

Kansas State makes big news in 2006

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Firing Kansas State basketball coach Jim Woodriddle hardly caused a stir.

What came next created a national buzz and sent Kansas State fans stampeding in droves to the season ticket window. Athletic director Tim Weiser, fearful of neither conflict nor moral condemnation, made the most controversial hire in college sports since Texas Tech resurrected the career of Indiana cast-off Bob Knight.

Into Manhattan on March 23, decked out in a purple tie and professing, "I don't think I'm a bad guy," came Bob Huggins.

Nothing else that happened on the Kansas sports scene in 2006 made bigger headlines around the state or across the nation.

Official school publications and the video board in Bramlage Coliseum now proclaim, "Welcome to Huggieville."

With 567 victories, a career winning percentage of .740 and 14 straight trips to the NCAA tournament, Huggins, 53, brought instant credibility.

But critics say he also brought some heavy baggage. His reputation at Cincinnati, which fired him the year before, included tales of ridiculously low graduation rates and players in trouble with the law.

Nevertheless, Kansas State fans voted their approval in the most affirmative way possible. Season ticket sales have soared from 6,500 last year to a Bramlage record 13,000.

While out of coaching for a year, Huggins did not just play golf and fish. Free of NCAA restrictions, Huggins recruited. He knew he would be coaching somewhere this season. He just wasn't sure where.

Now already joining him in Manhattan have been 7-3 freshman Jason Bennett and 6-6 high school superstar Bill Walker. Even more big names are committed for next fall.

When the brilliantly gifted Walker made his graceful debut in Bramlage Coliseum earlier this month, fans beheld the tallest player, the most highly sought freshman and the most nationally prominent coach in the history of the school.

Everywhere were signs of high times in Huggieville.

Big news was also made at Wichita State. The Shockers enjoyed a long run in the NCAA tournament in March, outdoing both Kansas and Kansas State. Then they rose quickly to the top 10 after coach Mark Turgeon got a contract extension.

From Florida to Phoenix, Rutgers fans ready

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — Rutgers alumni who suffered through years of lackluster football while they were in college are now scattered across the country. But, on Thursday, die-hard Scarlet Knights boosters plan to reunite in restaurants and bars from Phoenix to Florida to cheer on their alma mater in the Texas Bowl.

Dawn Yamanouchi, a 1997 graduate and leader of the Rutgers Club of Arizona, said she was a Scarlet Knights fan even when "there wasn't a whole lot to follow."

"Some of the older folks graduated 40 or 50 years ago, so they've had decades of losing seasons," said Yamanouchi, 36, a human resources manager who expects 15 people at her gathering in Phoenix. "Now they're just so excited that we have a program that's winning."

With Rutgers enjoying its best season ever — including a No. 7 ranking — Yamanouchi said

In football, too, '06 was a big year for the Wildcats. Bill Snyder's replacement may have been only in his mid-30s and merely the offensive coordinator at Virginia. But Ron Prince's first year was an unqualified success.

With a 7-5 record and an eye-popping victory over defending national champion Texas, the Wildcats qualified for the Texas Bowl, where they were to meet No. 16 Rutgers on Thursday night. And the basketball team is not the only outfit on campus with exciting freshmen.

Of the 64 bowl teams, only Kansas State figured to start a freshman quarterback and a freshman as its leading rusher.

Josh Freeman, who led a dramatic come-from-behind win over Oklahoma State in his first start on Oct. 7, emerged as a star-in-the-making when he passed for 1,651 yards and six touchdowns in the regular season.

At Kansas, it was a year of both good and bad. Bill Self's Jayhawks went out in the first round of the NCAA tournament for the second season in a row. But another outstanding recruiting class, which included Darrell Arthur, one of the most heralded freshmen in the nation, helped boost Kansas to a pre-season No. 3 ranking and a victory in Las Vegas in a preseason tournament over defending national champion Florida.

Self and his football counterpart, Mark Mangino, also got hefty pay hikes. Jon Cornish led the Big 12 with a school-record 1,457 yards rushing, but the football team finished a disappointing 6-6 and failed to get a bowl bid.

The Jayhawks were also hit with sanctions by the NCAA, which cited lack of institutional control. The probation period will run to 2009 and included recruiting and scholarships restrictions in both football and basketball.

Though he would go on to win the Nextel Cup title, Jimmie Johnson left Kansas Speedway in October upset by a penalty that led to a 14th-place finish in the Banquet 400. Tony Stewart, who wasn't in Cup contention, stayed on the track and ran out of fuel on the last lap — but still coasted to a victory.

Other notable sports stories in Kansas included the Kansas State women winning the NIT title, Johnson County voters rejecting a soccer bond issue, throwing a crimp into the Wizards' plans to move to Kansas, and Fort Hays State bolting the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference for the Mid-America Intercollegiate Athletic Association.

people no longer ask her where Rutgers University is when she's wearing her old college T-shirts.

"I'm just thrilled because I've always loved Rutgers," she said, pausing to call out Rutgers cheers and sing parts of the school's fight song. "I love that people can recognize that you can't just beat up on us anymore."

Like many of the other alumni clubs around the country, the Arizona group even has a few members attending the game in Houston, for which Rutgers sold 9,000 tickets.

One, 1961 graduate Bob Campel, also attended the school's previous bowl games in 2005 and 1978. He planned to attend a Rutgers pep rally and a pre-game tailgate party that is sold out.

Lou Koczela, who graduated in 1961 and is organizing a bowl-watching party for the Rutgers Club of San Diego, said he feels the school has "finally risen."

Court rules feds can have steroid test data

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — With Barry Bonds still in their sights, federal investigators probing steroids in sports can now use the names and urine samples of about 100 Major League Baseball players who tested positive for performance enhancing drugs, following a ruling Wednesday from a federal appeals court.

The 2-1 decision by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned three lower court decisions and could help authorities pinpoint the source of steroids in baseball. It could also bolster the perjury case against the star outfielder, who is under investigation for telling a grand jury he never knowingly used performance-enhancing drugs.

Investigators seized computer files containing the test results in 2004 during raids of labs involved in MLB's testing program. The samples were collected at baseball's direction the previous year as part of a survey to gauge the prevalence of steroid use.

Players and owners agreed in their labor contract that the results

would be confidential, and each player was assigned a code number to be matched with his name.

Quest Diagnostics of Teterboro, N.J., one of the largest drug-testing firms in the nation, analyzed more than 1,400 urine samples from players that season.

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