Coach Knight: The Will to Win

[T]he greatest reward a coach can ever have is a kid coming back to see how he is doing. Absolutely nothing compares to that—a kid comes back to say hello, to play golf, to go out and eat with you, to watch practice, whatever it is—that’s the best reward there is in coaching.

—Bob Knight with Bob Hammel, Knight: My Story, p. 109

In 1971, Robert Montgomery Knight, also known as “The General,” was hired to lead the Indiana University (IU) basketball program. Over the next three decades, he amassed one of the most enviable records in the history of college basketball. During his reign at Indiana, the Hoosiers won three National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) basketball championships and grew into one of the most dominant sports franchises of the late twentieth century. (Additional biographical information is provided in Exhibit 1.)

Knight’s remarkable career at Indiana earned him a spot on the top-five list of college coaches with the most wins in Division 1 basketball as well as a lucrative employee agreement reported to be worth more than $1.5 million. Eventually, his coaching services became so highly valued that he was given complete control over every aspect of the basketball program. Quite simply, Bob Knight was Indiana basketball.

Over the years, Coach Knight became famous not only for his remarkable achievements (see Exhibits 2 and 3) but also for his passionate and demanding leadership style. From his players, he expected nothing less than their absolute best, all the time. Unfortunately, Knight’s relentless drive and passion for excellence were not always as well received as was his record of wins and losses. Eventually, his unique approach to the game not only generated an extraordinary list of accomplishments but also an equally stunning list of controversies (see Exhibit 4).

In response to the many accusations leveled against him, Knight admitted, “Some of them are legitimate. I’ve certainly done my share of dumb things, some of which I’m genuinely sorry for (and some that, in my own perverse way, I still kind of enjoy).”

And so it was that on September 10, 2000, Myles Brand, president of IU since 1994, did the unthinkable, he fired Bob Knight. Outlining “charges that the coach had manhandled” a student and displayed a “pattern of unacceptable behavior,” Brand brought an end to one of the most storied associations in the history of college basketball.
The Will to Win

What Bob is more than anything, is intense. He is intense about everything he does. . . . He loves to compete. He loves to win. But it’s never that simple with him because nothing is simple with Bob.

—Al McGuire, *A Season on the Brink*, p. xiii

Even more than a passion for winning, Knight had an obsession for the hard work and preparation it took to win consistently: “Among all the things I believe . . . one tops the list: the importance of preparation. We talk in coaching about “winners”—kids . . . who just will not allow themselves or their team to lose. Coaches call that a will to win. I don’t. I think that puts the emphasis in the wrong place. Everybody has a will to win. What’s far more important is having the will to *prepare* to win.”

As a young boy growing up in the small town of Orrville, Ohio, Knight learned the value of discipline, a lesson that would become his trademark as well as a lightning rod for his critics. Knight recalled: “My father was the most disciplined man I ever saw. Most people, they hear the word discipline, and right away they think about a whip and a chair. I’ve worked up my own definition. And this took a long time. Discipline: doing what you have to do, and doing it as well as you possibly can, and doing it that way all the time.”

As a coach, Knight demanded discipline on the court every day. He did not play favorites. If a blue-chip recruit or player in his starting lineup performed poorly, that person quickly found himself sitting on the bench or demoted to the second team. In a 1988 interview with *Esquire* magazine, Knight had this to say about his star guard, Keith Smart (Smart had just been named the Most Outstanding Player of the 1987 NCAA Final Four): “If there are any problems with Keith Smart, you are going to see his ass on the bench. That’s the way we handle ego at Indiana. You see the bench gives your ass a message, then your ass gives your brain a message, and then your brain will probably get Keith Smart to play a helluva lot better.”

On occasion, Knight was also known to throw players out of practice for not working hard enough. If the pattern persisted, he would threaten to take away scholarships or drop them from the team entirely. Bob Knight viewed it as his personal duty to display “an unyielding, untiring passion for teaching kids to understand the game of basketball and carry this understanding and sense of commitment into all walks of life.”

In addition to running the basketball program, Bob Knight taught a course called “Methods of Coaching” at Indiana University:

I taught it for twenty-nine years. I can’t even begin to tell you the number of notes I got from kids or ran into people that had been in that class over the years that said it was far and away the best class they ever took in college. I’d be willing to bet that 99 percent of the faculty members at Indiana never got a letter from any kid saying this was the most important class or the best class for the future that I ever had to take. And I heard that constantly.

Filled with meticulously planned and flawlessly executed drills, a typical Coach Knight practice taught *his* game of basketball. His motivational toolkit included push-ups, wind sprints, and insulting verbal barbs. Some observers felt he pushed his players too hard, beyond reasonable physical and psychological limits. Biographer John Feinstein saw it this way:

Knight believed—and his record seemed to back him up—that the system he had devised over the years was the best way there was to play basketball. He always told his players that. “Follow our rules, do exactly what we tell you and you will not lose,” he would say. “But boys,
you have to listen to me.” The boys listened. Always, they listened. But they didn’t always assimilate, and sometimes, even when they did, they could not execute what they had been told.9

When it came to basketball, Knight was a perfectionist. In his own words:

Kids have to understand that you—you, the coach—aren’t going to be satisfied with just winning. . . . Kids will be satisfied with what you tolerate. If a coach tolerates mistakes, kids will be satisfied with mistakes. Steve Risley, who played for us at Indiana from 1978 to ’81, once said of me in an interview, “He’s after the perfect game. Maybe he’ll coach forever and not get it.” I thought, that’s probably true. There have been times I was more upset after we won than when we lost.10

One way Knight attempted to instill the “will to win” is illustrated by a winner-take-all drill he invented while coaching at West Point. Forever memorialized as “Bobby Ball,” one former Army player described the experience this way:

The drill was simple enough. The players formed two lines. Knight would roll the ball on the floor. [A player from each line] would dive for the ball and the battle was on [to see who could get the ball and score a basket]. It was like a football fumble without pads, helmets, and the dampening effect of grass. Most of us volunteered for Vietnam to get away from [that] drill.11

[It] was a drill made in the very image of Bob Knight the player. Bob Knight the man. High intensity. High contact. A drill that required more will than skill, the ball going to the man who wanted it the most, the guy who played the hardest. And in the Bob Knight pantheon of values, “playing the hardest” is the ultimate accolade.12

Relationships with Players

You know there were times . . . when if I had had a gun, I think I would have shot him. And there were other times when I wanted to put my arms around him, hug him, and tell him that I loved him.

—Isiah Thomas, quoted in A Season on the Brink, p. 8

One of the most public relationships Knight had was with star player Steve Alford, who went on to play in the NBA and then coach college basketball himself. Alford reflected:

I knew I was in the hands of a truly great basketball coach. I was less certain, however, of what kind of person he was. I couldn’t understand his need to intimidate people. Everybody around him—players, assistant coaches, faculty, sportswriters seemed uncomfortable in his presence.

The worst part of it, for me, was the profanity. . . . I had never [heard those words] in such abundance and with so much fury behind them. The trick, according to [one] upperclassman, was to understand that Coach used profanity to teach, as strange as that sounds.13

Dan Dakich offered this advice for dealing with his former coach’s colorful language: “When he’s calling you an asshole, don’t listen. But when he starts telling you why you’re an asshole, listen. That way you’ll get better.”14
Knight’s youngest son, Patrick, played for him at Indiana. Commenting on Patrick’s decision to join his father’s team, Knight offered the following prediction: “We are going to redshirt Patrick next year so he’ll have me as a coach for 5 years. When Patrick is done, having me as a father and a coach, Patrick Knight will undoubtedly have the most blistered ass in the history of basketball.” In a highly publicized incident, Coach Knight was accused of kicking his son during a game. Knight later said that he went to kick a chair and Patrick had simply gotten in the way. Eventually, his son became an assistant coach himself, as well as a staunch defender of his father’s programs and unique approach to the game.

A surprising number of Knight’s former players have gone on to coach in college (such as Mike Krzyzewski of Duke University) and the NBA (including Isiah Thomas and Mike Woodson, as well as others). Knight was “extremely proud of his coaching protégés. He followed their fortunes closely and often called after big wins or big losses. ... The Knight ‘family’—his former assistants and his coaching mentors ...—were renowned throughout the college basketball world.”

The Many Faces of Coach Knight

What people don’t see, what they don’t understand about Bob is that he’s a warm, sensitive, and funny guy. Yes funny. ... Bob always tries to act so tough—all the screaming and yelling. He’s really not tough, not at all. ... All the critical things he says about his players—try and criticize one of them and see what kind of response you get. Be ready to duck, too.

—Al McGuire, quoted in A Season on the Brink, p. xii–xiii

In his own words, “A coach has to be a tyrant, a benign benefactor, a parent. There’s a lot about coaching that’s like an actor. You’ve got to make yourself into different things at different times. Sometimes what you see is not really what you are.”

According to one biographer, “Knight’s most fervent supporters ... viewed (him) as a throwback—as [an] old-fashioned disciplinarian whose tough love built character.” In response to critics who consider such an approach old-fashioned, Knight had this to say: “My wife thinks I’m outdated sometimes. What the hell am I going to say to her? I just nod my head and keep right on.”

His wife, on the other hand, saw it this way: “People have often referred to him as having a temper. And I just see every day what I call a huge passion for living. He has a passion for every thing he does. Everything.”

In response to critics who charged that his “passion” often crossed the line, that he had an “anger control problem,” Knight admitted, “Yes, of course I do have a temper, but many times what people read as anger was my being extremely passionate toward helping kids become the best they can be at whatever they’re going to do.”

Knight played on a championship college basketball team himself at Ohio State. One of his former teammates, Mel Nowell, praised Knight as the best coach he knew, but still, “I would not send my son to play for him.” Other parents would disagree. In one tragic case, a player from Knight’s 1981 NCAA championship team was in a car accident that left him paralyzed for life: “Knight devoted most of his waking hours during the next few months to what became the Landon Turner Fund. Before he was through, more than $400,000 had been raised [in support of the player and his family]. ... When [Turner] was ready to return to school, his scholarship was waiting; Knight named him captain of the 1982 team he would never play for.”
One of Knight’s four “cornerstones for player and team development” he credited to a conversation he had with one of his earliest and most important mentors, the legendary New York City coach Joe Lapchick. According to Knight, Coach Lapchick once asked him:

“How important is it to you that people like you?”

I hadn’t thought about that. I did for just a minute or so and said, “I’d like to be respected as a coach, but I’m not concerned about being liked.”

He said, “Good. If you worry about whether people like you or not, you can never make tough decisions correctly.”

Link to Infamy

Bob Knight’s complex persona was a magnet for controversy. During a 1985 game against Purdue, Coach Knight was outraged over what he believed to be a bad call made by the officials. Frustrated to the point of action, he plucked a plastic chair from behind him and hurled it across the floor, safely away from people but in clear view for all to see.

As one writer poignantly recalled:

He’s the guy who threw the chair: the foul-mouthed, foul-tempered, petty tyrant: the “classic bully” who steamrolls anybody who gets in his way—player, fan, ref, athletic director, secretary, even his own son. He’s an out-of-touch, out-of-control, testosterone-infused beast, a speed-popping John Wayne with a saddle burr, storming around as a quavering staff, family, and wife wait for him to explode at the first provocation. People who don’t know Bob Knight are sure they have him all figured out, while people who have been friends for decades say they don’t know him at all.

Knight reflected, “All these years later, I still can’t understand the notoriety that brought. Also, the longevity of it. Rarely am I mentioned on national TV when a tape of The Chair Toss isn’t played.”

The Beginning of the End—A Policy of Zero Tolerance

In 2000, Sports Illustrated launched an investigative report into why a number of talented players had left the IU basketball program. On March 14, 2000, “CNN/Sports Illustrated aired its findings in a report that focused on the conduct of head coach Bob Knight. For the first time, some of Knight’s former players spoke openly about verbal and physical abuse.”

During the investigation, a videotape surfaced (provided by a disgruntled staff member who had been fired by Knight) of a 1997 IU basketball practice. Through grainy, blurred, long-distance video, Coach Knight was seen grabbing player Neil Reed by the neck. Reed alleged that he had been choked, though Knight disputed this, arguing, “There was no choke.”

In response to this incident, Knight said, “Hey, I probably have grabbed every player that has ever played for me at one time or another. I mean, I grab guys, I put ‘em in a position, I put them down, I set them here. . . . I have coached that way for 36 years.” Knight saw this as nothing unusual and said anything he’d done with one player he’d have done with a lot of players.
In response to the *Sports Illustrated* report, the IU Board of Trustees opened an internal investigation of its own. Sifting through 20 years of Knight’s colorful past, critics came out of the woodwork, but so did a host of staunch supporters. In the end, Knight was suspended for three games and levied a fine of $30,000 for displaying what the school called a “protracted and often troubling pattern in which Coach Knight has a problem controlling his anger and confronting individuals.” In addition to the suspension and fine, on Monday, May 15, 2000, a “zero-tolerance” policy went into effect. “Any new incident of inappropriate behavior would result in immediate termination.”

**The Final Straw**

Zero tolerance would last less than four months. In September 2000, while exiting the fieldhouse, Coach Knight had a confrontation with a student:

Kent Harvey, the 19-year-old stepson of a former radio talk show host who (was) a vocal critic of Knight, claim(ed) the coach grabbed his arm and cursed him after Harvey addressed the coach in a manner many adults would find disrespectful. . . . While saying he never raised his voice “over a conversational tone,” Knight acknowledged grabbing Harvey by the arm and lecturing him on the proper way to address an adult.

Within days, Knight was fired. Commenting on the circumstances surrounding his dismissal, Knight had this to say: “I tried . . . to keep my firing from happening. I accepted a no-win form of probation that every friend I had told me to reject and leave. I felt I could get by just by focusing on coaching and working with our basketball team. . . . That’s what I kept telling myself, so I can’t blame anything but my own stubbornness for my being there to be fired in September 2000.”

*            *            *            *            *

Based on unprecedented access to Coach Knight during Indiana’s 1985–1986 basketball season, sportswriter John Feinstein chose the following story to end his best-selling and controversial book, *A Season on the Brink: A Year with Bob Knight and the Indiana Hoosiers*:

I am reminded of an incident that took place in January. After the Indiana-Illinois game during which Bob kicked and slammed a chair, and kicked a cheerleader’s megaphone. Dave Kindred, the superb columnist for *The Atlanta Constitution*, wrote that he was disappointed to see Knight acting this way again. Kindred, a longtime friend of Knight’s, ended the column by writing, “Once again I find myself wondering when it comes to Bob Knight if the end justifies the means.”

A few days later, Knight called Kindred. “You needed one more line for that damn column,” Knight said. “You should have finished by saying, ‘And one more time, I realize that it does.’”

Kindred thought for a moment and then said, “Bob, you’re right.”

I agree.
Postscript

In the fall of 2000, Bob Knight had no team to coach. For the first time since taking the reins at Army in 1965, when at the age of 24 he became the “youngest varsity coach in major collegiate history,”34 a basketball season was about to start without him.

In March of 2001, Texas Tech offered Bob Knight a chance to return to college basketball. While “about fifty professors signed a petition”35 protesting the school’s decision, Knight was welcomed by a frenzied rally of supportive fans. His five-year deal as head coach included a $250,000 base salary, $150,000 in deferred income, and at least $500,000 a year in guaranteed outside income. No provisions were included concerning personal conduct or behavior.

The basketball team he inherited had not recorded a winning season in four years. Knight quickly turned things around. In his first year, his Red Raiders posted an impressive 23 and 9 record. This was followed by three more consecutive winning seasons, all accomplished with players he had not personally recruited. Coach Knight was back.

On February 5, 2003, Bob Knight earned his 800th career victory—only three coaches have ever won more games in Division 1 basketball. Duke University coach Mike Krzyzewski underscored the significance of the accomplishment: “Eight-hundred means you’ve sustained excellence for a long, long time. I hope he gets a lot more.”36 As long as he kept coaching, Bob Knight had a good chance of becoming the winningest coach of all time.

But had he changed?

His time at Texas Tech has not been without controversy. In December 2003, he exploded in profanity during an on-air interview with an ESPN broadcaster. In February 2004 there were accusations that Knight had a verbal confrontation with university chancellor David Smith, for which Knight was reprimanded by the school.

In June 2004, however, Knight was offered—and agreed to—an extension to his existing contract that would keep him in Lubbock through 2009. At the start of his fourth season with Texas Tech, he told a local reporter, “I look forward to doing this a long time. This is the best possible situation for me as long as I coach.” At the same time, the president of Texas Tech praised Knight: “I’m pleased with the direction of our program. He’s done a great job turning everything around. I think the future really looks good for us.”37

Concerning the “change question,” Knight himself had this to say: “Frequently in interviews since coming to Tech, the interviewer has asked if I have changed. Yes, I have. Every experience anyone has changes that person to some degree. But basic change? No.”38

* * * * *

When my time on earth is gone,
And my activities here are past,
I want that they should bury me upside down,
So my critics can kiss my ass.

—Bob Knight addressing crowd during Senior Day ceremonies at IU in 199439
Exhibit 1  Coach Knight Biographical Summary

Robert Montgomery Knight was born on October 25, 1940 in Orrville, Ohio. He was the only child of “a no-nonsense schoolteacher” and a father who worked the railways. His dad was conscientious to the point of perfectionism and “as unyielding as a locomotive.” As a youngster, Knight always wanted to win—if he did not win, he would throw a fit. With two working parents, he spent much of his childhood with his grandmother. Early on, she learned a strategy for handling the passions of her competitive grandson: Whenever they would play a game, she would simply let him win.

Not only a talented athlete, Knight also excelled in academics. A voracious reader, he is rumored to have set the record in his hometown library for most books checked out. An all-state basketball star and president of his honor society at Orrville High School, Knight graduated in 1958 to attend Ohio State University. At 6’5”, Bob Knight the player learned college basketball from Hall of Fame coach Fred Taylor. In addition to playing on the Ohio State Buckeyes’ 1960 NCAA championship team, he earned degrees in history and government.

While a student at Ohio State, Knight admired the Buckeyes’ colorful and controversial football coach, Woody Hayes—widely recognized not only for his accomplishments on the field but also for his volatile temper. Hayes was passionate, committed, honest, direct, contentious—words that could also apply to Knight. In the end, Coach Hayes was fired for striking an opposing player during the 1978 Gator Bowl. He simply hated to lose.a

After graduating from Ohio State in 1962, Knight landed his first job, as an assistant high school basketball coach in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. The next year he joined the Army to coach at West Point. During his six seasons as Army’s head coach (1965–1971), he earned a record of 102-50. The highly structured and disciplined culture of the academy suited Knight, but he had always dreamed of coaching in the Big 10. In 1971, he moved to Indiana, calling his decision to leave West Point “the toughest in my life.”

His remarkable 29-year career at Indiana University made him into a living legend in college basketball. After a 31-1 record in 1975, his 1976 team won every game they played. This remains the last NCAA championship team to have had a perfect season. One of his all-time great players, Quinn Buckner, saw firsthand what motivated Knight: “[That year] embodied everything [Knight] ever wanted in a team—it was a team of guys willing to sacrifice whatever skills they had in order for the team to be better. . . . I think he’s constantly searching . . . for the perfect game and he honestly believes that it’s out there. That’s what moves him.”b

Bob Knight has two sons, Patrick and Tim. Patrick played for his father at Indiana from 1991 to 1995 and now assists him as the associate head coach at Texas Tech. Tim is a 1986 graduate of Stanford University and serves as an assistant athletic director/special projects at Texas Tech. Bob and his wife Karen, a Hall of Fame basketball coach herself, were married in 1988.

Source: Portions are from http://www.hoophall.com/, copyright Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, with permission. All quotes and some descriptive details are adapted from an ESPN Classic Sports Century documentary on Bob Knight, broadcast February 23, 2005.


bBuckner played for Indiana University from 1972 to 1976 and later went on to a successful professional NBA career.
Exhibit 2  Statistics through the 2003–2004 Season

NCAA CHAMPIONSHIPS
10, John Wooden, UCLA, 1964-75
4, Adolph Rupp, Kentucky, 1948-58
3, Bob Knight, Indiana, 1976-87
2, Denny Crum, Louisville, 1980-86
2, Henry Iba, Oklahoma St., 1945-46
2, Ed Jucker, Cincinnati, 1961-62
2, Branch McCracken, Indiana, 1940-53
2, Dean Smith, North Carolina, 1982-93
2, Phil Woolpert, San Francisco, 1955-56

FINAL FOUR WINS
21, John Wooden, UCLA, 1962-75
10, Mike Krzyzewski, Duke, 1988-2001
9, Adolph Rupp, Kentucky, 1942-66
8, Dean Smith, North Carolina, 1967-97
7, Bob Knight, Indiana, 1973-87
5, Denny Crum, Louisville, 1972-86
5, Henry Iba, Oklahoma St., 1945-51
5, Ed Jucker, Cincinnati, 1961-63
5, Fred Taylor, Ohio St., 1960-68

TOURNAMENT APPEARANCES
27, Dean Smith, North Carolina, 1967-97
25, Bob Knight, Indiana and Texas Tech, 1973-2002
23, Denny Crum, Louisville, 1972-2000
22, Lute Olson, Iowa and Arizona, 1979-2002
22, Eddie Sutton, Creighton, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Oklahoma St., 1974-2002
21, Jim Boeheim, Syracuse, 1977-2001
20, John Thompson, Georgetown, 1975-97
20, Adolph Rupp, Kentucky, 1942-72
19, Lou Henson, Illinois and New Mexico St., 1967-99
18, Lou Carnesecca, St. John’s (N.Y.), 1967-92
18, Mike Krzyzewski, Duke, 1984-2002

CONSECUTIVE TOURNAMENT APPEARANCES
23, Dean Smith, North Carolina, 1975-97
18, Lute Olson, Arizona, 1985-2002
15, Bob Knight, Indiana, 1986-2000
14, John Thompson, Georgetown, 1979-92
13, Roy Williams, Kansas, 1990-2002
12, John Chaney, Temple, 1990-2001
12, Eddie Sutton, Arkansas and Kentucky, 1977-88
11, Bob Huggins, Cincinnati, 1992-2002
11, Mike Krzyzewski, Duke, 1984-94

Exhibit 3  Coach Knight Accomplishments

- Became Army head coach at 24, earning the distinction of becoming the youngest varsity coach in major college history
- His Army teams finished 102-50.
- His Army teams led nation in team defense for three consecutive years.
- Had a 32-0 undefeated season (1976)
- NIT Championship (1979)
- Coached Pan American team to gold medal (1979)
- In 1984, he became one of only three coaches to win the “Triple Crown” of coaching, winning NCAA and NIT titles and an Olympic gold medal (Hank Iba and Dean Smith are the others).
- One of only two coaches to both play on and coach national championship teams (the other is Dean Smith).
- Youngest coach to reach 200, 300, and 400 wins. Earned his 800th victory on February 5, 2003 with Texas Tech.
- At the time of his 800th victory, Knight had compiled an 800-303 record.
- Knight was hired on March 23, 2001 by Texas Tech. In his first season (2001–2002) as coach at Texas Tech, Knight had a 23-9 record; the second season was 22-13, the third season 23-11, and the fourth season 22-11.
- Led Texas Tech to the Final Four of the 2003 NIT
- Led Texas Tech to the Sweet 16 in 2005 for the first time since 1996 and to the regional semifinal for the first time since 1994
- Sixteen of his former assistant coaches have become head coaches at the collegiate level.

Exhibit 4  Timeline: Bob Knight Career Controversies

September 10, 1979: Knight is sentenced in absentia to six months in jail for hitting a Puerto Rican police officer before a July practice at the Pan American Games. The U.S. team wins the gold medal five days after the incident. The government of Puerto Rico decides in 1987 to drop efforts to extradite Knight.

March 28, 1981: After IU defeats LSU 67-49 at the Final Four in Philadelphia, Knight gets into an altercation with an LSU fan, allegedly shoving him into a garbage can. Knight claims that the fan used obscenities to provoke the incident. No charges are filed.

January 16, 1982: Ohio State guard Troy Taylor claims Knight cursed at him, “calling me everything in the book,” after he thought Taylor flagrantly fouled Jim Thomas. Knight and four Indiana players deny the charge and send films to the Big Ten and Ohio State. Ohio State later supports Knight.

February 16, 1983: Critical of Big Ten officiating, Knight stands at midcourt cursing at Big Ten commissioner Wayne Duke, who was sitting in the press box. Three days later, Knight publicly blasts officials for the “worst officiating I have seen in 12 years” and is publicly reprimanded.

February 23, 1985: Knight tosses a chair onto the Assembly Hall floor while Purdue’s Steve Reid attempts to shoot technical free throws. Knight is ejected from the game and later suspended for one game. Knight issues a formal apology.

March 22, 1987: After being assessed a technical foul, Knight bangs his fist on the scorer’s table during Indiana’s NCAA game against LSU. The university is fined $10,000 by the NCAA, and Knight receives a reprimand. Hoosiers go on to win the game 77-76 en route to their 1987 NCAA title.

November 22, 1987: With 15:05 remaining and Indiana down 66-43, Knight refuses to let his team finish an exhibition game against the Soviet Union after he is ejected for arguing with referee Jim Burr. He apologizes and is later reprimanded by the university.

March 10, 1991: In a growing spat, Knight leaves the court without shaking hands with Illinois coach Lou Henson, who calls Knight a “classic bully” who thrives on intimidation.

May 1991: Knight asks not to be renominated but is elected to the Hall of Fame, joining Larry O’Brien, Tiny Archibald, Dave Cowens, Harry Gallatin, Larry Fleisher, and FIBA’s Boris Stankovic.

December 3, 1991: Following a game against Notre Dame, Knight bans female AP sportswriter Beth Harris from the locker room, saying it is inappropriate for her to be there and also against university policy. All reporters are subsequently barred from the locker room.

May 25, 1992: During practice for the NCAA tournament, Knight draws protest from the local NAACP and other black leaders when he pretends to bullwhip black player Calbert Cheaney. Cheaney later says it was a joke and says the whip was a present from the players.

December 7, 1993: Knight pulls son Pat, a junior guard, from a game and appears to kick him in the leg.
March 17, 1995: The NCAA reprimands Knight and fines Indiana $30,000 for his outburst toward an NCAA tournament media liaison at a postgame news conference.

March 14, 2000: CNN/Sports Illustrated airs its findings in a report that focuses on Knight’s conduct. For the first time, some of Knight’s former players speak openly about verbal and physical abuse they say they endured from Coach Knight.

May 14, 2000: The university investigates Knight after former player Neil Reed claims the coach choked him during a 1997 practice. A videotape appearing to support Reed’s claim appears in April. Other reports that follow: Knight attacks a former Indiana sports information director and attacks former assistant coach Ron Felling shortly before Felling’s 1999 termination.

May 15, 2000: Indiana president Myles Brand suspends Knight for the first three games of the 2000–2001 season, fines him $30,000, and announces a “zero-tolerance” policy regarding any future incident by Knight deemed to be inappropriate.

September 7, 2000: Knight confronts 19-year-old freshman Kent Harvey, allegedly grabbing his arm and lecturing him after the student addresses the coach only as “Knight.”

September 10, 2000: Indiana president Myles Brand announces that Knight will no longer serve as the school’s basketball coach following a pattern of “unacceptable behavior.”

Texas Tech Era

January 2003: Two timing errors are discovered after Oklahoma defeats Tech, 69-64, in overtime in Norman. Knight says that OU coach Kelvin Sampson’s refusal to forfeit the win bothers him more than anything else has in coaching.

February 2003: Players Andre Emmett and Nick Valdez are suspended for a game against Texas for oversleeping. Joe Valdez, Nick’s father, claims the two were set up. Emmett runs 1,500 wind sprints to rejoin the team; Valdez quits.

December 22, 2003: Knight goes on a profanity-filled tirade during an interview with ESPN’s Fran Fraschilla about his relationship with Steve Alford, who is also involved in the interview.

February 2, 2004: Knight gets into a verbal confrontation with Texas Tech chancellor David Smith at a Lubbock grocery store.


Note: In his autobiography, Knight acknowledges the frequent distribution of this “AP laundry list” of stories and dedicates about 15 pages to refuting and explaining many of these incidents.


Endnotes

1 Knight was entitled to $140,000 in 2000 and $170,000 in 2001 and 2002. Knight was to receive $1.3 million as long as he did not coach for schools in Indiana or Kentucky or take a job at another school in the same basketball conference as Indiana.


3 Jack Isenhour, Same Knight Different Channel: Basketball Legend Bob Knight at West Point and Today (Dulles, VA: Brassey’s Inc., 2003), p. 221.

4 Bob Knight with Bob Hammel, p. 20.


7 Bob Knight with Bob Hammel, p. 19.

8 Isenhour, p. 313.


10 Bob Knight with Bob Hammel, p. 28.

11 Isenhour, p. 132.

12 Ibid., p. 134.


14 Feinstein, p. 4.


16 Feinstein, p. 250.


18 Berger, p. 11.


20 Isenhour, p. 315.

21 Bob Knight with Bob Hammel, p. 374.

22 Isenhour, p. 165.

23 Feinstein, p. 27.

24 Bob Knight with Bob Hammel, p. 15.

25 Isenhour, p. 7.
26 Bob Knight with Bob Hammel, p. 240.


28 Bob Knight with Bob Hammel, p. 312.

29 “The Knight Tape: Video captures encounters between IU coach, ex-player.”


32 Bob Knight with Bob Hammel, p. 310.

33 Feinstein, pp. 336–337.


35 Bob Knight with Bob Hammel, p. 371.


38 Bob Knight with Bob Hammel, p. 374.