

Mayer: Free throws secret to success in NCAA Tourney

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In a Dec. 25 column I cited the fine athletic health care at KU and how fortunate the Jayhawks are to have such an extensive and excellent program, now headed by Dr. Larry Magee.

There always are other vital aspects to any such continuing story. I'd like to add my two cents about how a couple of old Lawrence High Lion brothers laid the foundation from which the current operation evolved (by intelligent design, of course). That pair would be John and Ken Wertzberger. They earned high school All-American football honors as linemen at Lawrence High, then became starting linemen and later doctors via Kansas University. John was a center under coaches Chuck Mather and Jack Mitchell in the 1956-58 span. Ken was a guard in 1966-68, first under Mitchell, then under Pepper Rodgers. His play was vital to the Jan. 1, 1969, Orange Bowl team.

Both Wertzes played in more archaic days when under-equipped trainer Dean Nesmith worked one miracle after another in the "sports medicine" program.

Dr. John got productively entrenched with KU sports from 1970 to 1980. Then Ken began to make an impact in the fall of 1980, always on the sidelines when needed. Ken was the only clinical physician involved for a while and treated people in all the sports pretty much by himself for years. He traveled to all the games and did about 95 percent of the surgery.

Long about 1986, Ken asked Dr. Laird Ingham (who recently left here for a position in San Antonio) to consult. In 1988, Ken asked Dr. Larry Magee of student health to join him as a regular physician in the program, and they started traveling together to games. Dr. Steve Munns of the Kansas University Medical center joined in 1988, too. So KU had four official team physicians -- Ingham, Magee, Munns and Ken Wertzberger. In 1996, Dr. Jeff Randall joined Wertzberger's orthopedic practice and was made an official team physician about 2000.

In the fall of 2003, Wertzberger told Larry Magee he no longer was interested in so much demanding sideline duty -- after 23 years. So Magee, Ingham and Randall worked the sidelines; Wertzberger got to sit in the stands for the first time since 1979. He's had a massive body of work, about which he should be deeply proud.

From 1980 to 2003, Ken may have operated on as many as 500 athletes, certainly 400-plus. Things must have gone pretty well. How many floppolas did you read about? He repaired ankles for Greg Ostertag, Raef LaFrentz, Patrick Richey, Lester Earl, Tamecka Dixon; knees for the likes of Steve Woodberry, Chris Piper, Adonis Jordan, Alonzo Jamison, Stephen Vinson, Calvin Rayford; shoulders for Scot Pollard (same type of surgery as Wayne Simien had) and Alonzo Jamison. There was work on a compartment syndrome for Mark Randall, who scored 30 points four days later ... not to mention aid for lower-profile athletes in all the sports, major and minor.

Wertzberger and Jeff Randall accompanied Wayne Simien to New York for his career-restoring shoulder repair, and Ken maintains his private orthopedic practice with a group of noted guys including Randall. As broadcaster Paul Harvey has drilled into us, there often is more to most stories than one might absorb at first glance. Let's give the

home-grown Wertzberger boys deserved plaudits for their massive, long-term contributions to KU and its athletic program.