

KEVIN BROOKS

*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 2023 inductee will be former UL-Lafayette star Kevin Brooks. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2023 is former long-time Northwestern St. coach Mike McConathy.*

KEVIN BROOKS' BASKETBALL GENIUS WAS AHEAD OF ITS TIME

By: Kevin Foote
Written for the LABC

LAFAYETTE, LA – There's no arguing how good a scorer Kevin Brooks was in his prime.

When he finished his college basketball career for the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (then USL) Ragin' Cajuns in 1991, Brooks was the third-leading scorer in school history – only trailing legendary performers Bo Lamar and Andrew Toney.

But those who followed his career closely can only imagine how much greater Brooks' legacy would be if he played under the current defensive rules governing the college and professional games.

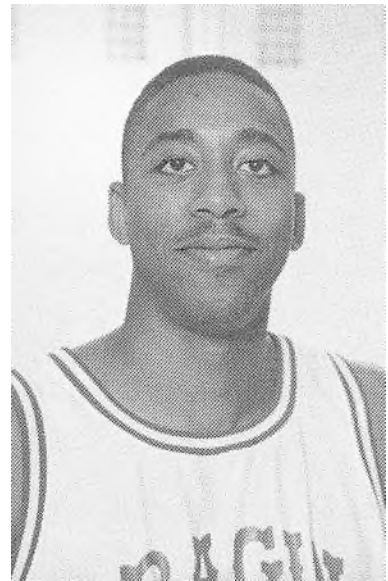
“No doubt,” former Cajuns' teammate Eric Mouton said. “He was Kevin Durant.”

From 1987-91, the skinny 6-foot-8 Brooks scored 2,294 points and shot 52.2% from the field and 40.9% from 3-point land for his career. For his career, he averaged 19.8 points and 6.2 rebounds a game, while making 77.4% of his free throws.

In recognition of his accomplishments, Brooks will be inducted into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame during the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches' 49th Annual Awards Banquet this Saturday, May 6, at the Baton Rouge Marriott. The banquet is sponsored by the Baton Rouge Orthopaedic Clinic and Universal Coin & Bullion, Ltd.

“He had so many offensive skills,” Mouton said of Brooks. “He could handle, really shoot it and he filled the lane. He made my job as a point guard pretty easy. And really, he could have played point guard if we needed him to. He was just a born scorer.”

“Kevin was a stretch four before they called it a stretch four.”



Brooks hit the ground running as the American South Conference's Newcomer of the Year and the Louisiana Freshman of the Year in 1988, while averaging 16.8 points and 6.3 rebounds and shooting 56.5% from the field.

The next season he averaged 20.7 points and 5.4 rebounds and had a 52.2% field goal percentage. Then as a junior he averaged 20.1 points and 7.0 rebounds, while shooting three-pointers at a 40.4% clip and making 81.6% of his free throws.

As a senior, Brooks averaged 21.2 points (1st in ASC) and 6.0 rebounds and made 44.7% of his 3-point attempts.

Over his USL career, he was as a two-time honorable mention All-American and four-time All-ASC and All-Louisiana performer, as well as a two-time ASC All-Tournament and second team NABC All-District selection.

All of that in an era, where the physical teams like Tim Floyd's New Orleans Privateers were allowed to hold, push and shove for 40 minutes.

"Yes, UNO grabbed and held," Brooks laughed. "It was just a different game back then."

"I guess it would have been much more beneficial for me to play in today's era, where they value the 3-ball and the perimeter game more."

That led to the only real regret from his college days, not once making the NCAA Tournament. In each of his final three years, the Cajuns were eliminated in the conference tournament by the Privateers.

"There's no way they could have handled guys like Kevin and Sydney Grider under today's (defensive) rules," Mouton said.

Other than lacking a few more wins in March, Brooks delighted Cajun fans with an offensive show for four years.

"We were very talented," Brooks said. "It was very disappointing that we never got a chance to get to the big show, but man, we had a lot of fun."

"We got up and down the court and we shot the 3-ball. The style of play definitely gave us an opportunity to show what we could do. It was a very entertaining style of basketball. We could fill those lanes. It was great."

Brooks was drafted No. 18 overall in the first round of the NBA Draft in 1991 and was immediately traded to the Denver Nuggets, where he played for three years before playing in the Continental Basketball Association (CBA) and overseas until he retired in 2005.

It didn't take Brooks very long to understand the 1990s also featured a physical style of defense in the NBA as well.

He still remembers a preseason game against Seattle early on as a rookie with the Nuggets trailing by a bucket with only seconds left on the clock.

"We ran a play on the sidelines on an out-of-bounds play and Nate McMillan was guarding me," Brooks said. "I mean he had two hands on me and was just grabbing me. It was just blatant. He was just holding me. He was a veteran and was stronger than me." The whistle wasn't blown and the play resulted in a turnover.

"I just looked at the official kind of saying, 'Are you seeing this?'" Brooks remembered. "It didn't matter. That was the way the NBA was back then."

"I was supposed to be able to get away from Nate even though he was holding me and get open. That's not how the game is played now. It's just a different game now."

Don't get the impression Brooks has any lingering bitterness. On the contrary, he's living life in so many ways. Once the NBA days didn't pan out like expected, the former White Castle High standout later played in Argentina, Sweden and New Zealand before settling in Adelaide, Australia.

Brooks married Melissa two decades ago and the couple has two sons – Kyan, 8, and Kobe, 5.

"Adelaide is very similar to South Louisiana," Brooks said. "There are festivals all the time, the people are very hospitable and very nice. Louisiana is more humid. They like to eat, drink and have a good time."

He rarely makes it back home, but did take his family on a five-week visit to the United States earlier this year. He visited many of his former Cajuns' teammates in Lafayette and visited the Cajundome, where his name and photos from his playing days are prominent on the walls.

"It was very emotional for me walking around the Cajundome and remembering all the great times I had there," Brooks said. "It was great to see what the Cajundome looked like. All the pictures on the walls and seeing what they had done. It was very classy. It was a lot of fun for my wife and kids to see. They enjoyed it."

During his career in the National Basketball League (NBL) in Australia, Brooks is a two-time champion and was the 1998 Finals Most Valuable Player.

All beyond his imagination growing up in tiny White Castle in the Baton Rouge area.

“Yes, it’s been unbelievable,” Brooks said. “It’s been a great run. It is crazy to think about a kid from White Castle and now living across the world in Australia. I’m absolutely blessed.”

His most recent visit home helped him really appreciate his journey.

“I’m from a town of less than 2,000,” he said. “I definitely wasn’t the best player out of White Castle. I received a lot of support from White Castle.”

“When I go back, my hometown isn’t the same. A lot of people have left for other opportunities. It’s hard to see. It’s very emotional for me.”

All these years later, Mouton still remembers hearing about this star basketball player from White Castle at the Top 28 state tournament in Baton Rouge.

“I remember going to watch him play at the Top 28,” Mouton said. “Kevin was must-see TV. He didn’t disappoint. We knew he was going to be a great player for us. He was so much fun to watch and so much fun to play with.”

Being from the Baton Rouge area, many assumed Brooks would sign with LSU. After all, he grew up idolizing such Tigers’ greats as Derrick Taylor, Ethan Martin and Howard Carter.

“I was an LSU fan all the way growing up,” Brooks said.

Brooks remembers Cajuns’ head coach Marty Fletcher and assistant coach Dale Clayton showing up to White Castle High very early in the morning.

“LSU was chasing Michael Harden, who ended up going to Temple,” said Brooks, who shocked many by signing with the Cajuns.

Brooks said he remembers several heated confrontations when former LSU coach Dale Brown later arrived to discover Brooks signed with the Cajuns.

“I have no regrets,” Brooks said. “I made the best decision for me without a doubt. I made the best decision for me.”

“The bond I still have with my teammates and friends there are still very strong until this day. My college years were great. I’m just very grateful for them.”

In addition to the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame induction, the May 6 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, and the presentation of the LABC’s Mr. Louisiana Basketball award to former long-time Northwestern State coach Mike McConathy.

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.

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