

Colorado Classics: CU Buffs' Jim Jochems was an eye witness to Wilt Chamberlain's six-point game

By Irv Moss *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

Last month, the 50th anniversary of Wilt Chamberlain's extraordinary 100-point game in the NBA sparked the recirculation of the simple yet famous postgame photograph of Chamberlain holding a piece of paper with "100" written on it. Seeing it sparked a 1,000-word response from Jim Jochems, a former University of Colorado basketball player who competed against Chamberlain when the Buffaloes played the Kansas Jayhawks nearly 55 years ago.

On March 2, 1962, Chamberlain scored 100 points for the Philadelphia Warriors in their 169-147 victory over the New York Knicks in Hershey, Pa.

Four years earlier, Jochems and the Buffs were opponents of Chamberlain and the Jayhawks.

"We played Kansas in Boulder late in the 1957-58 season," Jochems said. "Chamberlain scored only six points. It was the lowest point total of his college career."

Chamberlain had two field goals and was 2-for-6 at the free-throw line in the game that was played Feb. 10, 1958.

The Buffs lost 60-51, but second-year CU coach Sox Walseth saluted his team for holding Chamberlain to six points, which was more than 25 points below his scoring average.

Jochems remembers seeing it a little differently.

"Saying we held Chamberlain to six points was a joke," Jochems said. "He didn't even look at the basket most of the game. He had decided he was going to repay his teammates for always getting the ball to him. I bet he had 20 assists."

Chamberlain, who scored a Big Seven Conference single-game record 46 points the week before, took only five shots against the Buffs. After the game, he said he wanted to brush up on his passing.

But after some prodding, Chamberlain expounded on why he passed so much.

"I found out early in the game that they were ganging up on me and I could feed the ball to the other boys for easy shots," Chamberlain said. "So I did."

Chamberlain's performance against the Buffs drew national interest, primarily because his scoring average dropped to 31.1 points per game — leaving him more than two points per game behind national leader Elgin Baylor of Seattle and 1.8 points behind Oscar Robertson of Cincinnati.

Jochems had the honor of playing against Chamberlain twice — once in Boulder and once in Lawrence, Kan. — before Chamberlain ended his college career after his junior year and joined the Harlem Globetrotters.

After a year with the Globetrotters, Chamberlain began his NBA career with his hometown Warriors in the 1959-60 season.

"He was huge," Jochems said, describing what it was like playing against the legendary player nicknamed "Wilt the Stilt."

"It was like you were playing against somebody who was looking out a second-story window," Jochems said. "He was 7-foot-3 and 280 pounds — and a great athlete. He competed in the high jump, the shot put and the 440-yard dash in track and field."

Jochems said Chamberlain, who died in October 1999 at age 63, wasn't a big fan of playing in Boulder.

"He didn't like to play in our Balch Fieldhouse," Jochems said. "He called our fans 'maniacs.' It was a tough place to play. We had standing-room-only crowds, and it could really get loud. He also thought the fans in Lawrence were angry at him for leaving early and not winning an NCAA championship."

While shaking hands with him before the game, Jochems said he asked Chamberlain how many points he was going to score.

"More than you, son," replied Chamberlain, who had NBA career averages of 30.1 points and 22.9 rebounds.

Jochems and Chamberlain might have been college teammates had Jochems followed in his father's footsteps and attended Kansas.

Jochems played on Denver South's state championship team in 1953 and considered enrolling at KU but decided to stay home and be closer to his girlfriend.

"My dad always joked that my girlfriend cost me two NCAA Final Fours," Jochems said.

After college, the 6-8 Jochems wanted to play for the Phillips Oilers in the National Industrial Basketball Association. His interest in the NIBL was sparked by watching Denver legends Robert "Ace" Gruenig and Jack McCracken. Instead, Jochems went into the pharmaceutical business and stayed in that field until retiring in 1990.

Jochems has two passions. One is the Masters golf tournament. He has been to Augusta National for 30 tournaments. His other passion is basketball. He is campaigning to form a plan that would secure Tad Boyle as coach of CU's men's basketball team for another 10 to 15 years. After all, he knows a winner when he sees one.

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