

A marriage made on hardwood

by Mark Spector

Between them they've won 11 CIAU basketball championships. That's more than other programs can muster in 75 years.

It took 20 seasons between them. In that time they've compiled an incredible record of 537 wins against just 139 losses. That's a winning percentage of .790. But who's counting?

They are Kathy and Ken Shields. Sounds just like that couple that you stayed beside in the campground last summer. Or the couple that you met at that dinner party at Christmas time.

Not quite.

Actually, in their respective roles as men's and women's basketball coaches at the University of Victoria, they are the most hotly avoided pair of individuals in the country.

You don't want to meet up with them when a tournament is on the line.

It all started (as they say) in a little town called Vancouver. Ken was a grad student in 1970 and was coaching the varsity women's team. Kathy was a player. "The next year he went to a coaching job at Laurentian," remembers Kathy. "The next year I followed him.

"When he came back to Victoria in '76, I came with him. We were married shortly after."

If you've ever seen either of them run their ball club, you'd wonder how they could stand each other. While Ken is a picture of intensity, she is very calm, collected. "I've got a totally different personality," she concedes.

"She has her own personality, and that's good," says Ken. "It's a good thing because if we were both like me, we'd never get along. I'm way too intense."

"Likes don't attract. We're very, very different," says the four time CIAU Coach of the Year.

So how do they function. Being the only husband and wife team in the country would be pressure enough, one would think. But actually getting along at the same time?

"I think that it's a good thing for him," Kathy says. "Some coaches' wives don't understand their husband's jobs. When one of us has to miss dinner because of a player problem or something, it's much easier."

"At lots of schools there's a constant battle for funding, facility time, etcetera, between the two coaches. It's everyone for themselves. We're both concerned about each other's teams."

Ken agrees: "There's no rivalry between us. Some places it's a contest. We very rarely get involved with each other's games though. Maybe afterwards we'll talk about things, but never during."

"It's only an advantage if we make it one."

But living with a champion has its disadvantages too. Like trying to compete... or even stay close.

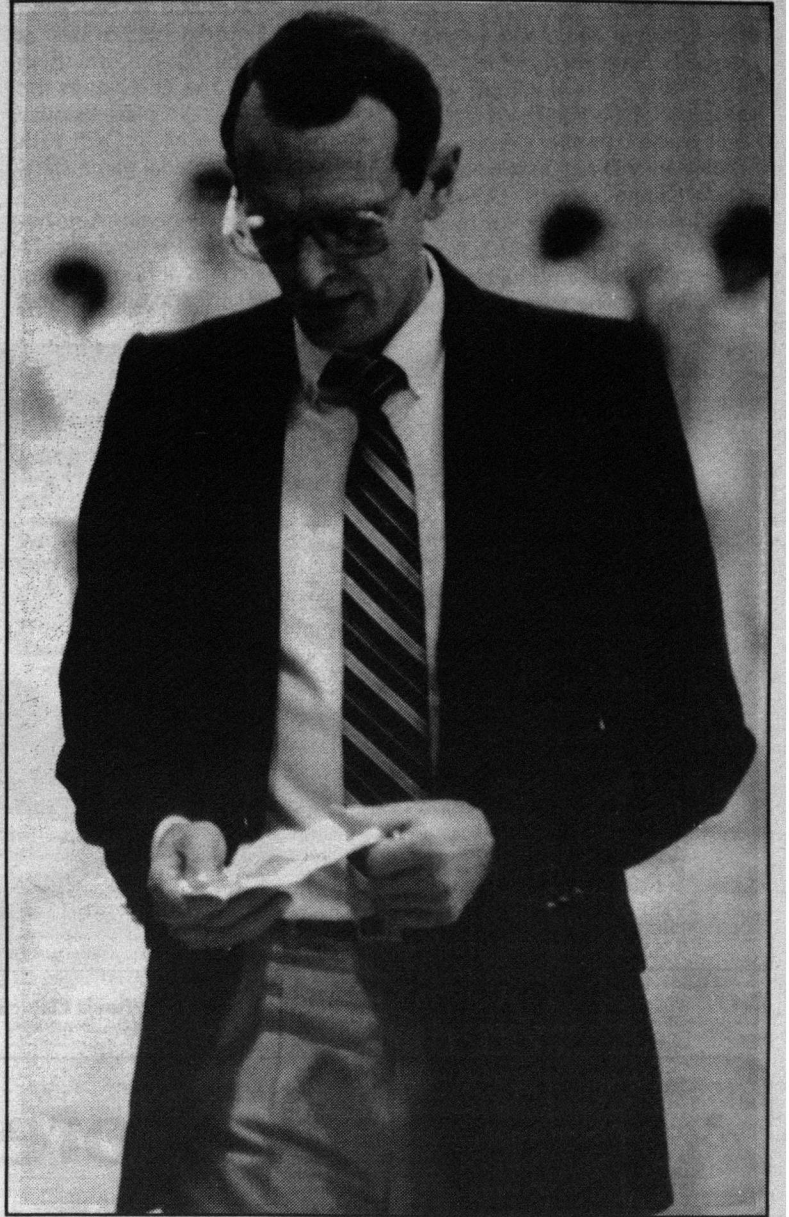
"(Three) years ago when my team was rebuilding it was very tough for us. We didn't make the nationals, and it was hard for Ken to enjoy his win when I had lost."

"I've learned from him over the years, like to take it easy when the game's done."

"We try hard not to let basketball enter into our homelife," agrees Ken.

Alberta coach Don Horwood knows Ken Shields almost as well as Kathy does. "Not that well," asserts Horwood, who is very quick to point out that his Golden Bears have defeated the Vikings three of the last four times that they met. Unfortunately, no one else has. Shields is onto his left hand now, having collected CIAU championship rings in each of the last seven years. Kathy's only won four times in that span. Only!

But call Horwood a masochist, he welcomes any chance to play



Ken Shields (above right) and wife Kathy (above) — 11 championships in 11 years.

against his colleague. "He's the one I want to play. I like to coach against the best, and that's him," Horwood states. "I've got tremendous respect for their program, and not a single coach in Canada isn't envious of the program that he's got out there. "If Ken were in the U.S., he'd be the God of basketball."

The Shields' both admit, though, that they were very nearly enticed to UBC, a program over which they have dominated for years.

"We took it (the offer) very seriously," says Kathy. "It was a very attractive offer," Ken agreed. "We were very, very close to going."

But the directors at UVic wised up and sweetened the pot for both

Kathy and Ken. Incidentally, it was rumored that Horwood was approached by UBC as well.

So if you like basketball, or if perhaps you have a streak of romanticism in you, this is an act that you don't want to miss. And, as usual, both the Vikings and the Vikettes come to Edmonton Saturday night as the number one teams in Canada.

And the University of Victoria is glad that they didn't miss their act back in '76.

Sure, championship rings are nice. But think of all the money they've saved on hotel rooms on the road.

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