

Oral Roberts Team Brings Out Faithful

Oral Roberts, once considered one of the world's most famous faith healers, has sent out 55,957 letters to his New York followers requesting them to attend a basketball game Thursday night between Oral Roberts University and Hofstra at Madison Square Garden.

"Evelyn, Richard and I will be there," said Roberts, now an ordained minister of the United Methodist Church, in his letter. Evelyn is his wife and Richard one of his four children.

"Like everything else at Oral Roberts," the letter continued, "athletics is part of our Christian witness. The players on our basketball team are all Christian boys. When we received this invitation to play in Madison Square Garden, we felt led of the Lord to make it an opportunity of witness.

"So, if at all possible, will you set aside the evening of December 9 (Thursday) and be there at 7 P.M. when our O.R.U. boys play? As I understand it, tickets will be sold at the windows [I have to buy my own like everyone else]. I hope you can secure a seat on the Eighth Avenue end of the Garden, as that's where the O.R.U. team and I will be sitting."

Chances are no other college in the country has more faith in its basketball team. Faith is something the 1,375 students live by at the \$40-million campus.

WRAG: 'We Run and Gun'

Signs all over the Oral Roberts campus say, "Expect a Miracle" and "Something Good Is Going to Happen to You."

Both slogans could apply to the fast-moving Oral Roberts basketball program. After two seasons of 21-5 and 27-4 won-lost records in the small-college division, the Titans opened the 1971-72 season last Wednesday night by defeating Illinois State, 95-93. It was Oral Roberts's debut as a major-college division team.

The 1970-71 Titans averaged 104 points a game last season with all five starters finishing in double figures. Coach Ken Trickey runs what he calls a WRAG offense.

"It means," said Trickey, by telephone, "we run and gun."

Last season the team, in a 28-seat Viscount jet the school owns, traveled 17,386 miles. The plane is the one that Roberts and the Oral Roberts Singers use to travel all over the nation on his crusades.

Recruiting Is Nonsectarian

The basketball team ranked sixth nationally in miles traveled. The only teams that went farther were Hawaii (21,500), Houston (19,536), Georgia Tech (18,255), Alaska (18,050) and Villanova (18,025).

This season Oral Roberts has games scheduled with Harvard, Boston University and St. Francis of Loretto, Pa., in the East, plays many of the teams in the Ohio Valley Conference and will sponsor its own tournament Dec. 29-30, with Loyola of Los Angeles, East Carolina and Connecticut the other competing teams.

Next season it will open its \$5.5-million Special Events Center.

"It makes the job a lot easier when your president, [Roberts] is enthusiastic," said Trickey. "He wants a national championship."

"I want not only a national championship," Roberts said, "I want our team to be competitive every year, but it must be done without violating any rules. Our Lord must be lifted up. If our boys fight on the court or anything like that, I'll stop it. I'll go right down there and stop it because it will have destroyed everything I stand for."

The Oral Roberts recruiting program is much like those of other schools.

"We don't limit ourselves to any special players or religious sects," said Trickey. "We just look for the good basketball players. We have students of all religions here, something like 33 different religious denominations.

"Nor do we limit ourselves to any special part of the country. Our players come from all over, although five boys on this team are from Tennessee because that's where my ties are strongest.

I used to coach at Middle

Tennessee State. We have a boy from Brooklyn, Ingram Montgomery, a 6-6 junior from Boys High School.

They Smile at Referees

"Our players, like all other students at school, must wear shirts and ties to classes. There is no drinking, smoking, dancing or swearing on campus.

"Even I had to make a big change in my coaching since I came here. I had to quiet down. When we get a bad call, the players smile and raise their hands. They've got to represent the university, and a lot of people look at us all around the country."

The mainstay of the team is Richard Fuqua, a 6-foot-3-inch guard who was all-everything in high school at Chattanooga.

He played on the varsity as a freshman and averaged 18.1 points a game. Last season he was one of the nation's top scorers with a 31.8 average. He scored 60 points against the University of the South, 57 against Quincy (Ill.) and 51 against Jackson State.

Roberts's interest in religion and his interest in basketball are connected. As a lanky 16-year-old playing basketball for Ada (Okla.) High School, he collapsed in the middle of the game. His illness was diagnosed as tuberculosis.

While resting at home, he says, he promised God that if he was cured, he would preach the Gospel.

Shortly thereafter, his parents took him to a revival meeting, where, he says, God spoke to him, saying, "My son, I am going to heal you, and you are going to take my healing power to your generation."

Roberts started a faith-healing mission in Tulsa and it mushroomed. He claims his evangelistic association has "saved" 5-million persons for Christ.

Roberts sees a world that worships athletics and he is convinced a nationally ranked team of Christian athletes will reach millions of sports fans "who won't go to church or tune in the religious radio and TV programs."