Top Women’s Team in Muhlenberg History

Contest 4:
2004 Basketball vs.
1989 Softball

2004 Basketball
Head Coach: Ron Rohn
Final Record: 19-7

Most of the other teams in this contest won a conference championship, played in the NCAA Tournament and/or were ranked in the top 10 in Division III. Not so with the 2004 basketball team, but then again, being different was what the Mules were all about.

Running a system modeled after the one used by the Grinnell men’s team for years, Muhlenberg pressed, ran, substituted five players at a time every minute, shot three-pointers and became one of the most entertaining teams in school history.

The Mules finished the season with a Division III-record average of 10.2 three-pointers per game. Muhlenberg scored 90.8 points per contest, which led all NCAA divisions and made the team the fifth Division III squad to average 90.

The Mules forced an average of 35.4 turnovers per game and scored more than 100 points eight times, with a high of 116 twice. Everyone played a part: No player averaged much more than 16 minutes per game, and none averaged much less than five. The squad’s top two scorers and rebounders, All-Centennial Conference seniors Jill Friedman and Susan Marchiano, played the same position and rarely took the floor together.

Muhlenberg finished the season with a 19-7 record and went 14-4 in the CC. The Mules lost in the semifinals of the CC playoffs to McDaniel, which went on to reach the “Sweet 16.”

1989 Softball
Head Coach: Brian Bodine
Final Record: 25-6
Middle Atlantic Conference Champions

The 1989 softball team gained the distinction of being the first Muhlenberg squad in any sport, since the formation of Division III in 1973, to qualify for national competition.

After winning the Middle Atlantic Conference championship for the first time in program history, the Mules received a bid to the NCAA Tournament and were sent to the Central Regional. Ranked 12th in Division III entering the tournament, Muhlenberg won its first two games against No. 8 Muskingum and No. 20 Wilkes to reach the championship round, where it lost twice to fourth-ranked Allegheny, the tournament host and a veteran of seven NCAA appearances.

The Mules lost their first game of the season to Division II Kutztown, then won 19 of their next 20. The lone loss during that span came to Franklin & Marshall, which had defeated Muhlenberg in the first round of the MAC playoffs the previous year. The Mules’ only other losses came in doubleheader splits with top-10 squads Glassboro State and Montclair State.

Muhlenberg breezed to its third straight MAC Southeast title with an 8-0 record, then got revenge on Southwest champ F&M by scoring five runs in the top of the seventh for a 5-0 win in the MAC semis. In the final, the Mules broke a 3-3 tie in the fourth and defeated Wilkes, 4-3.

Leading the team was sophomore Elaine Gratrix, who posted the best season to date for a Muhlenberg pitcher, going 14-1 with a .82 ERA. She, senior 2B Sharon Peifer and freshman OF Kim Lapple all earned all-region honors.