

JERRY LUCAS: Basketball's Wonder Boy

Though only a college junior,
he can do everything the
pros can do—and maybe do it better

By BOB DRISCOLL

Lucas stars on defense as well as offense.



Treva and Jerry Lucas

BASKETBALL BUFFS chronically delight in heated discussions about who's the "greatest" player. This year, however, off-floor experts are singularly silent. The reason is Jerry Lucas, a handsome, dark-haired, 21-year-old Ohio State University junior who plays so well there's no disputing his title as "Mr. College Basketball."

A unanimous All-America choice as a sophomore last year, a sure-fire repeater this year, and a bulwark of our Olympic squad in Rome last summer, Lucas qualifies by ability, physical endowment (6 foot, 8 inches, and 230 pounds), and temperament as a basketball coach's dream.

Former professional coach Joe Lapchick, whose fine St. John's College team Lucas helped send to its first defeat in New York's Holiday Festival Tournament in December, says: "At a comparable stage in college, Lucas is better than George Mikan was. He's a better all-around player than Wilt Chamberlain. He'd be No. 1 on my team."

In view of such heady praise, one might think that Jerry's scoring totals have to be tabulated by an electronic computer. Yet, as a soph last season, he scored "only" 26.3 points per game, a relatively unspectacular average when compared with those of Oscar Robertson, Tom Stith, and others. The fact remains that Lucas could score almost at will, but he is strictly a team player.

It's small wonder that harried profes-

sional coaches, who have vainly been trying to nullify Wilt Chamberlain the past two seasons, are drooling at the prospect of landing Jerry—and salary is no barrier. But Lucas sets their ulcers on edge by repeating: "Unless something happens to change my mind, I don't want to live out of a suitcase."

He's not saying this just to up the financial kitty, either. Jerry is a 3.5 student, a candidate for Phi Beta Kappa, and intent on a business career. "I like to be around people," he says while the pro coaches wince, "and maybe I'll try my hand at selling."

Jerry has a pretty reason for thinking of a permanent career in lieu of a few years of pro ball—she's Mrs. Treva Lucas, an 18-year-old OSU coed he met at a fraternity party when she was a freshman and he was a sophomore. They took some of the same courses, and it wasn't long before Jerry asked for a date. Love had its way, and they were married last September.

SHOULD JERRY decide to continue playing ball, Treva, a rabid basketball fan, probably won't protest too much. "I first saw him when my high school (Columbus North of Ohio) traveled to Middletown, Ohio, to play Middletown High," she recalls. "Jerry was the star, of course, and I remember thinking how handsome he was. I certainly was excited when I met him."

The drive that makes Lucas a star carries over to his off-court performance. Before last year's NCAA Tournament in San Francisco, Jerry had a final exam. His marks during the semester were so good, says Ohio State coach Fred Taylor, that he could have coasted in with a B, "as someone else might have done. Not Jerry, though. He studied for 16 consecutive hours and had his first sleep on the plane. And when you're 6-8, you know in advance that sleeping on a plane is no picnic."

Despite the "cramping" and the uncomfortable trip west, Jerry Lucas was outstanding and led OSU to the NCAA title. No wonder fans stand in awe of him—and pro coaches stand in line waiting for him.



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