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Out of the Agony of this Hour, We Will Rise

The 1976-77 Purple Ace basketball season signaled the end of an era. With over 514 wins to his credit, coach Arad McCutchan retired as head coach at the University of Evansville after thirty-one years at the helm. Evansville had won five National Division II titles under McCutchan, and the team faced two challenges, a new coach and a new division. The new coach came in the form of a former 34-year old Oral Roberts University assistant coach, Bobby Watson. At the same time, Evansville competed at the NCAA Division I level for the first time.

On December 13, 1977, however, the course of Evansville basketball changed forever. With a 1-3 record in their first few weeks of play, 24 players, coaches and athletic boosters boarded a DC-3 airplane destined for Murfreesboro, Tennessee for a game against Middle Tennessee State University. Just ninety seconds after takeoff from Dress Regional Airport at 7:20 p.m., the plane crashed in a cornfield and all aboard perished. This paper provides

insight into the tragedy that occurred, as well as the impact upon the University of Evansville family, surviving members of those lost, and the basketball program. It will also address how the Evansville basketball program rebuilt itself, the status of the current basketball program, and the impact of the tragedy on both the University and its athletic program twenty-five years later. Over the course of time, many colleges and universities have lost members of athletic teams to airplane accidents, such as Marshall University football, Iowa State Cross Country, and most recently, Oklahoma State basketball. While there are similarities between the accidents, there are also events unique to each tragedy.

Many questions come to mind concerning the Evansville tragedy. What caused the airplane to crash? Who were the people that lost their lives on that night? How did the University choose to remember these people? What effect, beyond the loss of life, did the tragedy have on the University of Evansville and its basketball program, the community of Evansville, and the state of Indiana? How does the University now view the event? What role does the event play at Evansville, 25 years later, and what do current students, faculty, and basketball players know about the event?
