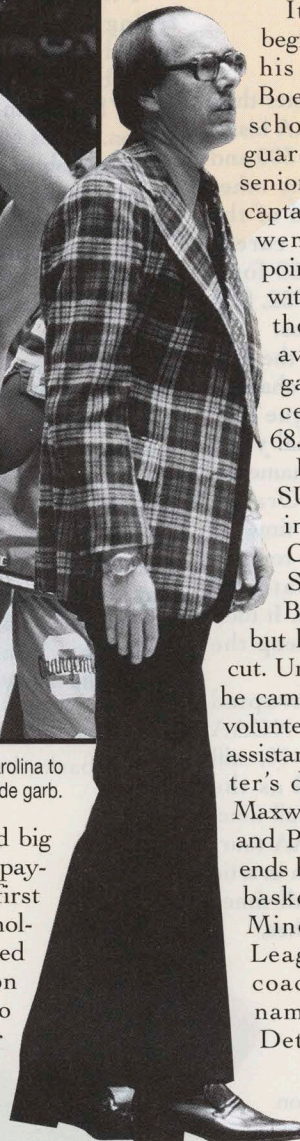
It was 1962, and the Orangemen had lost 41 of 47 games over the past two seasons. "Crowds" numbered as few as

500. But coach Fred Lewis had big plans. He talked Boeheim into paying his own way to SU that first year and working toward a scholarship. Boeheim bit and walked on as the ninth man. He soon learned Lewis had invited two other freshmen to compete for

that same scholarship, and he met Dave Bing, then a scholarship player from Washington, D.C., who nearly convinced the kid from Lyons that he was out of his league. "He was the kind of guy who never thought he was wrong—just like now," says Bing, who went on to become a 13-year veteran of the NBA. "He was a know-it-all, but he made good sense."

It was a discouraging beginning, but by the end of his freshman season, Boeheim had earned the scholarship. He started at guard his junior year. His senior year he served as co-captain with Bing. The team went 22-6, averaged 99 points per game, and came within one win of a trip to the Final Four. Boeheim averaged 14.6 points per game. He shot 56.5 percent from the field and 68.9 percent from the line.

Boeheim graduated from SU in 1966 with a degree in history from the College of Arts and Sciences. The Chicago Bulls gave him a tryout, but he didn't make the final cut. Uncertain what to do next, he came back to Syracuse and volunteered with the team as an assistant. He enrolled in a master's degree program at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. On weekends he earned money playing basketball for the Scranton Miners of the Eastern League. When Scranton coach Paul Seymour was named head scout for the Detroit Pistons, Boeheim



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was offered a tryout, a second shot at the NBA. He declined. He had decided to become a coach.

By 1972 he had worked his way into a paying job as a full-time assistant coach with the SU basketball team. A year later he completed his master's degree in social science from the Maxwell School.

In April 1976 he was interviewing for the top coaching job at the University of Rochester when SU head coach Roy Danforth accepted a job offer from Tulane. It took SU just six hours to elevate Boeheim. His first recruit was to his staff, a young coach named Rick Pitino. Pitino and Boeheim then signed Louis Orr of Cincinnati and Roosevelt Bouie from Rochester. They weren't highly touted players, but they made magic together. Dubbed the "Louie and Bouie Show," the two were among the top SU players in field goal percentage, rebounding, and scoring. Bouie was also named to the U.S. All-Star Team and played basketball in Lithuania and Russia the summer after his sophomore year.

With so much playing talent, SU men's basketball was set for the next four years. Manley Field House, with a capacity of 9,500, became the "Zoo," a notorious destination for visiting teams where crazed fans never failed to provide the sixth man. Boeheim's courtside antics and garish sport coats gained national attention.

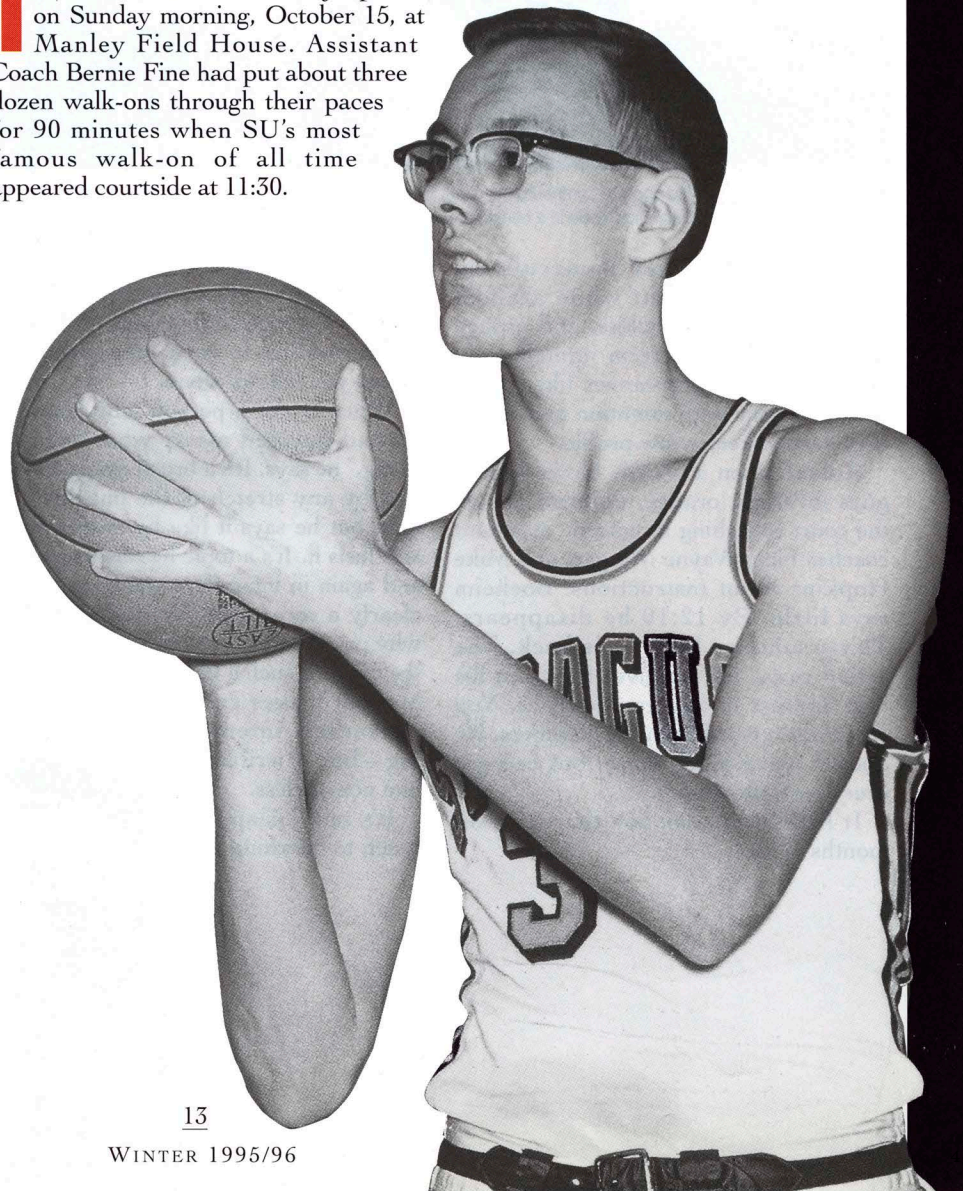
The Big East was founded in 1979. The following year the Orange moved to the Carrier Dome. Boeheim hoped they'd draw 15,000 fans. They averaged 16,440 the first year. Ten years later 33,048 would show up for a Georgetown game. That crowd still holds the NCAA on-campus attendance record.

The program hit a speed bump in the spring of 1990 when a book called *Raw Recruits* alleged that SU maintained a

relationship with a New York City street agent named Rob Johnson, who reportedly plied kids with gifts and favors and encouraged them to go to Syracuse and other schools. Investigations by a local newspaper, University officials, and the NCAA followed over the next two years. In the end, it was found that several boosters provided players with lodging, meals, transportation, and cash. The coaching staff was also cited for infractions. As a result, the NCAA barred SU from post-season play in the 1992-93 season.

The 1995-96 season officially opened on Sunday morning, October 15, at Manley Field House. Assistant Coach Bernie Fine had put about three dozen walk-ons through their paces for 90 minutes when SU's most famous walk-on of all time appeared courtside at 11:30.

Jim Boeheim Jr. came to SU in 1962, when the Orangemen had lost 41 of 47 games over the past two seasons. By his senior year they were 22-6, and came within one win of a trip to the Final Four.



"One thing I liked about Jim and his staff was that it was straight recruiting. With a lot of coaches, you knew it was one big snowball they were throwing at you. Jim doesn't try to impress you while he talks to you. He doesn't put on airs."—Leo Rautins



Jim Boeheim is often called upon to contribute his name, and fame, to charitable events. In 1991 he went one-on-one with sports commentator Dick Vitale in a benefit for young cancer victims. Boeheim trounced Vitale 16-3.

Tall, slender, and immaculately dressed in bright white athletic shoes and blue, white, and orange warm-up suit, Boeheim immediately draws your eye, yet moves like a man who is uneasy with attention and trying very hard to keep a low profile.

Around noon a whistle blows and 13 guys in bright orange uniforms are on the court stretching in unison. Assistant coaches Fine, Wayne Morgan, and Mike Hopkins shout instructions. Boeheim says little. By 12:10 he disappears. Thirty minutes later he is back. The action stops and he gives the team his first address of any consequence. You can't hear a word from the bleachers. He doesn't make much noise, but he's got everyone's attention.

It'll be that way for the next six months or so.

Boeheim's coaching has been widely praised and widely lampooned. He's the heart of SU men's basketball, or the only thing holding it back, depending on whom you talk to, when.

"There's not a person who hasn't second-guessed me or what we're doing," he says. It's a broad exaggeration by any stretch of the imagination, but he says it like he means it, and feels it. It's a topic he raises again and again in interviews and speeches, clearly a sore point. He understands why people do it—second-guessing the coach is such a large part of what makes college basketball interesting—but it irritates him nonetheless.

It's said his approach to coaching is

laissez-faire. That, he says, is the interpretation of people who don't know basketball. "We want the players on offense to have freedom—any good coach does. We give them the freedom to make things happen," he says.

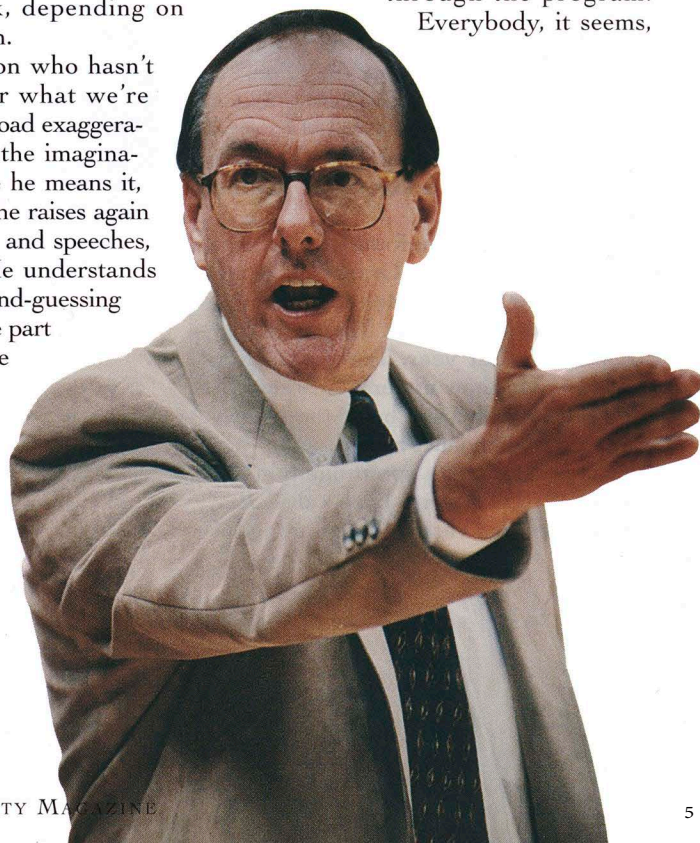
"Once you're established in the top group of players, it's a lot of fun because he lets you play," says Leo Rautins, who played for Boeheim from 1980 to 1983. "Practices are fun and interesting. You don't stand around; you run a lot, scrimmage a lot."

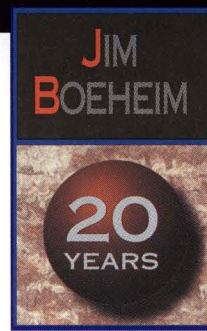
Coaching staff get the opportunity to make things happen, too.

"He's good to work for," says Fine, who's been with Boeheim 20 years. "I probably have more freedom than any other assistant in the country. If you do your job, he doesn't interfere or stand over you."

Playing for Boeheim is a business relationship, but the relationship is revised on the day your eligibility expires. From then on, you've got a faithful friend. Boeheim talks fondly of dozens of players who have been through the program.

Everybody, it seems,





was a good guy or a nice kid. If there was trouble, he doesn't talk about it. "Too many times people dwell on the bad stories," he says. "I choose to dwell on the good ones."

He keeps in touch with many of the guys. Rafael Addison called when he signed his contract with Charlotte. Pearl Washington keeps Boeheim posted on his efforts to put together a life without basketball. Boeheim helped Sonny Spera get the graduate assistantship that meant an all-expense-paid trip through dental school. He's been known to defend Derrick Coleman when others were less kind.

"Look around at the pictures on these walls," he says. "These teams have brought so much to me and to this whole area. Sometimes that's overlooked in wanting everything to be the best. Sometimes people forget to appreciate everything they have." Like a chance to watch a Pearl Washington, Billy Owens, Derrick Coleman, or Lawrence Moten in action, up close. "I always want people to walk away appreciating the talent of these kids," says Boeheim.

He wants them to finish school, but understands how issues like a budding NBA career can get in the way.

"When they're making \$3 to \$4 million it's hard to get them to focus on what they should do," says Boeheim. "Rony Seikaly came back and finished, and we're encouraging other guys to come back. We're trying to set up a program that will allow them to take the courses they need by correspondence."

In the 18-day recruiting period immediately preceding the first practice, most coaches try to hit about a dozen homes. Boeheim visited 22 this year. He's looking for at least four new players for the 1996-97 team.

Leo Rautins probably knows more about how Boeheim recruits than anyone else. He went through the process three times and signed with other schools twice before Boeheim finally netted him in 1979.

"One thing I liked about Jim and his staff was that it was straight recruiting," Rautins says. "With a lot of coaches, you knew it was one big snowball they were throwing at you. Jim doesn't try to impress you while he talks to you. He doesn't put on airs."

"He wasn't one to promise anything," says Howard Triche, who played from 1983 to 1987. "He just laid down what was going on, and then it was up to me to decide if I wanted to come here."

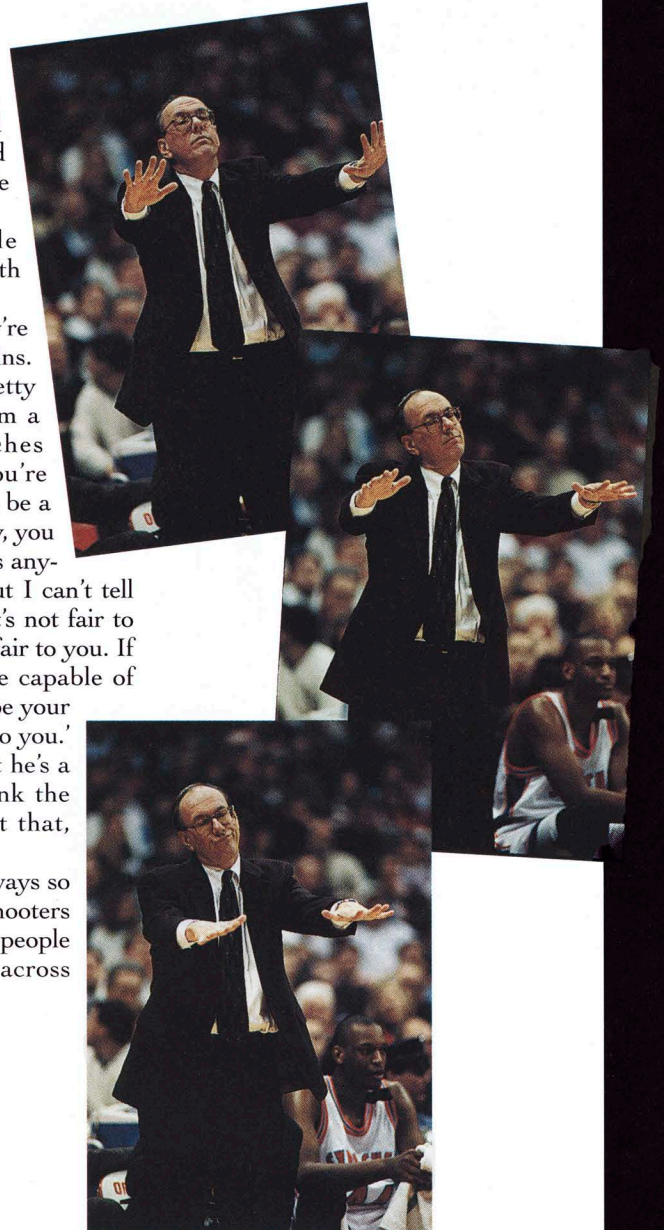
The no-nonsense style keeps Boeheim credible with street-smart kids.

"Players know when they're getting conned," says Rautins. "I think they read Jim pretty well. He doesn't give them a line of junk. I had coaches telling me everything—'You're gonna do this, you're gonna be a starter.' Jim would say, 'Hey, you have as much of a chance as anybody I've ever recruited, but I can't tell you you're going to start. It's not fair to the guys I have and it's not fair to you. If you do what I think you're capable of doing, most likely that will be your spot, but I can't just give it to you.' Players respect the fact that he's a straight-shooter, and I think the community should respect that, too."

The community is not always so comfortable with straight-shooters who don't put on airs, and people throughout Syracuse and across

Maestro of the hardwood:

Jim Boeheim conducts the Orangemen through a basketball game in the Carrier Dome.



"I don't know why somebody of his stature, with the things that he's accomplished, should have to constantly go around defending himself, defending his program, defending his players."—Dave Bing



During his years as a player and coach, Jim Boeheim has worked with many rising stars of basketball. Here he shakes hands with Lawrence Moten '95, who now plays professional basketball with the Vancouver Grizzlies.

the country have at times been uncomfortable with Boeheim. He's not vivacious or outgoing. He can appear sullen. He'll tell you up-front he's not personable. He says he's shy. People who know him tell the same story: He's a good guy, but don't expect a song and dance. He does not play to the camera. He does not talk in sound bites. He does not do PR. We are talking college basketball. He is a coach. In his mind, that sums it up.

He called a fan an idiot on a local radio call-in show once. He's been known to get annoyed with some questions, with people looking to pin something on the program, the players, or the University.

"When we lose a game it's always difficult; you don't want to talk to the media or anybody, but you go in and explain what happened—and they write whatever they want to write."

He denies that he has a bad relationship with the media, and yet that seems the logical conclusion of what he says. He admits he's bothered by what's written about him. "I think about all of it," he says. That you can believe.

A referees poll in 1987 tagged him as one of the 10 most difficult coaches in the country to work with, but that was eight years ago, and lots of people say he's mellowed. Talk with him one-on-one outside of a game situation and he is the essence of mellow.

He says he doesn't care for fame, but he offers his generously to help others. He gives his time to charity golf tournaments and has been a leader in supporting causes like the Syracuse Boys & Girls Club, the Pioneer Center for the Blind, the National Kidney Foundation, and the National Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. He visits children in cancer units and takes players with him.

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"We try to do as much as we can in the community," he says simply. "We always have." He wishes people would pay as much attention to these good works as they do to the players' occasional missteps. It disturbs him that people will work so hard to root out the bad and ignore all the good.

From the *Syracuse Post-Standard* to *The New York Times*, the press has worked hard at trying to figure out Jim Boeheim. Every couple of years, someone attempts the job again. They call him a "mystery" and wonder whether he's "really happy." They print his address and speculate about how much he earns. Boeheim doesn't like it, and he doesn't understand it.

"I'm not a hard person to figure out, but you shouldn't be trying to figure me out," he says. "It doesn't matter whether or not I'm happy. All that should matter is that I'm coaching these guys."

In February 1991, during the NCAA investigation of alleged SU basketball recruiting violations, Providence College head coach Rick Barnes said, "I don't know if there's a team in the country that's as underrated and well coached as Syracuse." About the same time, Dave Bing said of Boeheim, "I don't know why somebody of his stature, with the things that he's accomplished, should have to constantly go around defending himself, defending his program, defending his players."

There are four neat rows of team photos on Bernie Fine's office wall—three rows of five and a final row of four. Nineteen seasons represented. Space for just one more, the one taking shape right now. Then

what? Not an issue. Despite a very successful past, Boeheim won't lay claim to a future.

"I came here when I was 17 and I didn't think I'd last a year," he says. "There have probably been 15 times since then that I didn't think I'd be back for the next year. That's why I take it year by year. I start every new year like the first and I never think of the years going by. I just think about this team." ■

Head coach Jim Boeheim and assistant coach Bernie Fine spend a few moments in Boeheim's Manley Field House office before heading to practice.

