

**“They Remember the Man Who Invented the Jump Shot”**  
by **Low Freedman, Sports Editor**  
**Anchorage (Alaska) Daily News, April 1, 1990**

**Dateline:** DENVER

**Text:** He is from far away and from long ago, but this week at the NCAA Final Four basketball championships, **Kenny Sailors** is being remembered as if he never left. It's been 40 years since **Sailors** spent much time in Denver, 40 winters since he averaged 17.3 points per game for the original Denver Nuggets in the NBA, but he is as ubiquitous as Jerry Tarkanian this week.

NCAA Salute Dinner Thursday night: **Sailors** was a guest of honor. NCAA Final Four Exhibit: **Sailors** is on display in biggerthanlife photographs. NCAA game program: there's **Sailors'** face smiling back at you again. Denver Post: the story of **Sailors'** life.

TX: For the last 25 years, **Sailors** has been a hunting and fishing guide in Gakona, Alaska, as well as a high school basketball coach in Glennallen and, for the last three years, in Angoon.

**Sailors** walks around town here wearing an "Angoon, the basketball capital of Admiralty Island" jacket, a gift from his 1990 girls' team. He is being honored for what he did before the Alaska segment of his life began.

In 1943, **Sailors**, now 69, was the Most Valuable Player in the NCAA basketball

championships. He led Wyoming to the national title over Georgetown. The Cowboys won the crown, 4634, at Madison Square Garden, where he introduced his famous jump shot to an eastern audience.

**Sailors** is the man credited with inventing the jump shot in an era when the game of basketball was played flatfooted. It was his secret weapon for playing oneone against a brother three years older and six inches taller.

There was a lot of talk about the old days and the old game at the dinner which featured a Rocky Mountain Basketball Salute.

**Sailors** and teammate Jimmy Reese, 66, a retired General Motors executive from Denver, were introduced by sportscaster Brent Musberger and Denver Post sports columnist Dick O'Connor at a dinner attended by nearly 1,200 people, including former President Gerald Ford. They shared the attention with this year's Final Four coaches, but it was **Sailors** and Reese who got the standing ovation.

Neither **Sailors** nor Reese have ever been back to an NCAA championship since they played in one.

"There've been a few changes, " said **Sailors** dryly.

Indeed, there have been. Television pays millions of dollars to show the tournament, 1,000 media representatives swarm in to report on it, and scalpers want \$1,000 for tickets to watch it.

And everybody shoots the jump shot, not just speedy point guards like **Sailors**, who also pioneered his shot in five seasons in the NBA for such teams as the Providence Steamrollers and Cleveland Rebels, as well as the Boston Celtics.

There was a lot for **Sailors** to reminisce about. In that championship season of 47 years ago, Wyoming went 312.**Sailors** was an AllAmerican and the Helms Foundation PlayeroftheYear.

The Marriott City Centre dinner crowd seemed enthralled as **Sailors** and Reese told jokes and told stories about their run for the title.

"When a bunch of old guys like Jim Reese and I get together we talk about who set a pick for who, " said **Sailors**. "We can remember a lot of details, but when we walk out of here, we can't find our cars."

Reese, whitehaired and ruddyfaced, is originally from Rock Springs, Wyo. and is only one of a few other members of that nineman Wyoming team still living. He was a 5foot8 backup guard on the title team, but when someone asks him what position he played his sincere deadpan look fools them for a halfsecond.

"It's very obvious, " he tells them. "I played the post until they moved me to power forward."

**Sailors**, still trim and vigorous, was a captain in the Marines and still cuts his gray hair the same way in a brush cut. He also still plays rec league ball with men 50 years his junior.

Reese said **Sailors** always was aggressive and dedicated to the game.

"He was such a devoted athlete," said Reese.

Still, even Reese can't believe a **Sailors** approaching 70 plays fullcourt hoops.

"Haven't you ever heard of checkers?" asked Reese. "Or golf?"

Apparently not, but oldtimers in the basketball world have certainly heard of **Sailors**.

The other day, while visiting the decadebydecade picture exhibit of the Final Four at the United Bank Atrium, **Sailors** was standing in front of a 1940s photo of himself dribbling through a St. John's University team.

"The coach, Ev Shelton, used to just give me the ball and tell me to bring it up," said **Sailors**, "even if there were two or three of them."

An elderly gentleman gazing at the exhibit realized he was standing next to **Sailors**. He grabbed **Sailors**' hand, shook it, and then insisted on posing for a picture with him.

It's been that way all week long. People calling **Sailors**' hotel room who haven't seen him for years. People calling to interview him. They don't know where **Angoon** is, but they do know where **Kenny Sailors** came from. And in this part of the world, those old enough definitely remember the only NCAA basketball title won by a team from the Rockies.

"You know, we never thought it was that big a deal," said **Sailors**. "But I guess it is a big deal."

Lew **Freedman** is the Daily News sports editor.