

Rosselli nabs 1,000th as YSU tops Gannon

by Dan Pecchia and Bruce Burge

A smile crossed the face of YSU head basketball coach Dom Rosselli as his Penguins held on to turn back the Gannon Knights, 65-57, and give Rosselli his 1,000th career coaching victory.

Wednesday night's cage triumph at Beeghly Center brought Rosselli's basketball total to 582 wins, which, when parlayed with 418 victories via the baseball diamond, earn him the coveted millenium.

"It's just another game," said Rosselli, shortly after the contest. "We had to struggle for it, but I don't worry about numbers. The kids played hard, but to me a win is a win."

Point-guard John Goodson sparked the YSU attack with 15 points to feature a hard-fought see-saw battle with the visiting Knights.

Gannon, ironically, has played more games against Rosselli-coached teams (63) than any other of the Penguins' opponents down through YSU history. The rivalry dates back to 1946, when Roselli's first post World War II team upended the Knights, 59-49.

Coaches praise Rosselli

Former Gannon mentor Lou Tullio, who directed the Knights in the early 1950's, remembers the early days of the rivalry, and Dom Rosselli.

"We always looked forward to Youngstown State games, and Dom and I enjoyed playing each other," said Tullio, now the mayor of Erie, Pa. "Dom always gave a good account of himself and got a lot out of his boys."

Prior to the war, Rosselli served as head basketball coach for two seasons. Since assuming the position in the winter of 1940-41, he has led the Penguins to a .613 winning percentage, three Ohio District crowns, and 13 post-season tournament berths.

Now in his 38th season at the helm, Rosselli has assumed the name of "living legend" among area sports fans.

"That's exactly the way we feel about him in the coaching profession," said Cleveland State skipper Ray Dieringer, who has matched squads with Rosselli for the last 12 years. "I've never had the opportunity to coach against a finer person than he is, or a finer coach. I only wish he could get another 1,000."

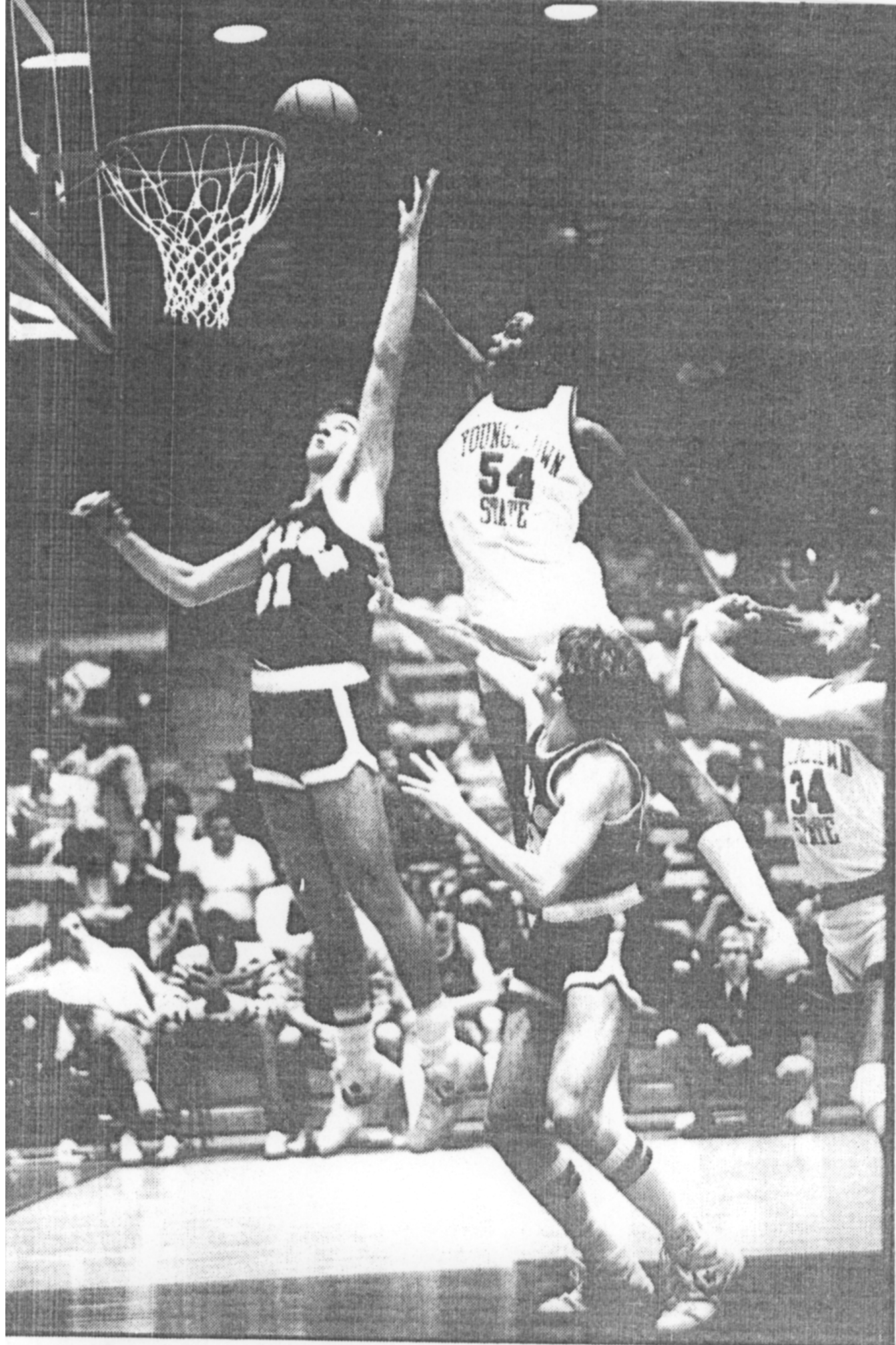
One of the most intense Penguin rivalries was the YSU-Steubenville fued, which came to the hardwood 46 times during Rosselli's career.

"Dom Rosselli is the pinnacle of what a basketball coach should be," said Hank Kusma, former Steubenville coach, who guided the Barons in a dozen meetings against YSU during the mid 50s and late 70s. "He's a class individual as well as being an outstanding coach."

When speaking of rivalries, Penguin fans must not forget the Akron Zips, who, to date, have engaged in nearly 200 sporting contests against YSU, of which 55 were men's basketball games. Most of the Zip-Penguin cage match-ups were extremely close battles.

"I don't remember them being any other way," noted Wyatt Web, who piloted Akron throughout the late 60s and early 70s. "It (the rivalry) was always a competitive situation, and we always had a lot of respect for Dom Rosselli's teams."

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Steve Martin (54) splits two Gannon defenders for a key tip-in to help Coach Dom Rosselli achieve his 1,000th career coaching victory. John Keshock (34) watches intently. (Photo by John Saraya)

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Before taking over as head coach, Rosselli served as an assistant under Ray Sweeney, who held the post from 1935 to 1940.

"Dom has done a tremendous job at Youngstown State," Sweeney said. "He's a fine person who has worked very hard to become successful."

Players remember Rosselli

Rosselli has earned the respect of his players as well.

Tony Knott, one of the greatest players ever to wear a YSU uniform, used to consider Rosselli as his "father away from home" when he played for the Penguins in the mid 50s.

"I just think the world of Dom," said Knott, whose name dots the YSU record book in several places. "He's just a really respectable guy and he was a peach of a guy to play for,

Another Penguin basketball great was Herb Lake, who still holds all YSU rebound records which he set in the late 50s.

"He did outstanding job as a coach and I'm sure all of his players share the same sentiments," Lake said of his former coach.

Jeff Covington, the all-time leading scorer for the Penguins, said that his relationship with Rosselli "always went further than the player-coach relationship, and always will."

"I enjoyed playing for him the four years," said Covington, now assistant basketball coach at Kent State University.

"He taught me a lot and what I learned is now paying off."

Media Mindful of Rosselli

Rosselli's career has also drawn the attention of some of the local media. Chuck Perazich, sports editor of *The Vindicator*, has been at countless Penguin games throughout YSU history.

"Dom always kept his winning in the proper perspective," said Perazich, who has been with the local newspaper for the past 28 years. "I've seen him win games with inferior material, and I've seen him win games with superior material. He's always maintained one level of cordiality, and never gloated or basked over beating another team."

Don Gardner, who has served the Youngstown sports community for over 40 years in the broadcasting capacity, covered Rosselli's first YSU basketball game and traveled with the Penguins for many years.

"It's a wonder that a kid his size could do anything," Gardner quipped. "He was always a competitor and no matter what he turned his hand to, he gave 100%."

Rosselli Recalls Past

A native of the Youngstown area, Rosselli spent much of his youth participating in local sports while growing up in the Smoky Hollow region.

"I would play any sport available," said Rosselli. "I stayed out of trouble by spending my time with sports."

Obviously, it paid off for Rosselli, as his four-year stint at Rayen High earned him a football scholarship to Geneva College.

There, Rosselli played quarterback under the late Dwight "Dike" Beede, who was later to become YSU's first grid coach. Rosselli also starred in baseball and basketball for the Covenanters, before graduating in 1939.

He enrolled in graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh after graduation, acquiring his M.A. in Education, and then came to Youngstown College to coach basketball and serve as a football assistant under Beede, another Penguin immortal.

"There were a lot of intangible things I learned from being around Dike," Rosselli said. "There are certain things that rub off, and everyone that has ever associated with Dike could say that some good rubbed off."

In 1948, Rosselli became the only Penguin baseball coach, and to date has guided YSU to a phenomenal 24 winning seasons in 27 years at the post.

"It gets tough at times, coaching two major sports," said Rosselli, "but it means you've got to work harder, keep your mind clear and keep your priorities straight. You've got to work at your job."

In his rookie year as the Youngstown College basketball mentor, Rosselli led to 14-9 a squad that had only experienced three winning seasons in its 13-year history before his takeover.

"I can remember that team and almost all of the players that ever played for me," said Rosselli. "You mention a kid and I can still say this or that about him."

After a disappointing 9-12 season the following year, Rosselli left his position to serve in World War II as an Air Force captain.

"I stayed active in sports when I was with the service," Rosselli said, "but I was glad to get my job back and just keep with it."

Returns from War

Upon returning, Rosselli led Youngstown College to another winning season, but suffered through seven losing campaigns over the next nine years.

"Losing is always hard to take no matter what," said Rosselli, "but you've got to learn to take

the bitter with the sweet, and that goes for everything in life."

In the winter of 1956-57, Rosselli's Penguins compiled a 23-4 record enroute to the NAIA Ohio District Tournament Championship and advanced to the quarter finals of the National Tournament before bowing to Southeast Oklahoma by a 69-65 count.

"Things started to blossom then," said Rosselli, who won the Ohio



Dominic Rosselli

College Coach of the Year Award after that season. "We had a lot of good players that year, and we had a lot of exciting games."

Youngstown University repeated as the Ohio District Champs for the next two years, reaching the quarterfinals of the NAIA Nationals again in 1958.

Rosselli received the Italian Coach of the Year award in 1958, after the Penguins had finished out at 23-7.

After going 11-14 in 1959-60, Rosselli's Youngstown University teams went 12 years without a losing season, making seven post-season appearances throughout the skein.

Rosselli received his second Ohio College Coach of the Year award in 1964 when his Penguins registered a 24-3 mark, their best ever.

"That year helped our program to become more of a fan's sport," Rosselli said. "We won 16 in a row that season, which helped create a lot of excitement."

Since that time, YSU has had only two losing campaigns, and

has been in post-season NCAA play twice.

"The recent success of the team is always because of the players," said the modest coach. "There are tons of unsung heroes who have done the job, and it's hard to single out just one player, because there have been so many."

This year, Rosselli's Penguins take a step up in competition, because of a difficult schedule and their new membership in the Ohio Valley Conference.

"This is the toughest schedule in the school's history," Rosselli said. "It means we've got to get stronger. The OVC is very competitive and it's gonna be every night that we'll be put on the spot."

Dom Rosselli has been put on the spot many times throughout his coaching career, yet still enhances the winning tradition he's built here at YSU.

Sixty six years young, the living legend continues.