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## Nicholson Pavilion

Central Washington University

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## What is in a Name? Nicholson Pavilion

Few names are as well-known at Central as Leo Nicholson. Born in Oregon in 1901, he was raised in Yakima. After graduating from high school in the self-proclaimed, 'Palm Springs of Washington,' he earned undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Washington.

During his UW days, Nicholson also played three years of varsity basketball. Following his graduation, he decided to pursue a coaching career rather than practice law, and became the head basketball coach at Bothell High School (earning a record of 91-9 in four years).

In 1929, he was hired to serve as Central's head basketball coach and assistant coach in football. A year later, he became the head football coach (while also coaching the school's golf and tennis teams).

While basketball was his first love, Nicholson's football teams performed admirably, winning 13 out of 14 games during his first two seasons (the only blemish on the school's record was a tie with Gonzaga in 1930).

In 1941, Nicholson was named Director of Athletics and turned over the football coaching duties to Phil Sarboe. During his decade as head football coach, Nicholson compiled a respectable 45-26-6 record.

Nicholson's gridiron success during his tenure was more than equaled by his teams' achievements on the basketball court. During his first year, his team won 20 intercollegiate games while losing only one, and a year later his team went 11-3, losing only to the University of Washington and Washington State.

During his tenure, Nicholson's teams won nine conference championships. In 1950, his team won the district championship and made the quarterfinals of the National Association of Intercollegiate Basketball (now known as the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics or NAIA) national tournament—the first Central team to go to a national tournament.

From 1929 until he retired in 1964 (34 seasons!), Nicholson's teams won an impressive 505 games while losing 271 (a winning percentage of 65 percent).

In the late 1950s, Nicholson was actively involved in the effort to build a new gymnasium and athletic pavilion at Central. According to CWU historian Samuel Mohler, he and his staff worked closely with the architect in designing a distinctive and functional facility.

During the dedication ceremonies to open the new pavilion, the Board of Trustees announced it would be named in honor of Nicholson, making it the first time Central had named a building after a person still active on university staff.

In honor of his impressive coaching achievements, Nicholson was elected to the NAIA Hall of Fame, the Helms Athletic Foundation Hall of Fame, and CWU Hall of Fame. Following his retirement, he relocated to Laguna Hills, California, where he passed away from a brain tumor on June 11, 1967.

Nicholson's replacement as Central's head basketball coach was his son, Dean Nicholson, who would go on to even greater success. By the time Dean Nicholson left Central in 1990, he had compiled a record of 609-219 (73 percent winning percentage) and had become the 17<sup>th</sup> coach in collegiate basketball history to win 600 games.

Together, Leo and Dean Nicholson won a staggering 1,114 victories, becoming the winningest father and son coaching combination in the history of collegiate athletics (and the answer to a question in one of the versions of the popular Trivial Pursuit game!).