

The Kentucky Basketball Survey of 1945

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At the end of November 1945, University of Kentucky President Herman L. Donovan sent a brief letter and a four-question survey to 32 fellow university presidents. In the letter he made an extraordinary request: "It will be of help to us here at the University of Kentucky if we could learn the practice of certain other institutions in regard to the salaries paid to their basketball coaches. Would you be kind enough to give me the information requested below with the understanding that it will be considered confidential?"

He then asked for the following information:

1. Annual salary of basketball coach.
2. Is this a twelve-months' salary? Yes No
If not, what period of employment does it cover?
3. What duties does this coach perform in addition to coaching freshman and varsity basketball?
4. How much is expended annually for his assistants in coaching freshman and varsity basketball?

Donovan gave no explanation for this request. Nevertheless, all but three of the questionnaires were returned, with only one of the 29 institutions answering not mailing back its response quickly. Oklahoma A & M (now Oklahoma State University) alone delayed its response, the letter arriving on February 23, 1946, after the University of Kentucky had compiled a summary of the other responses. Oklahoma A & M did, however, comply with the request for information. In fact, only one school declined to share salary or other information about its basketball program. Declaring that "it has been our policy not to divulge the salaries of the members of our coaching staff," Purdue University Athletic Director Guy J. Mackey stated that he did not feel "in a position to complete the questionnaire submitted' by the University of Kentucky. Some of the information provided by the other universities was surprisingly detailed. (See, for example, the December 4, 1945 letter from Georgia Tech Athletic Director W. A. Alexander and the January 7, 1946 letter from L. W. St. John of Ohio State University).

Donovan solicited information from all eleven members of the conference to which Kentucky belonged, the SEC, as well as all of the Big Ten except the University of Chicago, which no longer competed in intercollegiate football.

Questionnaires were sent also to twelve institutions scattered across the nation which had successful basketball programs: Long Island University, New York University, St. John's University (Brooklyn), Rhode Island College, Temple University, Notre Dame University, De Paul University, University of Wyoming, University of Utah, Oklahoma A & M, Oregon State College, and the University of Oregon. Only St. John's, De Paul, and New York University did not respond.

The survey results underlined the fact that in 1945 basketball was not on the level of football, the dominating sport on most university campuses. Most of the basketball coaches served also—and often primarily—as assistant football coaches, a situation that would change later with the injection of huge sums of money from television. By the 1970s and 1980s, basketball would join football on many campuses as a revenue-generating sport, but in 1945 this level of importance generally did not exist.

In 1945, only two of the 29 colleges covered in the survey employed fulltime basketball coaches—Tulane and Wisconsin. All the other coaches had additional duties to perform, whether coaching or administrative tasks. For most coaches basketball seems to have been an added duty, with responsibilities as an assistant football coach generally taking precedence, especially in the SEC.

In addition, basketball coaching in 1945 was not, according to the evidence found in this survey, lavishly remunerated. Not in comparison, that is, with football coaching. The median for all 29 basketball coaches was \$5,000, while for the SEC it was only \$3,900. At Alabama Polytechnic Institute (Auburn) the coach made \$3,200 per year and served as an assistant football coach as well as director of the Tigers' basketball program during the winter months. At the University of Mississippi the head basketball coach received \$3,300 and was also responsible for serving as an assistant in the football program and for fulfilling "other duties."

In the richer Big Ten, the pay was better, with the median being \$6,000. In addition, every coach—with the exception of Bud Foster of Wisconsin—was responsible for other duties, including teaching physical education, or assisting and scouting in football, or serving as athletic director. One even worked as director of the university's golf course in addition to fulfilling responsibilities as assistant athletic director. The status of basketball coaches at other colleges included in the survey was similar to that of the Big Ten and SEC. At these colleges basketball coaches served as assistant football coaches, athletic directors, physical education instructors, baseball coaches, and one as "Assistant to the President."

Donovan had also conducted a survey during 1945 of salaries received by head football coaches. Unfortunately, that survey is no longer in existence but Donovan did summarize the findings in a letter to a University of Kentucky alumnus. Donovan observed that "the lowest salary paid any coach in the Southeastern Conference is \$7,500," and that "there are three schools paying \$12,000." Most of the schools "pay in the neighborhood of \$10,000 . . . In the

Big Ten there is no coach getting less than \$10,000, and some get up to \$15,000.”

Oklahoma A & M did not return its questionnaire in time for inclusion in the survey results, but the situation there was similar to the other responding schools. Henry Iba was one of the nation’s leading basketball coaches in the mid-1940s winning the NCAA title in 1945 and 1946 (the first back-to-back championships since the tournament had begun in 1939). Even Iba, however, had other duties to perform for his school. In addition to coaching the Aggies basketball team he served as the school’s athletic director and was paid \$10,000 on a twelve month basis. In his capacity as basketball coach Iba was, according to a February 21, 1946 letter from Assistant to the President Earle C. Albright, helped by an unspecified number of student assistants who were employed “at nominal salary, probably not exceeding \$1,000 a year.”²

On February 2, 1946 Donovan held a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the University of Kentucky’s recently incorporated Athletic Association. Donovan reported that he had received replies to an “inquiry which he had sent to a large number of institutions regarding the salaries and duties of basketball coaches.” After a brief summary of the information received Donovan observed that if Kentucky’s basketball coach, Adolph Rupp, “received a salary of \$6,500 for *basketball coaching alone*, he would be the highest paid coach in the country” (emphasis added). Quickly and with little discussion the Board voted unanimously for the raise.³

It is interesting to note that in the late 1920s Walter “Doc” Meanwell was paid \$6,500 as the basketball coach of the Wisconsin Badgers and that he continued to receive this salary into the depression thirties and until his retirement in 1934. His successor, Bud Foster, did not enjoy Meanwell’s prestige or his record of achievement and apparently found it necessary to accept a very large cut in salary because his pay in 1945 was only \$4,500. The opposite happened at the University of Kentucky. There basketball coaching salaries never approached \$3,000 during the twenties. When Adolph Rupp was hired in 1930 he received \$2,800, which was a sizeable increase over the pay of his predecessor John Mauer and was the highest salary paid a University of Kentucky basketball coach up to that time. In his second year at the University, 1931, Rupp received \$3,000, and by 1937 he was making \$4,250.⁴

In the mid-forties the top salary an administrator or faculty member at the University of Kentucky could make was \$5,000. A provision of the state’s 1891

1. Letter from Herman L. Donovan to Tyler Munford, dated October 26, 1945. University of Kentucky Archives.

2. Letter from E&C Albright to Herman L. Donovan, dated February 21, 1946. University of Kentucky Archives.

3. “Minutes of the Board of Directors, University of Kentucky Athletic Association. February 2, 1946.” University of Kentucky Archives. On the formation of the University of Kentucky Athletic Association see Humbert S. Nelli, “Herman L. Donovan and the Emergence of ‘Big Time’ Athletics at the University of Kentucky,” *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, in press.

4. University of Wisconsin Board of Regents Minutes, June 16, 1928; Chancellors Miscellaneous Files, Box 1, “Athletics—Ray Brown. etc.” Folder, Series 4/0/3. University of Wisconsin Archives. I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer of this article for the information, and the documentation, on Meanwell’s salary.

constitution imposed this cap on all state employees and was still in effect in 1946. At the time of the Athletic Association's vote on February 2, 1946 Adolph Rupp's salary was \$5,000, as was that of Athletic Director Bernie Shively, the deans of the colleges of Arts and Sciences, Engineering, Agriculture, Commerce, Law, Education, and the Graduate School, as well as the University's Comptroller, the Dean of the University, and even President Donovan (although Donovan received an additional \$3,500 from so-called "restricted" funds). For the average Kentuckian, \$5,000 was an unattainable income. According to the 1950 United States Census the median income for the state of Kentucky in 1949 was but \$1,353. For comparison, the average annual net income of nonsalaried lawyers in the nation as a whole in 1946 was \$6,951 while that of nonsalaried physicians was \$10,202.⁵

In 1986 *USA Today* reported on current coaching salaries. Unlike the mid-forties the average salary of the nation's college basketball coaches in 1986 (\$42,000) compared favorably with that of football coaches (\$45,900). Some even outearned their institution's football coach. Among these was Denny Crum of the University of Louisville, whose base salary in 1986 of \$102,022 not only exceeded that of the university's football coach, Howard Schnellenberger (\$72,100), but also outstripped the president, Donald C. Swain (\$97,750).⁶

Even assistant basketball coaches have in recent years received large salaries and enjoyed hefty pay raises. At the University of Kentucky assistant coach James Dickey received a 13.9 percent raise for 1988-89, assistant coach Dwane Casey enjoyed a 9.9 percent increase, while faculty and staff raises averaged two percent. Dickey's annual pay went from \$39,520 to \$45,000 and Casey's from \$36,400 to \$40,000. In addition, the two received additional income from coaching at sports camps, TV appearances, and from clothing and other endorsements. When asked by a newspaper reporter about the difference between athletic and academic pay structures at the University, one faculty member observed: "It's another symbol to many faculty of where academics rank in some people's minds."⁷

A comparison of the data from the 1945 survey with current statistics shows that in the space of four decades, the status of college basketball, as reflected in coaching salaries, has risen dramatically.

5. *University of Kentucky Budget for 1945-46*, manuscript copy in University of Kentucky Archives; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventeenth Decennial Census of the United States, 1950. VII, Characteristics of the Population: Pt 17. Kentucky* (Washington, 1952), p. 261; U.S. Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, 1975) pp. 175-76.

6. *USA Today*, September 24, 1986.

7. *Lexington Herald-Leader*, September 9, 1988.

December 4, 1945

Dr. H. L. Donovan, President
University of Kentucky
Lexington 29, Kentucky

Dear Doctor Donovan:

Doctor Van Leer turned over your questionnaire relative to the salary of our basketball coach to me for reply. I have filled it out to the best of my ability, but thought that a letter of explanation might also be necessary.

Prior to the war, we paid our basketball coach \$3600.00 a year. In addition to coaching the basketball team, he coached our baseball team. He used one of our assistant football coaches to help him in basketball, and another in baseball. We did not attempt to allocate any part of their salaries either to baseball or to basketball.

At this time, we are combining our departments of intercollegiate athletics and physical training and, except for the varsity football coach and two assistants, we are requiring all of our coaches to work in both departments. The institution pays part of their salary and our Athletic Association pays part.

We intend to go into basketball a little more vigorously than we did prior to the war and have consequently raised our budget. Mr. Mundorff, our former basketball coach, will return from the navy in a few months and we will pay him an annual salary of \$4800.00, \$2400.00 from the institution and \$2400.00 from the Athletic Association. He will coach baseball and basketball, and in addition will have around fifteen hours a week of physical training classes in sophomore physical training, indoor games division. We will have two of our physical training instructors help him in basketball, paying one of them \$1200.00 and the other \$600.00. The institution will pay each of these men \$2400.00 for their work in physical training.

I trust that I have made our set-up on this question clear. If there are any questions, I shall be glad to reply.

With kindest regards and best wishes, I am

Sincerely,
W. A. Alexander, Athletic Director

Source: Herman L. Donovan Papers, University of Kentucky Archives.

January 7, 1946

Mr. H. L. Donovan, President
University of Kentucky
Lexington, Kentucky

Dear President Donovan:

In the first place, I am quite apologetic that I have been so slow in answering your inquiry under date of November 29th. You could probably understand when I say that I have been buried under a mass of work, and am just now in the process of getting my desk cleared so that I can see the top in certain spots. Your inquiry directed to Mr. Bevis was forwarded to me on December 3rd for answer. While we do not make public the salaries of our coaches, I have no hesitation in giving you this information in confidence.

(1) Mr. H. G. Olsen, who has been the head coach of our basketball for something like twenty years, is on a \$6864 salary.

(2) Mr. Olsen is on the regular teaching basis which covers three quarters, and as a regular professor, he has the fourth quarter on vacation. In other words, he is paid for the Autumn, Winter and Spring Quarters of service, getting the Summer Quarter on vacation. If he teaches any in the Summer Quarter, he receives extra compensation for this service.

(3) Mr. Olsen has served during the Autumn Quarter as assistant athletic director. He has also served for a number of years as a special director of the University Golf Course which we operate.

(4) He has had one, and sometimes two assistants, in connection with the basketball job. At the present time he has one assistant who is paid something like \$900 for four months work. When we resume a full scale program, namely a freshman team in addition to the variety and reserve teams, we will doubtless have a second full time employee in basketball who will probably receive from \$3000 to \$3600. There will also be additional assistants during the basketball season by way of one or two additional men who are likely to be recent basketball players.

I trust this will give you such information as you may desire.

Sincerely yours,
L. W. St. John
Director of Athletics

LWS:R

Source: Herman L. Donovan Papers, University of Kentucky Archives.

Salaries and Duties of Basketball Coaches at Institutions in the Southeastern Conference and Big Ten Conference and at Eight Other Institutions That Have Recently Been Successful in Basketball

Institution	Annual Salary	Salary Period	Additional Duties	Expenditure for Assistants	Remarks
Alabama Polytechnic Inst.	\$3,200	12	Ass't football coach	\$1,200	
Georgia School of Technology	4,800	12	50% of salary to phy. ed. and basketball	1,800	Ass'ts also teach phy. ed. for additional salary total of \$4,800
Louisiana State University	3,600	12	Ass't coach in football and basketball	600	
Mississippi State College	3,600	12	Ass't in football, tennis coach, & inst. in phy. ed.	No data	Assistance in basketball rendered by one of football assistants
Tulane University	5,000	12	None	None	
University of Alabama	5,500	12	Football line coach, supervisor of athletic plant	No data	Assistance is given by other coaches Amount not specified
University of Florida	3,900	12	Ass't football coach and director of intramurals	None	An ass't to be added later
University of Georgia	5,000	12	Ass't in football, phy. ed. & dir. of intramurals	None	
University of Mississippi	3,300	12	Ass't in football & other duties	No data	Basketball is coached by one of ass't coaches, salaries range from \$2,700 to \$3,300.
University of Tennessee	5,000	12	Ass't in football & some admin. duties	600	
Vanderbilt University	2,300	Season	Ass't in athletics	None	The salary for basketball is \$500 for the season
Median for S. E. Conference	3,900	12		None	
Indiana University	\$7,000	12	Teaches physical education	\$1,500	Assistant's salary is projected maximum
Northwestern University	6,000	12	Assistant and scout in football	1,200	
Ohio State University	6,864	9	Ass't athletic director in fall quarter & director of univ. golf course.	4,500	May receive extra compensation for summer teaching. Expenditure for ass'ts is projected medium.

University of Illinois	9,500	12	Coach is also athletic director. Salary is for both jobs.	7,600	May receive extra compensation for summer teaching. One of assistants is head baseball coach.
University of Iowa	6,000	12	Teaches physical education	200	Amount for assistant varies.
University of Michigan	5,500	10	Assistant football coach	7,000	
University of Minnesota	4,750	9	Teaches physical education	1,500	
University of Wisconsin	4,500	10	None	3,000	
Median for Big Ten	6,000	11		2,250	
Long Island University	\$2,000	4	Ass't to President at salary of \$4,800	\$2,500	
Notre Dame University	5,200	12	Ass't in football	500	
Oregon State College	5,270	12	Teaches physical education	1,428	
Rhode Island State College	5,000	10	Director of Athletics & Head of Dept. of Phy. Ed.	None	
Temple University	500	4	Ass't football coach	400	Probably is paid an additional sum for football
University of Oregon	5,270	12	Coach of baseball	4,500	Expenditure for assistants also covers baseball
University of Utah	3,576	9	Teaches physical education	3,536	
University of Wyoming	4,500	12	Coaches baseball, scouts for football and teaches physical education	None	
Median for Misc. Group	4,750	11		3,018	
Median for Entire List	5,000	12	Either teaches in physical education or assists in another sport	Approximate 1,200	
75th Percentile for List	5,500	10	Either teaches in physical education or assists in another sport	3,000	

Source: Herman L. Donovan Papers, University of Kentucky Archives

NOTE: Purdue declined to provide the requested information and Oklahoma A&M responded after this table was prepared.