



It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.
Jordan Hulls reflects on his four years of playing
basketball at Indiana University.
Photo by Shannon Zahnie

From Despair to Glory

Jordan HULLS Looks Back

The **5**
Best and **Worst**
Moments of His
IU Basketball Career

by Justin Albers

When 18-year-old Jordan Hulls arrived on the campus of Indiana University during the summer of 2009, IU men's basketball had reached the depths of its existence. A program known for on-court excellence and the winner of five national titles, IU had won only six games the previous season. In the wake of a violations scandal, new coach Tom Crean had inherited a mess.

Enter Hulls, a Bloomington native and Indiana Mr. Basketball, who had grown up idolizing the Hoosiers. Just as much as Crean, he wanted to see the program

restored to the greatness he had seen as a kid.

It was never easy, but in the space of just four seasons Hulls, the coaching staff, and his teammates took the program from despair to glory, winning the Big Ten championship and twice making it to the Sweet 16.

With Bloomington and the Hoosier Nation looking on, Hulls experienced some of the lowest lows and highest highs on a basketball court.

These are the times he will remember forever.



Losing to archrival Purdue “was tough” for the Bloomington native, but after losing four straight, Hulls says, “It seemed like nothing would ever pay off.” (left) Hulls drives between two Boilermakers during the 2010-2011 season. *Photo by Indiana University Athletics*

At Bloomington High School South, Hulls and his teammates would often practice on their own time. When he arrived at IU, he says, “I just didn’t understand why guys wouldn’t want to come in the gym and get better.” (below) Hulls leads his teammates in a scrimmage during Hoosier Hysteria. *Photo by Jamie Owens for jscottsports.com*

The Lowest Lows

5. March 8, 2012: Senior Verdell Jones III tears ACL in Big Ten Tournament

Hulls and his teammates endured constant losing for two full seasons before they finally saw dramatic improvement. During the 2011-2012 season, the Hoosiers were a lock for the NCAA Tournament, based on their 24-7 record.

But just before the team got to taste the postseason for the first time, Verdell Jones III—who had experienced lackluster 6-, 10-, and 12-win seasons—went down in the Big Ten Tournament with a season-ending ACL tear.

“That was extremely tough because Verdell was a senior. He’d been through it all,” Hulls says. “We were finally good that year, going into the NCAA Tournament, and he tears his ACL. It’s a kid’s dream to be able to play in the NCAA Tournament at a big-time program like IU, and it was really difficult to see what happened to Verdell.”

4. February 23, 2011: Hulls’ fourth straight loss to Purdue

The #8-ranked Boilermakers defeated IU at Assembly Hall, 72-61.

All defeats were hard on Hulls during his first two seasons, but the losses to Purdue University were especially crushing. He grew up knowing everything about the Indiana-Purdue rivalry and what it meant for both fan bases.



Plus, he had turned down a scholarship offer from Purdue. Now he had to watch as the Boilermakers became one of the nation’s best teams.

“It was tough just not being able to compete the way we wanted to,” Hulls says. “We hung in there, but then they’d just be able to pull away and make it look like it wasn’t even close. It seemed like nothing would ever pay off.”

3. Trying to change the culture

“I had always been a guy that went and worked on my own,” Hulls says. The problem he encountered when he arrived at IU was that nobody else on the team shared his work ethic. Hulls’ teammates believed the shots they put up and the drills they undertook in practice were good enough.

“I would say in the locker room, ‘Hey, I’m going to be coming back at this time. Come out

with me,’” Hulls remembers. “People would be like, ‘Yeah, all right.’ And then it would never happen. That’s just how it was.”

Hulls was a freshman and not used to being a vocal leader. When he led Bloomington High School South to championships and an undefeated season, his teammates would just naturally follow his example. But that didn’t happen at IU, although he tried to change the culture.

“I just didn’t understand why guys wouldn’t want to come in the gym and get better,” Hulls says. “It’s hard for me to fathom if you’re a Division I basketball player that you wouldn’t want to come in and get extra work. That was pretty challenging for me. I asked my coaches, asked my dad, to try to figure out what I could do differently.”

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THE High Five

5. March 6, 2010: Hulls hits eight 3-pointers against Northwestern

After Indiana's 11-game losing streak during his freshman season, Hulls spent even more time in the gym leading up to the Hoosiers' game against Northwestern University. And it paid off. He scored 24 points on eight 3-pointers, and Indiana won 88-80 in overtime.

It was one of only four conference wins for the Hoosiers that season.

"That was a big win for us," Hulls says. "Any win we could get was a big win for us."

4. Summer 2010: Will Sheehey and Victor Oladipo arrive on campus

"It was really good for the program. Most people wouldn't understand, but just getting those two guys [Will Sheehey and Victor Oladipo], who had that kind of strong work ethic and wanted to get better every single day, completely changed our program around," Hulls says.

Sheehey and Oladipo came to Indiana the year after Hulls. Like Hulls, they had been under-recruited and overlooked by many Division I schools, and they had plenty to prove. When they arrived on campus, they joined Hulls for workouts beyond the team's regular practices.

Recounts Hulls, "Then guys who hadn't been coming in [for extra practice] see everybody else coming in and thought they had to come in, too. It completely changed the culture. We were sick of losing. Even though we weren't winning, it was really good to get those guys on campus. That was a really good moment."

Victor Oladipo (right) and Will Sheehey (below) arrived at IU during the summer of 2010, before Hulls' sophomore year. "Getting those two guys, who had that kind of strong work ethic and wanted to get better every single day, completely changed our program around," Hulls says. *Photos by Indiana University Athletics*

3. November 30, 2011: Indiana wins at North Carolina State

The Hoosiers started the 2011-2012 season with six straight victories but didn't yet have a signature win or a meaningful victory away from Assembly Hall. Basketball analysts from around the country still mocked Indiana's inability to win on the road.

That was until the Hoosiers went to North Carolina State University and beat a talented Wolfpack team in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge. Indiana recovered from a late deficit to earn a convincing 86-75 victory.

"That was our first big road win as a team," Hulls says. "We were still undefeated at that point, and everybody was still doubting how good we really were. We were able to go in there and play a really good game and make a statement."

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Hulls, who recently became engaged, is playing in the Polish Basketball League this fall.
Photo by Shannon Zahnle

The Lowest Lows continued...

2. December 28, 2009: Maurice Creek suffers left knee injury against Bryant

One of the primary reasons the Hoosiers lost 11 straight games in Hulls' first year was Maurice Creek's season-ending injury. Indiana had the game well in hand against Bryant University—the Hoosiers won 90-42—but Creek, the team's leading scorer, injured his knee on a play under the basket. He collapsed and did not move. It was the first of three major injuries for Creek, injuries that effectively wiped out his IU basketball career.

"I was Mo's roommate freshman year, so the first injury was especially difficult," Hulls says. "He was going to be a huge piece of the puzzle for us to bring back the program. He never got back to the same player that he was. It was definitely hard to see that because you really care about the guy. I can't imagine what it'd be like to sit out multiple years like he did. We needed him. We could've won who knows how many more games just with Mo in the game."

1. Indiana's 11-game losing streak during the 2009-2010 season

The Hoosiers went 10-21 during Hulls' freshman campaign, and they struggled to compete with almost every team in the Big Ten. Beginning with a January 24 loss to Iowa, Indiana dropped 11 consecutive games, with all but two coming by double-digit margins. The Hoosiers did not win again until March 6.

"That was probably the toughest time in my four years there, just because we put in all the work in practice and had gone over game plans, then we'd have a couple games where we'd get really close and then we just wouldn't be able to finish it off," Hulls says. "It was just mentally draining going through that process."



As a freshman during the 2009-2010 season, Maurice Creek was IU's leading scorer until his season-ending injury. "He never got back to the same player that he was," Hulls says. "It was definitely hard to see that, because you really care about the guy." *Photo by Indiana University Athletics*



THE High Five

continued...

2. December 10, 2011: Indiana beats #1 Kentucky

“Every time I see it, I still get chills,” Hulls says of Christian Watford’s last-second, game-winning 3-pointer. “I just remember I was spotting up in the corner, trying to be a decoy. When Christian hit the shot, I ran over, and I don’t know what was going through my mind except to get those people off of Christian because it looked like he was about to die. It was one of the cooler moments that I’ve ever been a part of.”

The game-winning basket has become iconic in Indiana basketball history. Longtime rival University of Kentucky, the eventual national champion, was ranked #1 in the nation at the time, while the Hoosiers were unranked.

“That was a turning point for us,” Hulls says.

(above) Christian Watford sinks the game-winning three pointer against Kentucky, the #1 team in the nation on December 10, 2011. “Every time I see it, I get chills,” Hulls says. Photo by Jamie Owens for jscottsports.com

1. March 10, 2013: Indiana wins Big Ten regular season title

In Hulls’ first year at IU, the Hoosiers won four conference games and finished last in the Big Ten. During his final season, they won the Big Ten championship with an improbable come-from-behind 72-71 victory at Michigan in the last game of the regular season.

“Although the Kentucky game was really cool, I think the way we were able to win at Michigan was probably my favorite moment,” Hulls says. “We were down five with 55 seconds left and we didn’t call a timeout. We were really cool and collected. We just gave Cody [Zeller] the ball in the post and he made big plays.

“After blowing it against Ohio State on Senior Night [a 67-58 loss], just being able to go on the road against one of the best teams in the country and win on their floor for the Big Ten championship was a moment I will remember forever.”

From 10 wins to 29, from the Big Ten basement to the conference championship, Hulls helped bring Indiana back. ✨

