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Athletics

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Sweet Home Chicago

DePaul Basketball Returns to the City



A long-held dream was realized with the Nov. 11 grand opening of Wintrust Arena.



When fans gathered on Nov. 11 at the brand-new Wintrust Arena at McCormick Square to watch DePaul square off against long-time rival Notre Dame in the opening game of the 2017-18 season, it was the dawn of a new era in Blue Demon basketball. One NBA scout called it the best college basketball game of the day, but for those closely involved in making this festive occasion happen, it was the fulfillment of a dream.

"It's electrifying and kind of hard to describe," said Wintrust

Arena Fundraising Committee Chair **Dan Ustian (BUS '73)**. "What a great arena and the start of something special. The feeling today is even better than we all thought it would be."

It didn't much matter that DePaul was bested 72-58 by one of the nation's top teams. DePaul Athletics Director **Jean Lenti Ponsetto (EDU '78)**, men's basketball coach **Dave Leitao**, women's basketball coach **Doug Bruno (LAS '73, MA '88)** and the more than 10,000 fans who filled Wintrust Arena came away with hope for the future. "This

Photos by Tom Evans

DePaul Notches First Win at Home

On Nov. 13, DePaul scored its first win at Wintrust Arena with a 81-57 victory over the Delaware State Hornets. Tre'Darius McCallum led the way with 17 points, while Max Strus hit six of eight shots on his way to a 15-point performance. Eli Cain finished with 11 points and eight rebounds, and Devin Gage contributed 10 points and eight assists.

was the culmination of many years anticipating when that moment would come when we would once again have our own facility in the city," Ponsetto said.

Even though junior guard Eli Cain wanted to score the first basket in the new facility after scoring the final basket at Allstate Arena, it was sophomore Devin Gage who made the first field goal in Wintrust Arena. "I had to get it before Eli did," Gage said with a laugh. "We were down by five, needed a basket and the shot clock was winding down. So I drove the lane for a layup. I didn't realize it was the first basket [for DePaul] ever at Wintrust because I was in the moment. When I look back, it's pretty amazing to be a part of history."

Super-fan and donor **Joni Phillips (CSH '82)** was on her feet roaring her approval after Cain's double-pump reverse layup tied the game 22-22 four minutes before halftime. "There is such an energy in the building," she said. "It feels like home and the return of a great tradition."

"This is the beginning of a new chapter in the book of DePaul and the day everyone has been waiting for," said ex-Blue Demon **David Booth**

(CMN '03), the university's second-leading all-time scorer with 1,993 points. Booth, now director of player personnel for the New Orleans Pelicans, said, "It totally brings back memories of what it was like when I played. Seeing all these DePaul guys—**Melvon Foster (CMN '93)**, **Tommy Kleinschmidt (CMN '09)** and others—we still have that bond."

Stephen Howard (BUS '92), a well-respected college basketball analyst for ESPN, said he can't wait to see the impact Wintrust Arena will have on the community. "It's going to rejuvenate the South Loop, the city of Chicago and DePaul University. All the people I talk to from Chicago want the Blue Demons to be relevant again."

Opening day for former coach **Joey Meyer (CSH '71)** was like old home week. "It was fun to see all my former players, and it brought back a lot of great memories," he said. Meyer, who succeeded his father, the legendary Ray Meyer, as coach, guided DePaul to seven NCAA tournament appearances. "Despite the outcome Saturday, this was still one heck of a start. There's a feeling that DePaul is on its way up."



Eli Cain soars for a dunk in DePaul's season opener against Notre Dame.



The Blue Demons' state-of-the-art locker room rivals any in the NBA.

Photo by Steve Woltmann/DePaul Athletics