

JOHN BRADY

*Note: This is the **first** in a series of two feature stories on this year's inductee into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame and this year's recipient of the LABC's Mr. Louisiana Basketball award. The 2026 inductee will be former Louisiana State University coach John Brady. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2026 is long-time St. Thomas More Catholic High School coach Danny Broussard.*

JOHN BRADY WAS ON HIS WAY TO THE LOUISIANA BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME LONG BEFORE HE REALIZED IT

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Written for the LABC

BATON ROUGE, LA – Former LSU men's basketball coach John Brady wanted to be a coach back when he was at McComb High School in the early 1970s.

But little did he know that the contacts he would make by chance would lead to the promised land of the 2006 Final Four, the induction into the LSU Athletics Hall of Fame last Sept. 19 and upcoming inductions into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame in Baton Rouge on May 2 and the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame in Natchitoches on June 27.

For example, how would he have known that the Hattiesburg High guard who defended him in high school games and in junior high – Tim Floyd – would become a college head coach at Idaho and UNO and one day hire him?

Or how he happened to catch on with Mississippi State basketball coach Kermit Davis as a graduate assistant and become friends with Kermit Davis Jr., who would later become his top assistant coach at LSU.

Or that one of his best friends in his early 20s would happen to be the son of Joe “String Music” Dean of SEC basketball television announcing fame and the marketing executive at Converse. Dean, a 1985 inductee into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame, would become LSU's athletic director in 1987 and one day hire Brady as LSU's basketball coach.



“I’m telling you, the dominoes were falling, and I didn’t even know what was going on,” Brady said. “I had no idea. It’s crazy now.”

There were also coaching mentors supreme he would learn from as a player, like his McComb High coach, Bobby Nelson, and his college coach at Belhaven University in Jackson – Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame coach Charlie Rugg.

And the head coaches he would learn more from when he worked for them – like Kermit Davis when he was a graduate assistant at Mississippi State (1976-77) and Bob Boyd when he was an assistant at Mississippi State (1982-86) and Richard Williams at Mississippi State (1986-90) and Floyd at UNO (1990-91).

From each, he learned old school fundamentals.

“Bobby Nelson is a great guy and had a big influence on me,” Brady said. “Charlie Rugg was at Belhaven and also had a huge influence on me. I always thought about coaching when I was playing, because it was the only thing I really felt comfortable thinking about in terms of what I was going to do.”

But he had to get the jobs first.

“Mississippi State coaches had come to watch me play at Belhaven a couple of times,” Brady said.

So, after graduating from Samford with a business degree, Brady enrolled at Mississippi State for a Master’s in education so he could coach, and he sent a resume and letter to coach Kermit Davis.

“He knew who I was,” Brady said.

And he caught on with the State staff as a virtual graduate assistant and met Joe Dean Jr., who had just finished his playing career at State in the 1975-76 season and was the graduate assistant for 1976-77.

“Joe Dean Jr. and I became best friends,” Brady said. “I lived in the dorm with the basketball players. Joe Dean Jr. and I were at practice every day. I used to come home with Joe on weekends to Baton Rouge and hang out at his house with his dad off Country Club Drive by the golf course. I got introduced to Big Joe. He’d wake us up at 6:30 a.m. - ‘Get up and eat breakfast. Doris (Mrs. Dean) made some great biscuits.’ It’s amazing how that all worked.”

Soon, Joe Dean Sr. was the star of Brady’s resume as he tried to get coaching jobs.

“It changed my life,” Brady said. “Joe Dean was the Converse shoe man. He’s traveling the world. He knew everybody. My connection with Kermit and his dad changed my life. All that played a huge part in me being able to come to LSU.”

And Doris Dean didn't just make breakfast. When Crowley High baseball coach Richard Pizzolatto, who led the search for a new boys' basketball coach before the 1977-78 season, called the Dean home to ask Joe Dean about Brady's application, Doris took the call. Her husband was in Boston on business.

"Well, we interviewed a coach here for a job. Do you know John Brady?," Pizzolatto asked.

"Oh, yes, he's like family," Doris said.

"Well, mam, that's all I need to know," Pizzolatto said.

And Brady was off.

Brady won at Crowley and was named the Louisiana Sports Writers' Association Class AAA coach of the year in 1981. A rabid LSU fan since he was young, Brady also enjoyed going to LSU basketball games while at Crowley as a rising coach named Dale Brown took LSU to its first SEC title and NCAA Tournament since 1954 in 1979 and made LSU's first Final Four since 1953 in 1981.

Brown recruited Crowley High, and so did that old combatant from Hattiesburg High. One day, Tim Floyd visited as an assistant for Don Haskins at Texas-El Paso to recruit two of Brady's star players – 6-foot-8 forward Jerome Batiste and 6-7 forward Greg Lazard.

"I went over there for players, and ended up finding one of the greatest hires I ever made," Floyd said. "John impressed me so much. We had a chance to sit down and talk. We had those Mississippi roots. Then I suggested to coach Haskins that we hire him at UTEP."

But Brady instead returned to Mississippi State to coach under Boyd, who was USC's coach from 1967-79 and a nemesis of UCLA legend John Wooden. And Boyd signed the two players. Neither stayed, but Brady sure did and became friends with fellow assistants Richard Williams and Larry Eustachy, who would also both become head coaches.

"Bob Boyd taught me how to communicate the game to players," Brady said. "Bob was the best communicator I've ever been around in terms of teaching and details in his teaching. And he always held players accountable."

When Boyd retired after the 1985-86 season, Williams replaced him and kept Brady on staff. But Brady realized Williams would not leave State any time soon, so he had to leave in order to get a head coaching job. And Floyd hired him as an assistant at UNO for the 1990-91 season.

"Tim reiterated what I always believed in, especially under Boyd – defending without fouling, rebounding, taking care of the ball, then getting a quality shot," Brady said. "Those four

things were paramount to me. You can't control whether the ball goes in, but you can control the effort, which translates into defending and rebounding."

Brady was at UNO only one season before he got his first head coaching job – at tiny Samford in Birmingham, Alabama, beating out candidates Mark Gottfried, who went on to become head coach at Murray State, Alabama and North Carolina State, and Matt Doherty, who became head coach at Notre Dame, North Carolina and SMU. Why did Brady beat them out? He had Dean as a reference.

"Joe Dean helped me get every job I ever had," Brady said. "That Joe Dean-Bob Boyd combination was strong."

Brady quickly turned around a struggling Samford, which was coming off six straight single-digit-win seasons. Brady went 17-10 in his second season and won back-to-back Trans America Athletic Conference West Division titles in 1995-96 and 1996-97.

He never reached the NCAA Tournament at Samford, but he did become Cinderella on Dec. 3, 1996, with a 53-50 upset at LSU. Boyd later told Brady that he warned Dale Brown of Brady.

"You better be ready," he told him. "That SOB could come in here and cut us up."

Brown, a Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame inductee in 2005, had announced before the season that the 1996-97 season – his 25th - would be his last. And Brady struck while the victory was still hot. He called Dean the next day.

"I want to be the next basketball coach at LSU," he said.

"John, I love you like a son," Dean said. "But I can't hire you at LSU from Samford. Hell, they want me to resurrect Adolph Rupp or hire freakin' Bobby Knight. So, I can't hire John Brady from Samford."

Brady repeated that he wanted the job and said to keep him in mind.

At this time, the NCAA was investigating LSU over its recruitment of star Baton Rouge forward Lester Earl. And one-by-one, the top candidates removed themselves. Also at this time, Joe Dean Jr. was working his father for his old friend – John Brady.

It came down to Ole Miss coach Rob Evans or Brady.

"If Rob doesn't take it, I'm sending the LSU plane to pick you up," Dean told Brady.

"I was pumped, and I didn't care if they were going on 10-year probation," Brady said. "And I got the call."

But Brady inherited a program in as dire straits as Samford was as LSU had four straight losing seasons prior to Brady. He inherited seven players, but three quit during his first team meeting.

“Any ideas?” Brady asked assistant coach and old friend Kermit Davis Jr.

“Yeah, I’ve got one,” Davis said. “Let’s not have any more team meetings.”

After Brady had losing seasons in his first two years, the NCAA’s sanctions started in 1999 and included LSU losing two scholarships a year for three years through 2002. But Brady and assistants Butch Pierre and Davis still signed Shreveport elite forward Stromile Swift, who as a sophomore led the Tigers to a Top 10 national ranking and the NCAA Tournament Sweet 16 in the 1999-2000 season along with an SEC regular season title and a 28-6 finish.

There was another losing season in 2000-01, but the Tigers reached the NIT in 2001-02 as Brady recovered from the sanctions.

He took LSU to NCAA Tournament in 2003 and 2005, before a magical season in 2005-06 in which the Tigers won another SEC title at 14-2 and reached the school’s first Final Four since Brown’s second in 1986 and finished 27-9.

Floyd, then coaching USC after head coach stints at Iowa State and the NBA Chicago Bulls and New Orleans Hornets, watched Brady’s Tigers upset No. 1 seed Duke and No. 2 seed Texas to reach the Final Four.

“I was so proud,” Floyd said. “I always respected his journey. He didn’t take any shortcuts. He wasn’t anointed a head coach at a major school. He had to go through the school of Hard Knocks. I always had great respect for how he went about it, how his teams looked on the floor. I always thought he was an extremely talented guy in all areas of the game.”

Just a year before, Brady was in danger of getting fired.

“I thought I was going to get fired every day,” Brady said.

He kept bouncing back from the bad seasons, though, and when he had talent as in 1999-2000 with Swift, Jabari Smith and Torris Bright and in 2005-06 with Tyrus Thomas, Tasmin Mitchell, Darrel Mitchell, Garrett Temple and Glen Davis, he won big.

“I think his greatest strength was holding great players to a standard and making them accountable,” Floyd said. “He was not afraid to be direct with his players. And not afraid to take them out of their comfort zone to get them better. He coached with his gut and with great strength. Accountability was everything to him.”

Stromile Swift and Jabari Smith echoed that at the 25-year reunion of Brady’s 1999-2000 team that reached the Sweet 16.

“He got on me my freshman year, after I had a terrible game at Florida especially,” Swift said. “I had never had a white guy talk to me the way coach Brady did. I was steamin’ hot. I wanted to leave.”

His mother, Mary Swift, convinced her son to stay.

“It was one of the best decisions I ever made,” said Swift, who was the second overall pick of the 2000 NBA Draft and played nine years in the league.

“I appreciate you coach,” Swift told Brady at the reunion. “I needed a coach like you. My high school coach was not aggressive with me. He didn’t hold me accountable.”

Jabari Smith nodded his head.

“Coach Brady just said he was an a—hole when he was coaching. But he wasn’t. He was a tough coach, and he made us better.”

“I appreciate all you guys for coming here,” Brady said in tears as the reunion ended. “I was in coaching for 41 years, and sometimes it just happens. And sometimes, you just never know if a team is going to hit. Well, we hit it in 2000.”

And it really happened six years later with Brady Ball reaching the pinnacle – LSU’s fourth Final Four 20 years after Brown’s last one.

“That Sweet 16 team set the table for us to get those players from Louisiana for the 2006 Final Four team,” Brady said of Tyrus Thomas, Tasmin Mitchell, Glen Davis and Garrett Temple from the Baton Rouge area and Darrel Mitchell from nearby St. Martinville.

“Our 1999-2000 team with Stromile Swift and Torris Bright showed that we could get the best players from Louisiana and win,” Brady said. “If Stromile would come to LSU, then Tyrus Thomas and Glen Davis figured they could, too.”

The magic quickly ended, though, as Brady fell to 17-15 and 5-11 in the SEC in 2006-07 and was fired midway through 2007-08 at 8-13 and 1-6 after his best player – forward Tasmin Mitchell – was lost for all but three games of the season with a shin injury. Center Chris Johnson also missed seven games with a broken hand.

“And 18 months before he was at the Final Four? You’ve got to be kidding me,” Floyd said, still angry 18 years later. “His best player was out. I didn’t agree with the firing at all.”

Brady quickly got another job at Arkansas State for the next season and would go on to win two Sun Belt Conference West Division titles and stay eight years before retiring after the 2015-16 season.

Brady also received a third SEC championship ring from LSU a year after he left in 2009. Trent Johnson, the coach who replaced him at LSU, thought it only fair as he won the SEC in his first season with Mitchell, Johnson and other top players left by Brady, such as guard Marcus Thornton and Garrett Temple playing major roles.

“Tasmin and Garrett might have asked him to do that, but he did it,” Brady said. “And I really appreciated it.”

Brady would get one more SEC title ring when coach Will Wade won the league in 2019 with Brady as the LSU Radio Network game analyst, where he remains.

“So, I got four and only won two,” he laughed.

He also treasures the radio gig.

“I didn’t leave LSU all mad,” Brady said. “And coming back and doing the radio helped my legacy by people seeing me in a different light. It’s helped me go to this nice place with LSU people now, which I’m blown away by. I’m just so humbled by it and these Halls of Fame. I’m a lucky guy.”

Overall, during his 11 years at LSU, Brady won 192 games, posted four 20-win seasons and had a 58.0% career winning percentage. Twice he received Southeastern Conference and NABC District Coach of the Year honors. He was also a three-time Louisiana Coach of the Year.

Brady will be inducted into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame during the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches’ 52nd annual awards banquet on May 2, at the Baton Rouge Marriott.

In addition to the hall of fame induction, the awards banquet will include recognition of Louisiana’s major college, small college, junior college and high school players and coaches of the year, the top pro player from the state, as well as the presentation of the LABC’s Mr. Louisiana Basketball award to long-time St. Thomas More Catholic High School coach Danny Broussard.

The Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame is sponsored by the LABC. The Hall of Fame was created in 1975 to honor former great basketball players and coaches from Louisiana colleges. More information about the LABC and the Hall of Fame can be obtained by visiting their website at www.labball.com.

April 17, 2026