**Yes, IU students stormed the court after beating Purdue. It was 6 years in the making.**

By Matt Cohen

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BLOOMINGTON — There they were in the shine of those historic bulbs above, a mass of humanity stampeding, sweaty and swarming to the floor. They exorcised demons older than their own college years, elated and celebrating — surrounding the man who had carried home their long-shot dream.

There they were at midcourt, hoisting their hero in the air above them. He extended his arms and let out his own yell, his moment made, a tormented legacy cemented.

After nearly six years of failure, finally, they had gotten their turn.

There was Rob Phinisee, the hero, on the broad shoulder of Trayce Jackson-Davis. For once it was a game won not on the star forward’s shoulders, but instead the maligned Phinisee, who scored 20 of the biggest points of his IU career in a 68-65 upset over No. 4 Purdue in Assembly Hall.

“Something I won't ever forget,” Phinisee said. “Just these fans, they've supported me through everything, so I just want to say thank you. The crowd tonight was huge. They really boosted us. That moment is a moment I will never forget.”

The wait began nearly 24 hours before tip-off. Some students camped out in temperatures dipping into the teens Wednesday night into Thursday morning along 17th Street. They couldn’t get in line until 2 p.m. Thursday, but they wanted to be first. More students came in droves Thursday. They rushed across to the student section entrance at 2, and by 5, the line extended all the way down the parking lot, past Wilkinson Hall, up Fee Lane and across 17th Street.

They stayed there in the cold which never raised above 25 degrees until finally, the doors beckoned open. The thousands rushed into Assembly Hall with the noise and hostility that only quite comes when the Boilermakers are in town. Every single one of the 17,222 seats in this building were full.

As IU recovered from a slow start, the whole crowd bellowed for Phinisee and Xavier Johnson draining the crucial shots that kept IU in front of Purdue for over 22 minutes of the game. It was a back and forth bout before Phinisee delivered that knockout blow — a quick 3 from the corner with just over 16 seconds to go.

The students began to line up, sensing the moment coming. With the energy in Assembly Hall at another level, even for this building, no one even tried keeping the students off the floor.

They rushed down with glee from behind the basket, and leaped over the railings of the main students section down onto the bleachers. They came in dozens, then hundreds until not an inch of McCracken Court could be seen.

Their party had begun.

“We’re going to get so drunk tonight!” one student yelled.

They swarmed and danced. Screaming for the cameras and dotting the sky with iPhones. They saluted Phinisee on the shoulders of teammates, honored for the win he’d cemented.

The swarm remained for at least 10 minutes after the game. They slapped the midcourt logo and shouted a certain expletive about their least favorite rival. Nobody wanted to leave.

For the freshmen and sophomores, this was their first Purdue game after the COVID-19 pandemic kept them out a year ago. For the seniors, this was one last ride. They were determined to make it count.

A senior of decades past stood along the sidelines as former IU basketball star Ted Kitchel watched the fray. A Bob Knight player, he wasn’t quite one to support a court storming. But he knew just what this win meant.

“This game was fabulous,” Kitchel said. “It was a huge win for Mike and his team.”

Woodson yelled with a passion hardly seen from the Hoosiers’ new coach. He had beaten Purdue. In his first try.

“Dog gone, they were great,” Woodson said. “It's a big win for our team. It's been a while since we beat Purdue, and they have a hell of a team.”

They left slowly, forced off the floor they’d rushed by police and security officers. The filed out into the frigid Bloomington night. To the tailgate fields and down to Kirkwood. To Kilroy’s and Upstairs. To Nick’s and friends waiting back home. There was a couch burned near the Sample Gates and “This is Indiana” boomed loud and proud down. It was a night to celebrate a drought finally past its expiration.

Soon the floor was empty again. The court was littered with crumbled newspapers and destroyed masks.

The aftermath of a dream fulfilled.