

## Kenneth L. "Kenny" Sailors Medallion Service Award

by Julianne Couch  
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### Fast Facts:

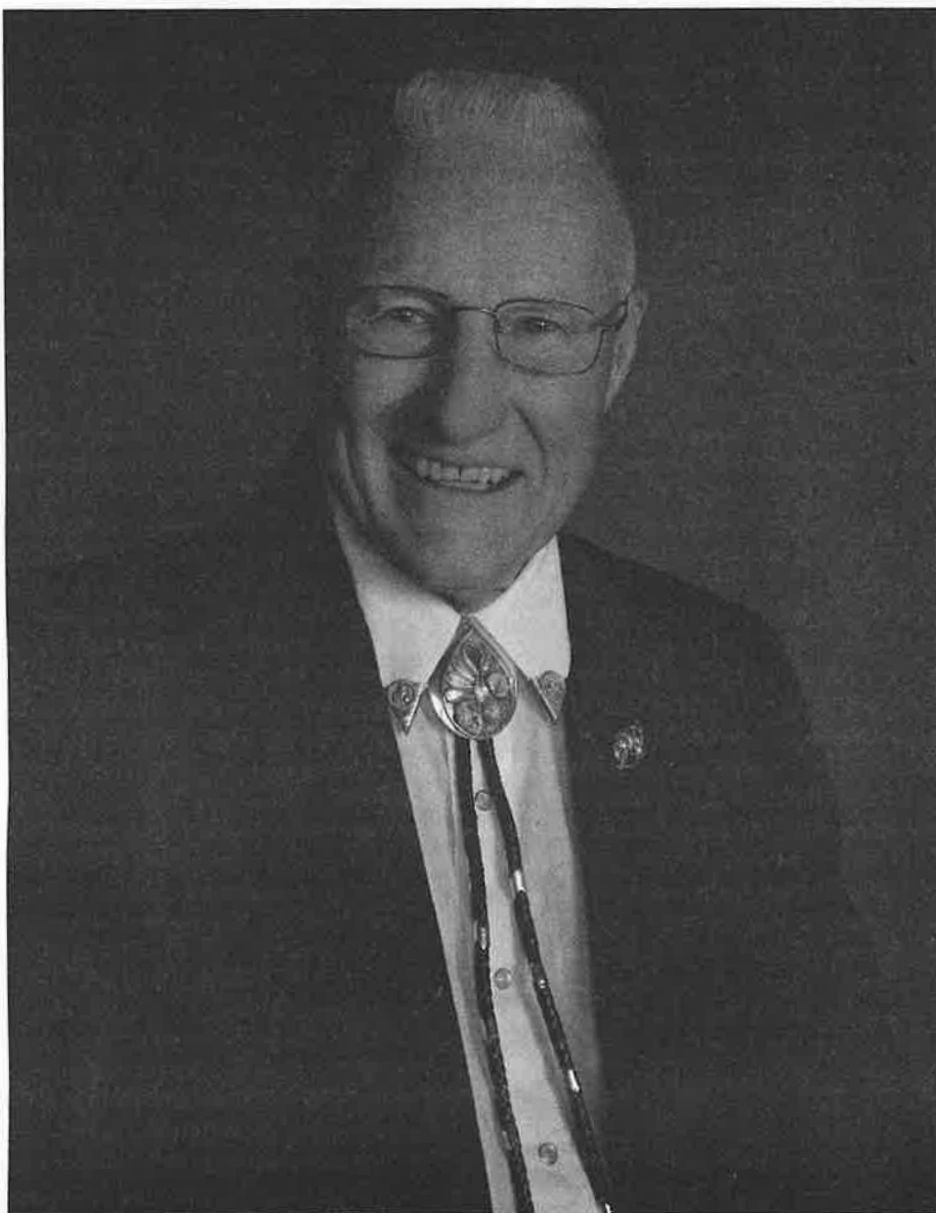
BS Education, '43  
Resides in Laramie, Wyo.  
Occupation: Retired professional basketball player, Alaskan outfitter, high school coach  
Selected accomplishments: unanimous selection, college basketball player of the year, 1943  
World War II service in Marine Corps  
UW Cowboy 10-member all-century basketball team  
University of Wyoming Intercollegiate Athletics Hall of Fame  
Best known for: Inventing the jump shot and playing on UW's 1943 NCAA championship team  
Family: Wife, the late Marilynne Sailors, children Linda and Don  
Hobbies: fishing, basketball, talking about sports

Kenny Sailors should be used to the accolades by now. Point guard for the NCAA 1943 championship Wyoming Cowboy basketball team and tournament MVP. Three time All-America selection. Number 4 Cowboy jersey retired. Now he has been awarded the Medallion Service Award from the University of Wyoming but seems uncertain what he did to deserve the honor.

**IN MY MIND KENNY SAILORS MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT UW STUDENT-ATHLETE TO EVER WEAR THE COWBOY OR COWGIRL UNIFORM.**

- Tom Burman,  
UW Director of Athletics

Tom Burman, UW Director of Athletics, sums up Sailors' accomplishments. "In my mind Kenny Sailors may be the most important UW student-athlete to ever wear the Cowboy or Cowgirl uniform. Mr. Sailors is credited with inventing the jump



Kenny Sailors, BS Education, '43

Ludwig Photography, Anne Brande

shot by many basketball historians. The jump shot changed the game of basketball in a similar fashion to how the forward pass changed the sport of football. Kenny's playing career was interrupted due to World War II, where he served his country with honor and then returned to UW before becoming a professional basketball player. Kenny is a great asset to Laramie and the University of Wyoming."

Sailors smiles modestly when he hears comments such as Burman's but speaks up firmly on the question of the jump shot. "No one really knows who took the first jump shot. But I worked at developing the shot and made it the shot that players still use today."

Sailors isn't too fond of the modern game in which players either slam dunk the ball or shoot a distant three without driving to the basket. But Sailors' technique called for dribbling toward the basket, elevating an estimated 36 inches off the ground, seemingly freezing in the air while squaring the body and cocking the elbows, then releasing the ball with

a flick of the wrist. "Nobody could block it," he recalls with pride. And it almost always went in.

Sailors graduated in 1943 and after a stint in the military returned to UW for one year to complete his eligibility. Then he went on to play basketball in the brand new NBA for five years starting when he was 27, the age at which many players were retiring. He played for various teams including Cleveland, Baltimore and Denver. But it isn't his basketball days serving as an ambassador for UW alone that this award acknowledges. It is his continued dedication to what he considers his home town of Laramie and the University of Wyoming.

Sailors came to Laramie from Hillsdale, Wyo., because his mother wanted him to attend high school here. He went on to UW hoping to play both football and basketball but could only do one. Although his tuition was paid by the Elks Club he still needed money so he worked at the Student Union. He met his wife Marilynne Corbin one day at work. Their mutual friend Stan Hathaway, who

would one day be governor of Wyoming, brought her by to introduce the two. Sailors was a member of the Phi Delta Theta fraternity, and she was in Kappa Kappa Gamma. Hathaway convinced Sailors to invite Corbin to a fraternity dance. "She went to my dance, I went to hers, and we were off! Six months later we were married and we lived together for 60 years." After many years in Alaska, Marilynne became ill, forcing the couple to leave their work as outfitters and move to Idaho. When she passed away, Sailors returned to Laramie, where all three of their children had been born.

Now Sailors can be seen at home basketball games studying the Cowboys as they dribble, screen, shoot and play defense. What most fans don't see is how Sailors interacts with the players off the court. "I never talk to them about how to do things or run certain plays," he said. "I talk to them more about what to expect and how they'll be treated on and off the court and how to keep it from bothering them when things don't go well." Sailors recalls a particular game in his own pro career when he scored 42 points against the Knicks. "Everybody loved me - the fans, the girls - I really thought I was someone. Then a few weeks later I had a bad game and everyone thought I was a bum." The moral of the story he tells the players is: "If you can't handle that, you've got a problem!"

Players ask his advice about how to become a starter on the team. "If you want to be a great ball player in this league, you've got to become aggressive," he tells them. "I'm not saying you have to get dirty and kick people and bite 'em, but you have to get people out of the way and get to the ball. If you can do that and get to the point where it doesn't bother you, you'll be a ball player." Sailors knows whereof he speaks. He recently played in the Senior Olympics and practices the jump shot, though now he only elevates of few inches off the ground. He dismisses any notion that his days on the court are behind him. "Of course I still play. I'm only 87 years old!"

Now that Sailors is in Laramie he finds himself granting many interviews about his basketball days. He's often asked if he expects to be named to the NBA Hall of Fame, "It'll happen some day. It didn't help me going to Alaska for 33 years where no one could find me. It doesn't matter though. I belong to greatest Hall of Fame that any man or woman could belong to. It's not down here, it's up there. It only has one person on the selection committee, and that's Jesus Christ!"