

Last victory was in 1971

Generals give Globetrotters a fight

Washington Generals team members know that anytime they play, they probably won't win.

It's not that the Generals play poor basketball, but they have the misfortune of playing the Harlem Globetrotters almost 200 times a year. The Generals surrendered again at Pershing Auditorium Saturday night.

Sam Sawyer, Bill Campion and Garry Cooper play for the Generals — a team that hasn't won a game since Jan. 5, 1971.

But they don't consider themselves losers.

Campion, a six-year veteran, played briefly with the New York Nets during the American Basketball Association era and tried out with the Detroit Pistons last year. He said the Generals don't play to lose.

"I've never been told to lose a game," he said. "Any ballplayer doesn't like to lose; my job is to play basketball."

Losing every game is hard to accept, said Cooper, a rookie who recently finished a college basketball career at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. He said he has never been on a losing team before, but he still enjoys playing against the Globetrotters.

Sawyer, an 18-year veteran and assistant coach, said he looks at his role on the Generals as a player who helps

entertain the audience.

"It goes back to the principle that it's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game," he said. "It's natural for athletes to play to win and we do play to win. It's just that we're playing against a very good team."

Sawyer was a part of that historical Generals victory in 1971. He said he remembers it well.

The Globetrotters took the loss very well, he said, and congratulated the Generals on their victory. But the Generals weren't prepared for the win, he said.

"We didn't have any champagne or anything," he said. "But we had a Coke and we poured the Coke on Coach Klotz's head."

According to Coach Louis "Red" Klotz, the Generals are no pushovers.

"My players have to play well on this team," Klotz said.

Former Generals include Charlie Criss and Sam Pellom. Both played for the Atlanta Hawks.

Not just anyone can make the Generals team, Klotz said.

"You have to have a sense of humor, a good disposition, like to travel and be a helluva ballplayer," he said.

Most players, Klotz said, use the Generals as a stepping stone to the National Basketball Association or to

the Globetrotters. Sawyer said he agreed with Klotz's assessment of the Generals. He said they are underestimated.

"People think we're a bunch of pat-sies," he said. "But people think better of the Washington Generals after the game."

Saturday's matchup with the Globetrotters included all the crowd-pleasing antics. The Generals played along, sometimes almost stealing the show.

Sawyer, while the Globetrotters performed the Generals often watched from the bench.

But that's all part of the performance, Sawyer said, and the Generals don't mind not being in the spotlight.

"We are part of the laughter," he said. "We know we contribute."

All three contributed in Saturday's game, pleasing the crowd and piling up points. Sawyer guarded Geese Ausbie during the second quarter. He often was the subject of Ausbie's jokes and tricks. Campion played three quarters and tallied 15 points on outside jump shots and slam dunks. Cooper added six points.

Despite the continuous travel, all said they enjoyed playing for the Generals.

"I wouldn't have done it for 18 years if I didn't enjoy it," Sawyer said.

Story by Kevin Warneke

Photos by Craig Andresen

Clockwise from top to right: Sam Sawyer pokes some fun at the official because of his choice of handbags. The Globetrotters Clyde Austin Dribbles circles around Greg Scott of the Generals. Hubert "Geese" Ausbie seems awed by Sawyer's presence. Sawyer acts a bit miffed as Ausbie takes liberties with the official.



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