



# Hardwood Glory: A Life of John Wooden (Youth Biography)

*Barbara Olenyik Morrow*

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What you are as a person is far more important than what you are as a basketball player. John Wooden

Foreword by UCLA Basketball Coach Steve Alford

John Wooden helped define college basketball in the twentieth century and became an icon of American sports. His name is forever identified with the University of California, Los Angeles, where in the 1960s and 1970s he built a basketball dynasty and coached Bruin teams to unprecedented success: ten national championships in twelve years, seven national titles in a row, four perfect seasons, and an eighty-eight-game winning streak all NCAA men's records that remain unrivaled.

To speak only of Wooden's UCLA coaching career is to overlook a significant part of his life story, however. Wooden was born in Indiana, and throughout his long life--he died in 2010 just months shy of his hundredth birthday--he remained proud of his Hoosier roots, enough so that he visited his home state whenever possible, maintained contacts with old friends, and always stayed true to the midwestern values instilled in him by his family and teachers. In 1948, when at age thirty-seven Wooden accepted UCLA's head basketball job, few West Coasters had ever heard of him. Plenty of Hoosiers had.

They knew him as a young John Bob growing up on a Morgan County farm near the hamlet of Centerton, learning to toss a rag-stuffed ball through a tomato basket nailed to a barn wall. They knew him as the accomplished athlete nicknamed Pert who helped his Martinsville High School basketball team compete in three state championships. And they knew him as the India Rubber Man at Purdue University in West Lafayette, where, as a three-time All-American guard, he delighted fans with his hustle and dives for loose balls. Hoosiers, too, are the ones who called Wooden coach before the rest of the nation knew him as Coach. In the 1930s and 1940s, Johnny Wooden honed his hoops-teaching skills at South Bend Central High School and later at Indiana State Teachers College (now Indiana State University) in Terre Haute before crossing the continent to make basketball history.

In this tenth volume of the Indiana Historical Society Press's celebrated Youth Biography Series, Barbara Olenyik Morrow traces the path of Wooden's career. Readers young and old alike will meet the coaches who served as Wooden's mentors; the high-school sweetheart who became his devoted wife, Nell; the players who both respected and challenged him; and the fans who revered him not just for his coaching record but also for his decency and common-sense wisdom encapsulated in his homespun maxims ( Never mistake activity for accomplishment ) and highlighted in his well-known Pyramid of Success. Full of archival photos, this biography also shows how Wooden's story is inseparable from major events and social currents in the twentieth century, from the Great Depression to civil-rights struggles to campus unrest during the Vietnam War.



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