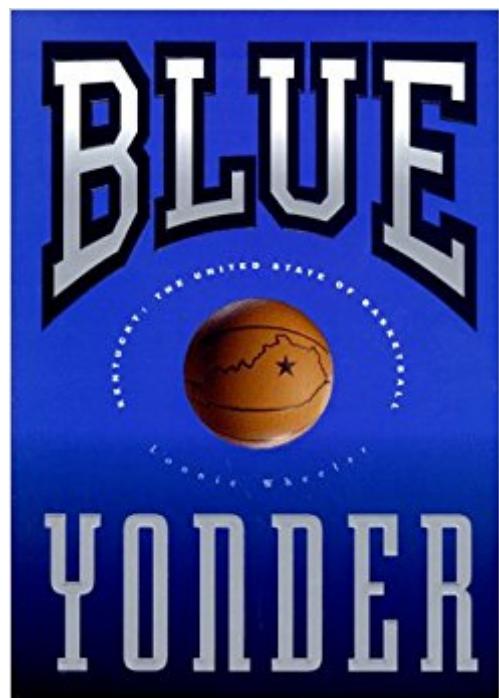


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# Blue Yonder : Kentucky : The United State Of Basketball



## Synopsis

This is an impeccably true story about a state's obsession, but it masquerades as a fast-paced cultural novel featuring at least a dozen of Kentucky's favorite characters. Even when the outcome is preordained-i.e., the University of Kentucky's 1997 trip to the Final Four-the readers cling precariously to their chairs, watching the astounding picture unfold. For in this unusual and disarming book, what happens next isn't always predictable. Wheeler, the author of eight books, including the best-selling *I Had a Hammer* (with Henry Aaron), begins with a fan camping out thirty-eight days in front of Lexington's Memorial Coliseum while waiting for tickets to a practice. Wheeler then takes the reader back in time to when basketball authoritarian Adolph Rupp established Kentucky's national reputation. Segueing deftly between the contemporary resurgence of Kentucky basketball under Rick Pitino and all the eventful turns between these two legendary coaching icons, the reader is taken on a star-studded trip down memory's free-throw lane. 320 pages. Hardcover.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book attempts to explain the phenomenon that is University of Kentucky basketball, both from inside the program and from the perspective of some of the most devoted fans in all sportsdom. Written by a journalist who had oft observed this scene but not participated in it (he admits to having been a non-UK fan but thought the subject needed book-length exposition), "Blue Yonder" succeeds wildly. It gives historical background on UK basketball by analyzing the reign of legendary coach Adolph Rupp, showing how "the Baron" was both flawed and tragically misunderstood by his

many critics. Wheeler gives special attention to UK superfans and the legions of UK supporters (and just basketball-crazy fans in general) residing in the Appalachian region of the commonwealth. Finally, the book looks at the circumstances under which Rick Pitino inherited the coaching mantle and how he raised the basketball program back to the top after a scandal, and then turned over the reins to Tubby Smith. For Kentucky fans, reading the book is like paging through a combination of family chronicles, a Shakespeare history play, and the Bible, all bound together at the spine. For non-UK fans, curious as to how the team engenders such fanatic loyalty, "Blue Yonder" gives the perspective and depth that no national publication or commentator has ever managed. Anyone interested in college basketball in general will gain from reading this well-written and well-researched book.

For a college basketball fan in North Dakota, I always wondered why Kentucky fans treated their program with such deference and respect. Seven national championships (six at the time the book was written) will garner well-earned praise from local and national media, certainly, but the almost religious fervor with which UK fans rally behind their 'Cats always amused me. Not anymore. Lonnie Wheeler's work is the best there is at explaining the Big Blue Phenomenon; the book is almost epic in its scope and subject, but it succeeds so well in imparting the importance of Kentucky basketball not only to Kentuckians, but also to anyone who appreciates the heart and soul of the individual athlete with legendary aspirations. Kentucky is never the underdog in the college basketball world, winning so often (more times, in fact, than any other school in college basketball history) that many outside of the state root for the team they're playing against just for the novelty of it. But this book goes beyond the juggernaut of the UK program, delving into its heart and soul and laying it out for all to see. My hat's off to Lonnie Wheeler for an insightful, intelligent, well-researched, well-written, and often even emotion-evoking exploration of the entity that is the University of Kentucky basketball program.

If you've ever wondered why the University of Kentucky Wildcat basketball fan is so completely and intensely immersed in the fortunes of twelve young people wearing the word "Kentucky" across their chests, then this is the book for you. Kentucky fans are known throughout the college basketball world as one of the the most fiercely supportive and brazenly one-sided groups of people around. Why? Ask one, or, if there isn't one nearby, pick up a copy of Lonnie Wheeler's book. Never before has there been such a rich explanation of Kentucky basketball, ranging from its controversial and largely misunderstood coach from the plains of Kansas, Adolph Rupp, to the slick, big city style of

coach Rick Pitino, to the down home, heady expectations of Maryland native, Orlando "Tubby" Smith. Mr. Wheeler's book is written not from the point of view of a Kentucky fan, but from the point of view of a disinterested journalist trying to tell the stories of the history and the emotion tethered to the most successful college basketball program of all time. As a Kentucky native, this book brought tears to my eyes on numerous occasions, and I salute Mr. Wheeler on his well-researched, well-written, and timely expose.

Lonnie Wheeler's book offers a glimpse into the many facets of Kentucky basketball, its fans, and its fanatics. You'll read about the history of the program from its salad days under Adolph Rupp, without any of the revisionist history most latter-day writers attempt to author about Rupp's "prejudice." You'll also see the groundwork being laid for this year's national championship, with the succession from Rick Pitino to Tubby Smith. Learn what it's like for a Kentucky mountain high school basketball player to be highly regarded across the nation, yet be considered not good enough to play at UK. This book is well-written, well-researched, and factually correct. (I should know; I'm quoted in the book, and very accurately, I might add) It also makes liberal use of many of today's means of communication, including the Internet. If you are a fan of Kentucky basketball, a college basketball fan in general, or if you are interested in learning something about the Commonwealth of Kentucky, this book deserves your attention.

...and then I had to read this book after losing a bet (on the 1999 UK/Indiana game, which Kentucky won). As a hoosier fan, it pains me to say that I actually loved this book, and any book that can take the arch enemy of a program and make him/her see the light is a remarkable work. Reading through this book, I actually realized that there were tears in my eyes on several occasions. How could this be? I'm a hoosier--a sworn enemy of the Kentucky Wildcats--and yet, after reading this book, I found myself actually (choke!) liking them! My congratulations to Lonnie Wheeler on an unbelievably good book, and my hat's off to the Kentucky Wildcats--the best program in college basketball!

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