

Over the years my family has heard so many stories about Ulf Wedberg and my time as a basketball coach in Sweden. Showing them the beautiful country and the wonderful people was a fantastic opportunity for them to actually share this memorable experience of the KIF 50th anniversary with me.

From 1975 to 1977 I attended Wilmington College in the state of Ohio and was playing American football. I decided to go on an exchange program for one year and was given the choice go to Sködinge Sweden or Istanbul Turkey. Obviously, I chose Sweden... And I am so glad that I did.

After my year as an exchange student, I wanted to stay longer in Sweden and got a job as a vaktmästare at ASA Folkhogskola. I asked my coworker vaktmästare Henrik if anybody in the area played basketball. Henrik said he thought there was somebody in Katrineholm who had recently started a basketball club and that he would try to connect me with this person. He did and that evening I met Ulf Wedberg for the first time. And that's how it all started, because of that one question I asked Henrik. And it is because of Ulf Wedberg, that I was able to have such an incredible 10-year experience in Sweden with KIF Basketball. And I will always be grateful to Ulf Wedberg for that and our nearly 40-year friendship.

The next day Uffe said we would go to the building where they practiced basketball. He took me to a little red barn in Katrineholm with one basketball hoop and a rubber basketball and I remember thinking...oh shit!! This will be a challenge.

Uffe and I spent many hours talking about how to build a successful basketball organization so that the KIF boys and girls and men and women could eventually compete at a higher level. We both agreed that to have a successful basketball program we had to start from the bottom and build a strong foundation. So Uffe also started a youth basketball program.

Those years were very busy, but we had many wonderful people who helped the organization grow and develop young and talented basketball players.

The late 70s and 80s was a great time for Sweden- Bjorn Borg, Mats Wilander, Ingemar Stenmark and ABBA.

But Basketball was still quite young.

After developing a successful youth program and improving our A teams, we wanted to do something that would spark even greater interest in basketball in the community. So, we planned a trip to United States for our men's and women's A teams which generated a lot of interest and media

coverage. To raise money, we planted rows and rows of trees. It was truly a team effort.

The trip was fantastic, and we had a lot of fun and a lot of laughs and played against some very good basketball teams. We even visited my old college, Wilmington College, and played a couple of games there.

We had some great success in those early years and even had one of our best players ever in Katrineholm, Anders Wahlqvist who was the first player to be selected to the Swedish Junior National Team. This of course was also a huge boost to basketball in Katrineholm.

Eventually KIF became so big that we needed our own practice and game facility. So again, under the leadership of Ulf Wedberg, we were able to claim Nyhemshalen as the home of the Katrineholm basketball club.

We were even able to bring my father coach Jim Connor here for a clinic and my brother Gery who played college basketball. Gery also played and coached for KIF as well during those years.

We needed to get another American ballplayer to help our program. So I asked my father who was a college basketball coach, who might be a good person to bring to KIF. We wanted someone who was not only talented but competitive and a hard worker and he said "Nick Carlotta." Nick played for my father in high school and went on to become an All American at St. Catherine's College. I contacted Nick and we met and discussed the possibility, and he accepted the challenge. Nick meant a lot to the development of KIF Basketball and still does so today.

I had some great experiences during these years. One that I will never forget was when a group of my young basketball players came into my apartment early in the morning while I was still asleep and it was still dark outside. They had candles on their heads and were holding candles and singing St. Lucia. I was not very familiar with this Swedish tradition and at first, I thought that maybe I had died during the night and went to heaven. It was a kind and beautiful experience and such a wonderful part of Swedish culture.

Midsummer afton was also a beautiful and memorable experience for me every year in Sweden.

After coaching four or five basketball teams seven days a week for about six years I wanted to do something else other than just coaching. So, once again I approached Uffe about doing something else besides coaching basketball. He asked me if I would be interested in working as a drug and alcohol addictions counselor. I thought about it for a moment and then said yes, and Uffe put me in touch with Valmotorp which was a therapeutic

community outside of Katrineholm for people with drug or alcohol addictions. Through Valmotorp I had the opportunity to work in Thailand for nearly a year and in New Zealand for approximately three months through the United Swedish Foundations.

These experiences started me on the road to become a forensic psychologist which I am today in the United States. So, I need to thank Uffe for that as well.

My years in Sweden taught me so much about sociology, politics and the beauty of nature. I always thought that “allemansrätten” was a fantastic idea and how it taught people to respect and appreciate the environment.

I am so very grateful for my years in Sweden and so grateful for the opportunity to have lived and worked in this beautiful country for 10 years. Even though it was nearly 40 years ago when I came to the KIF 50 year Anniversary, not a day went by that I didn't have a fond memory of my 10 years in Sweden. The wonderful people I met, the many basketball players I worked with, the beautiful nature... And yes, I even learned to like lutfisk and blood pudding.

And by the way, those of you who attended the KIF Basketball 50 year Anniversary, heard the story from Monica Brihall that I used her bar of soap to write our strategy on the mirror in the locker room and then used her expensive sweater to erase the strategy from the mere. Well you should know that I sent Monica a bar of soap and a new sweater recently! That was a great and funny memory and story!

Our motto the best was “offense sells tickets and defense wins games.” I hope that is still a motto for KIF basketball as I still firmly believe that still today.

I will not start to name all the people who I met and influenced me in my thinking over the years in Sweden as there are so many I am afraid I would leave someone out. So many good people.

Thank you all for those wonderful 10 years in Sweden. And a sincere thank you to Uffe Wedberg. Uffe and I have remained in contact over the years, and he has kept me abreast of KIF's progress. And I will continue to follow KIF and Sweden for the rest of my life.

Sincerely,

Ed Connor

Attached is a photograph of our house in Newport, Kentucky. Quite interesting that it looks like a red house with white trim in Sweden!



Sarabeth and I and Katie, Justine and Nathan want to thank everyone for being so kind and gracious to us during our visit to Katrineholm! We wish you all the very best!

