

Where Are They Now: Frank Guisness, UW basketball star

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Published 9:00 pm, Tuesday, March 15, 2005



He has season tickets for Washington men's basketball games somewhere in the upper level at Hec Edmundson Pavilion, on the south side of the arena. He doesn't know exactly where. He never sits there. Frank Guisness is the guy at the far end of press row, standing throughout the action, fidgeting nonstop, slyly exercising. For 74 years now, he has been in perpetual motion, enjoying his own decorated Huskies career, still keeping himself fit, always looking for a reason to let fly with his one-handed push shot. Considering how long he's been a deft basketball marksman, what's another two decades?

Fifty-four years ago, Guisness helped the Huskies capture the Pacific Coast Conference championship in a playoff with UCLA and qualify for the 16-team NCAA Tournament in Kansas City. He was at his best in the postseason spotlight.

Frank Guisness, 74, is still shooting baskets. He helped the UW reach the NCAA Tournament in 1951. "My ambition is to shoot baskets with my great-grandchildren," Guisness says. "I've already done it with my grandchildren. My oldest grandchild is only 13, though. I've got a ways to go. I'll have to do it at 95."

The 6-foot-2 forward came up with 21 and 22 points on consecutive nights as the UW swept the Bruins 70-51 and 71-54 in Seattle for the '51 league title. He led the Huskies with 16 points in their NCAA opener, a 62-40 thrashing of Texas A&M, a startling outcome that was followed by a heartbreaking 61-57 loss to Oklahoma State and an 80-67 consolation victory over BYU.

"John Wooden gave me the highest compliment," he recalled with pride, referring to the legendary UCLA coach. "He said, 'One guy can't check Guisness.' "

Today, he is a retired car sales manager who lives in Laurelhurst with his wife of 45 years, JoAnne, and is the father of two grown children, Mary, 42, and Greg, 40, who have provided him with six grandchildren.

With Guisness, there is no idle time. He exercises at least an hour every day. He keeps two basketballs, a tennis racquet and baseball mitt in the trunk of his car. He has a list of favorite hoops and walls throughout the north end and doesn't hesitate to use them.

Stand and talk to him, and he might start doing ankle flexes in mid-sentence. Or he'll be at home and grab onto his sink and lift himself up, strengthening his shoulders. Once while waiting to pick up family members at the airport, he hopped up on a bench and started doing knee bends.

"My 6-year-old grandson saw me and said, 'Can we just act like we don't know him?' " Guisness said, smiling at this.

Everybody wanted to know him in Southwest Washington. He averaged 20 points per game as a senior for then Vancouver High School, the state runner-up in 1947. He was certain he was bound for Oregon State. One look at Seattle convinced him otherwise, and the end results proved his decision to be a wise one. "When I was up here we played the Beavers 12 times and won 10," he said. "I picked the right school. I wish I was that smart in some of my econ classes."

Quick and determined, Guisness was a two-time All-PCC selection, scoring 1,070 points in his three-year varsity career, averaging 11.9 per game. He started alongside Bob Houbregs, Doug McClary, LeDon Henson and Lou Soriano, losing the league playoff to UCLA and missing out on a second NCAA appearance as a senior in '52. It was a huge disappointment for multiple reasons: The Huskies were 25-6, ranked in the top 10 all season and as high as third; worse, the Final Four was held at Edmundson Pavilion that year.

"Tippy Dye said that was the best team he ever had," said Guisness, referring to his UW coach, who guided the Huskies to the Final Four in Kansas City the following season after the forward had graduated.

Guisness was drafted in the fourth round by the Baltimore Bullets and offered a \$5,500 contract by the NBA team, but he had a military commitment to fulfill. He played one year of AAU ball, helping the Seattle-based Buchan Bakers win the 1956 national championship, before devoting himself full time to his family and car sales.

He gave up competitive hoops, but he has never stopped exercising, never stopped shooting. "People think I'm nuts; they laugh at me," Guisness said. "They ask, 'When are you going to grow up?'"

"Never."