

'Shorties' Hold Tourney's Key

Tall Men May Take Back Seat In Big Seven Cage Meet

BY DON PIERCE
Special Correspondent

ANY BASKETBALL coach still will welcome a 6-9 pivot man when he goes after the Big Seven tournament title. But the little guys are going to have a lot to say about what team captures the ninth annual meet, which opens a four-day run Monday in Kansas City's Municipal Auditorium.

Fact is, the ever-increasing fleet of little men in the midlands circuit is threatening to swing much of the spotlight away from the towering denizens of the keyhole. Oklahoma's Lester Lane, a nifty 5-10, 170-pound guard, may have signalled such a trend last year when he won the tournament scoring championship on 64 points.

In so doing, he outdistanced Kansas' All-American B. H. Born, 6-9; Burdette Haldorson, Colorado's 6-7 center who later won the conference point scepter; Bob Reiter, Missouri's 6-8 hook-shot artist; Nebraska's Bill Johnson, 6-7, and Kansas State's brace of Roger Craft, 6-7, and Jerry Jung, 6-11.

For seven years previously pivot men—none of which stood less than 6-4—had monopolized the individual tournament scoring crown.

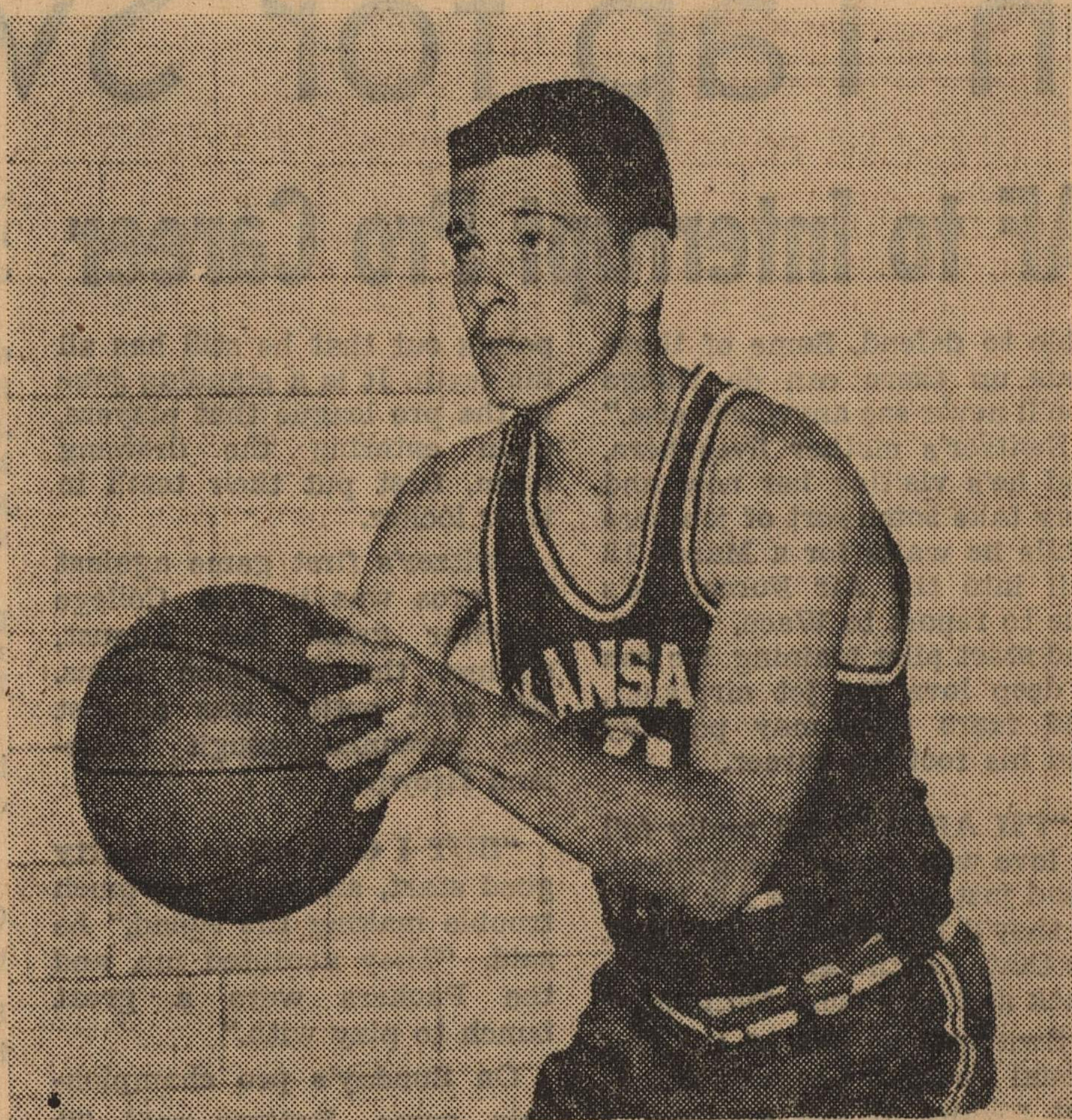
Lane, and his stablemate, the 5-9, 155-pound Jimmy Peck, typify the backlines that most conference teams now have in operation. Iowa State will come in with a pair of comparative midgets in Gary Thompson, 5-10, and Larry Wetter, 5-10. Kansas is mounting Dallas Dobbs, 5-11, and John Parker, 5-11, in its backline. Colorado floors Charles Mock slightly out of the midget class at 6-0, and Tom Harrold, 5-11. Kansas State alternates three; Kent Poore, 5-8½; J. R. Snyder, 5-10½, and Pachin Vicens, 5-9. Nebraska's regulars are Duane Buel, 5-10, and Billy Wells, 5-11.

Only favored Missouri and California, this year's guest team, will not start backlines containing two men under six feet—or, in the case of Colorado, one under 6-0, and another exactly at that level.

This trend can be traced to three points: 1. The niftier, nimbler little men can bring the ball up quickly and more efficiently, especially against various pressing defenses. 2. The little men can play the front line of defense, against the enemy's smaller men, thus keeping the big players against the board for rebounding. This serves a dual outlet for the fast-break. 3. The advent of increased importance of speed in the game has forced all coaches to employ more small, elusive scooters.

TIME WAS WHEN the league was loaded with towering guards. Fifteen years ago Nebraska floored perhaps the tallest backline tandem the conference ever has seen, in Don Fitz and Don Held, both 6-4. Missouri had the 6-4 John Lobsiger in its rear defense. Iowa State boasted the 6-5 Carol Schneider. Kansas State carried the 6-3 Larry Beaumont. Since the war Claude Houchin, 6-5, and Bill Hougland, 6-4, of Kansas, and Iowa State's Jim Strange, 6-7, who also played center, have been notable backliners.

In contrast, the tallest guards slated to start in next week's



KENT POORE . . . A K-State Shorty

tourney are 6-1 Frank Hess of California and the 6-1½ Lionel Smith of Missouri.

As reflected in Lane's 1953 tournament scoring championship, the shooting shorties are not without imposing credentials. Thru pre-meet games of December 18, that same Lane leads all tournament scorers with a 24.5 average. This has been accumulated on 98 points in just four games, all of which the Sooners have lost.

Dobbs is second at 18.7, and Thompson, a sophomore, third at 17.8. Haldorson is no better than fifth at 17.2. Reiter is ninth at 16.0. Bob McKeen, California's 6-7, 220-pounder, is tenth at 15.7. Craft and Jung are not among the top fifteen.

FOR THE RECORD the remaining members of this elite are: 4. Chuck Duncan, c, Iowa State, 17.5; 6. Rex Ekwall, f, Nebraska, 17.0; Jim Smith, f, Kansas State, 16.3; 8. Chuck Smith, f, Nebraska, 16.3; 11. Norm Stewart, f, Missouri, 15.2; 12. Larry Friend, f, California, 15.2; 13. Med Park, f, Missouri, 13.2; 14. Lyn Hart, f, Oklahoma, 12.5; 15. Gene Elstun, f, Kansas, 12.5.

If Lane is able to retain his scoring title, he will be the first and only repeater since Clyde Lovellette, the old Kansas mastadon, was winning three in a row from 1949 thru 1951.

Here is the roster of tournament point kings:

1946—Gerald Tucker, c, Oklahoma, 64; 1947—Bill Waters, c, Oklahoma, 40; 1948—Gene Peterson, c, Kansas, 51; 1949—Clyde Lovellette, c, Kansas, 64; 1950—Clyde Lovellette, c, Kansas, 82; 1951—Clyde Lovellette, c, Kansas, 76; 1952—Dick Knostman, c, Kansas State, 71; 1953—Lester Lane, g, Oklahoma, 64.