

Observances from under the Carolina blue dome

By **EDDY LANDRETH**
Sports Editor

There is a majestic new palace on UNC's campus, and the king of college basketball holds court there.

The official name is the Dean E. Smith Center, but it is more commonly known as the Dean Dome.

As you approach the structure, you are suddenly overwhelmed by the enormity of it. The Smith Center is the third largest on-campus arena in the country, seating 21,444 for basketball. Only Syracuse's Carrier Dome and Brigham Young's Marriott Center are larger, in terms of seating capacity.

Most everything inside the building is painted your favorite color of blue, especially the interior of the arena itself.

All the seats are the plastic-chair type, rather than the old aluminum-bench version. This equates into greater comfort for everyone's back. The seats in the upper-most level are all plastic, while those in the lower areas contain a cushioned bottom, for yours.

Banners advertising past glories gently wave in the cloud section, instilling a sense of tradition as you gaze about.

The seating arrangement is laid out so everyone has a good view of the game. But in the upper-most seats, even the tallest of men are reduced just a bit. Before you complain about the height of your seat, remember — if they still played in Carmichael, you probably would not be there.

When you make that inevitable trip to the restroom, you realize there is a permanent line. Then you notice the line is not moving because it's

a mural.

Upon entering the facility, one of the first things you notice is the many plaques honoring those who contributed the \$33.8 million dollars necessary to build it. All the funds were private donations, raised in a campaign led by former N.C. Gov. Hargrove "Skipper" Bowles.

The first activity in the center was not sports related, but a black-tie fund-raiser, which yielded a collection of \$211,650 for the University's College of Arts and Sciences. The center was named that evening for the University's resident legend.

The arena is adjoined to a swimming facility named for a former University trustee, Maurice L. Koury. It houses a 50-meter, eight-lane, Olympic-sized pool that will make the University eligible to host NCAA championships and Olympic swimming trials. The pool should be ready before the fall semester.

Because of the delays in the construction process, the official dedication ceremony was postponed until this fall. There will be an alumni

game of many of Coach Smith's former players on Sept. 6, sometime after the first football game. All of Coach Smith's former players will be invited, although they probably will not all participate in the game.

The center has created so much interest that there is a souvenir stand open year-round from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. Tim Mee operates the stand for the student store.

"Everybody who comes through town has to come to see this place," Mee said.

Mee said he did a considerable business most everyday. "The hottest items are the boxer shorts and the Dean E. Smith T-shirts," he said. "Slightly more women buy the shorts than men." The shorts are covered with the word Carolina, printed in

light blue, of course.

Mee said he also served as a combination information booth and guide. "People who usually come in here are families," he said. "They usually come by the carload, one at a time, then the next load will come in."

The public has such an interest in the facility that Dena Nail of the

sports information office is creating a brochure explaining many of the details about the building, including the first game played and who scored the first basket. By the way, the game, which the Heels won 95-92, was against the hated Duke Blue Devils. Warren Martin will be remembered as the man who scored first, on a dunk off a Kenny Smith assist.

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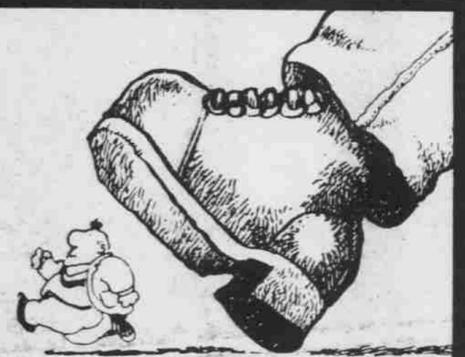
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