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Editorial

Born in Centerton, Indiana in 1910, John Wooden moved to Martinsville, Indiana, in 1924 after his family went bankrupt and lost their farm. In Martinsville, Wooden enrolled in high school and in 1927 as star player he led the basketball team to the Indiana state basketball championship. In 1928 he enrolled at Purdue University where he played for the basketball team that won the Big Ten Conference two out of his four years there, being captain for his last two years. He was a three-time Helms Foundation All-American and national player of the year in 1932, and won the conference's award for outstanding merit and proficiency in scholarship and athletics. In the same year, he married Nellie Riley, who he met in high school, and moved to Dayton, Kentucky, where he taught English and coached for two years. Returning to Indiana in 1934, he taught and coached at South Bend Central High School. After nine years, and a 218-42 high school coaching record, he served as a lieutenant in the US Navy, working as a physical education instructor during World War II. In 1946 he was discharged from the Navy and became basketball coach at Indiana State University, winning the conference championship the following year. In 1948, he left Indiana State with a 47-14 record and became head coach at UCLA. It was not until 1964 that Wooden's UCLA team won their NCAA championship, but 1966 was the only year through 1973 that his team did not win the championship. After winning a tenth NCAA championship in 1975, Wooden announced his retirement and finished with a record at UCLA of 620-147. Having been elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame in 1960 for his achievements as a player, in 1973 Wooden was elected as a coach to become the first player in the hall to be elected as both a player and a coach. Wooden's numerous awards included in 2003 the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian award. [1, 2]

Wooden is regarded as the greatest college basketball coach ever and a paragon of virtue. A living legend all the way through to his passing in 2010, Wooden had numerous admirers, including sports journalist Rick Reilly who visited Wooden on a regular basis:

Every time I left his little 700-square-foot condo in Encino, Calif[ornia], full of books and learning and morals, it would hit me how far short of him I feel. He made me want to be more principled. ... He abhorred stardom and showmanship. ... He made me want to be more humble. In the most self-obsessed city in the world – Hollywood – he was selfless. ... He made me wish I read more, thought more, listened more. I started noticing something on my visits. The TV was never on. He was always reading. Poetry, history, the Bible. Never sports. Never novels. He knew hundreds of classic poems by heart. Yet when he found himself coaching a bookish 7-footer named Alcindor in 1966, he memorized the poems of Langston Hughes, the black modern poet. It didn't go unnoticed. He was a nut for Lincoln, yet not for a second did he realize he, himself, was sports' Lincoln... Look, John Wooden wasn't perfect. He may have stopped swearing for good at 14, but he said plenty to refs. He'd put his head down and yell things at them into his program as they'd run by. ... And it's not true he never drank. He did, at 22, with his Purdue teammates. He had a half a bottle of beer "and threw up six," he remembered. That was the last time. He made plenty of mistakes. He let Alcindor score 60 points in his first

collegiate game just to put fear in the rest of the Pac-10. "I'm ashamed of that," he once said. He and Nell's relationship wasn't perfect. Once, when he was just out of college, they had a huge fight and he left. Started hitchhiking west. Didn't care where he went. Got as far as Lawrence, Kansas, where he got a job helping to build the football stadium. Then he went back home. "I just got a little confused," he said. At UCLA, he didn't pay enough attention to realize a booster named Sam Gilbert was lavishing his players with gifts and cars. But I will punch any man in the mouth who says Wooden knew. He couldn't have known it or he'd have stopped it. He'd have sooner cut off his own hand than cheat. [2]

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