

Where Are They Now? George Irvine, Former Huskies basketball star

'Hawkeye' had golden touch

By DAN RALEY, P-I REPORTER Published 10:00 pm, Tuesday, December 18, 2007

[George Irvine](#) had a textbook jump shot, squaring up to the rim with perfect form and launching the basketball with a stroke as pleasing to watch as it was accurate.

Yet on the night after Christmas in 1969, against a 12th-ranked USC team full of future pros in Portland's now-defunct Far West Classic, Irvine couldn't find the range. Three of his first four attempts bounced off. The Washington Huskies senior forward was enjoying a career outing and didn't know it.

"I made a lucky shot and after that I was on a roll," he said.

Indeed, Irvine drained 15 of his final 16 field-goal tries, including all 10 in the second half. He piled up 41 points, still the fourth-highest total in UW history, trailing only three 40-plus games by Bob Houbregs. He dropped in his final point in a 90-86 victory over the Trojans on a free throw following the buzzer after getting knocked to the floor by USC's 7-foot-1, 265-pound [Ron Taylor](#) on a breakaway lay-in and momentarily losing consciousness -- though some would suggest there was nothing momentary about his state of mind.

That season, Irvine also came up with games of 35, 33 and 31 points, averaging an even 20 per game, and earned All-Pac-8 honors. He hit 11 of 13 shots against Yale. He was hardly fulfilled, though. His [Tex Winter](#)-coached team had as much potential as any for the UW, opening 8-0 and getting ranked ninth, before injuries spoiled everything.

Senior [Rafael Stone](#), a sensational dribbler and passer, and 6-9 sophomore [Steve Hawes](#), a second 20-point scorer, were lost with broken legs in consecutive games. Both played again after lengthy absences, but the damage was done, with the UW settling for a 17-9 season.

"We were good, we were really good," Irvine said. "Lose your point guard and center, and it's going to hurt most teams. We couldn't get out and run as much. We struggled until they came back. It was disappointing."

Irvine came to the Huskies from [Ballard High School](#) as part of a recruiting class with more of a localized bent than usual. The UW signed four of the five All-Metro players in 1966, also taking Roosevelt's Dave West, Cleveland's Larry Bullock and Stone from Garfield. There was a family connection, too.

Irvine's brother, Earle, had been a stalwart for [Lincoln High School](#), setting the Metro scoring record with a 44-point game, and a two-year starter for the Huskies, lending to much anticipation surrounding the arrival of the next family member.

"He was one of the best the city has produced, and coming along as his little brother gave me opportunity," Irvine said.

A career 55-percent shooter for the Huskies who ranks 17th on the UW scoring list with 1,314 points, Irvine was drafted by the Sonics, but saw more opportunity and money in the newly formed [American Basketball Association](#). He played five seasons for the Virginia Squires, sharing the floor with a who's who list of teammates, topped by [Julius Erving](#), [George Gervin](#), [Charlie Scott](#), [Swen Nater](#), [Doug Moe](#) and [Larry Brown](#), and then briefly with the [Denver Nuggets](#) before injuring a knee.

His shooting touch proved golden on the pro level, too, earning him the nickname "Hawkeye." He set a pro basketball record, since broken, by hitting 56 of 85 shots for the Squires in the 1972 ABA playoffs, a blistering 66 percent.

"That was playing with Julius," said Irvine, who spent two seasons alongside the player known as Dr. J. "They would double-team him, and he would give up the ball. That would space the floor, and I would get easy shots. Playing with Julius made life easier. I respected the hell out of him. He's a good friend."

Other Virginia teammates were [Roscoe Pondexter](#), father of current UW forward [Quincy Pondexter](#), and Taylor, the big guy from USC who laid him out in his career-high scoring game.

"The ironic part is we lived together in Virginia for three months," Irvine said of Taylor, now an actor. "I didn't bring it up -- much."

He spent the next two-plus decades in the NBA either coaching or in the front office, first joining Brown's Denver staff as an assistant coach. He had two stints as head coach of the [Indiana Pacers](#) and another with the [Detroit](#)

[Pistons](#), compiling a wearing 100-190 record before the latter team fired him in 2001. More recently, he scouted for the [Orlando Magic](#) and [Utah Jazz](#) and helped coach a high school team in Danville, Calif.

Two years ago, Irvine, 59, finally came home, buying a beachfront home in Indianola with his second wife, Jeanie, considering himself retired. He has two sons, Tobin and Jaime, and three stepsons, Conor, Michael and Pat.

He holds season tickets to UW football and basketball games. He shouldn't be faulted if he suddenly climbs out of his seat and starts pacing.

"I watch a game and think, 'I'd like to be coaching right there,' because you get the competitive juices going," Irvine said. "The part I miss the most is being able to go out and work with the players. The part I miss the least is dealing with players' agents and dealing with the media."

USC will be happy to hear that he misses something.