

RICKEY BROUSSARD

*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 2016 inductee will be former Nicholls State University coach Rickey Broussard (1990-2002). Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2016 is former LSU radio announcer Jim Hawthorne.*

SOLID RECRUITING HELPED BROUSSARD TRANSFORM NICHOLLS INTO A WINNER

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THIBODAUX, LA – Rickey Broussard did not have his name hanging above his Nicholls State University men's basketball coaching office door.

Instead, Broussard had a small wooden plaque with one message – “Recruit daily or perish.”

It was more than a message for Broussard, as he used that philosophy to build Nicholls into one of Louisiana's top men's basketball program in the 1990s.

When Broussard arrived in Thibodaux for the 1990-91 season, Nicholls was coming off five straight losing seasons. Twelve years later, Broussard transformed the Colonels into one of the top programs in the Southland Conference with a pair of NCAA Tournament appearances.



Broussard said all of that was possible because of recruiting.

“I believe that recruiting was the lifeblood of the program,” he said. “I had a sign above the door to my office saying ‘Recruit daily or perish.’ It was a reminder to everyone that came to my office daily that we have to recruit every day, and that was how we were able to build the program.”

During his 12-year tenure at Nicholls, Broussard guided the Colonels to a 150-183 overall record, a 112-86 mark in the Southland Conference and a pair of NCAA Tournament appearances (1995 and 1998). He was also named the Southland Conference Coach of the Year (three times), Louisiana Coach of the Year (twice) and National Association of Basketball Coaches District 8 Coach of the Year (once). He is also a member of the Nicholls Athletics Hall of Fame.



Now, Broussard will add another honor to his collection, as he will join the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame. He will be inducted on April 30 during the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches' 42nd Annual Awards Banquet at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge. The banquet is sponsored by the Baton Rouge Orthopaedic Clinic.

"I think it's the biggest honor that I can receive at this point in my retired career," Broussard said. "Getting inducted into the Nicholls Hall of Fame was big and I appreciate that, but this is probably the biggest honor that I can receive. I am grateful and excited about it. It means a lot to me and Nicholls State."

Broussard's path to Nicholls started on the high school level in the Acadiana area, as he served as the head coach at his alma mater Meaux High School and later Fatima and St. Thomas More high schools. Broussard's coaching prowess was evident, as he led his teams to the playoffs each season.

Jack Delhomme said Broussard had the ability to transform programs because he had the three C's needed to succeed as a coach -- concentration, confidence and the ability to stay calm.

"No matter where he went he built that program," said Delhomme, who coached with Broussard at Fatima. "Everywhere he coached he proved that he could build a program from the junior high level all the way to college. He can walk into anywhere and give him three years you will have a winning program."

Because of success on the high school level, Broussard caught the eye of then USL coach Bobby Paschal and joined the Ragin Cajuns' staff for the 1983-84 season. He stayed in Lafayette for three seasons and followed Paschal to South Florida in Tampa, Fla., for three more seasons.

After leaving South Florida in 1989, Broussard returned to Louisiana and coached one season at North Vermillion High School before getting the call about the Nicholls opening. Former Nicholls coach and Louisiana Basketball Hall of Famer Don Landry contacted him about the opening and urged him to apply.

While the Nicholls program was down at the time, Broussard said he was ready for the challenge.

“I came to Nicholls knowing that it was a big challenge because a lot of my fellow coaches told me not to go there because it was tough to recruit there and was off the beaten path,” he said. “There were a lot negatives, but I never looked at it that way because I saw it as an opportunity to do something special.”

Broussard said he knew Nicholls had potential to be a great program, especially if he followed the message “Recruit daily or perish.”

Paschal said he knew it would only be a matter of time before Broussard transformed the Nicholls program.

“I always knew that he would be a good college basketball head coach because he knew how to teach and how to get kids to play a winning style,” said Paschal, also a Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame member. “He also had the skills to be a very effective recruiter.”

Solid recruiting helped Broussard quickly turnaround the Nicholls program. Within his first two years, he was able to recruit several key players, including eventual Louisiana Basketball Hall of Famers Reggie Jackson and Gerard King, which helped lay the foundation for future seasons.

The plan worked as Nicholls went from 3-25 in Broussard’s first season (1990-91) to 15-13 in his second season. The 12-win improvement was one of the top turnarounds in NCAA history at the time.

“After that turnaround, I knew we had the makings of being a good program, but we were not there yet,” Broussard said. “We still needed to add pieces to this puzzle. Once we were able to do that, I knew we had a complete team.”

With Jackson (a four-time all-SLC selection) and King (a two-time All-SLC selection) leading the way, the Colonels continued to improve each season and reached the top after winning the Southland Conference regular season and tournament titles during the 1994-95 season. It was Broussard’s best season in Thibodaux, as Nicholls finished with a 24-6 overall record and 17-1 mark in the SLC.

That season, Nicholls experienced March Madness by reaching the NCAA Division I Tournament for the first time in school history. The Colonels went into the tournament as the No. 13 seed and was matched up with No. 4 seed and ACC champion Virginia.

Broussard said seeing Nicholls' name pop up on the screen during CBS' NCAA Tournament selection show is a moment he will never forget.

"It happens so fast. We were watching the telecast at Bubba's Restaurant and the place was packed, and then all of a sudden our name pops up on the screen that we were playing Virginia," he said. "Everyone was saying that it was a great draw, but I knew it would be tough because Virginia won a share of the ACC championship."

Nicholls played Virginia tough early on, jumping out to a 16-10 lead and trailed 31-27 at halftime. But in the second half, Virginia's perimeter game proved to be the difference as the Colonels fell 96-72.

Quinn Strander, an assistant under Broussard from 1994-2001, said despite the loss, Nicholls' basketball team generated excitement throughout the community.

"The biggest thing about that game was that it was played during the day, and everybody stopped what they were doing to watch the game," Strander said. "Schools in Lafourche, Terrebonne, Assumption and St. Mary (parishes) stopped to watch the game because it was one of the biggest events in our area at the time."

With one NCAA Tournament appearance under their belts, Broussard said he didn't want it to be Nicholls' only trip. But it would take more recruiting, as Nicholls had to replace seven seniors – including Jackson, King and Ray Washington.

After missing the SLC Tournament in back-to-back seasons, the Colonels stormed back to the top during the 1997-98 season. Nicholls won the Southland Conference regular season title with a 15-1 record and punched its second ticket to the Big Dance by winning the SLC Tournament.

Once again, the odds were stacked against the Colonels in the NCAA Tournament, as they were a No. 16 seed and paired up against top-seeded and defending national champion Arizona. Nicholls lost 99-60 to end its season with a 19-10 overall record.

"I feel sometime that second team that went to the tournament does not get the recognition as the first team," Broussard said. "It was just so gratifying for our team and loyal fans, and it kind of validated us as a program on the rise. It also proved that getting there the first time was not a fluke."

Broussard remained at Nicholls for four more seasons, leading the team to three more trips to the Southland Conference Tournament. Each time, however, the Colonels lost their first tournament game.

Despite a disappointing 2001-02 season where the Colonels finished last in the Southland, Broussard remained committed to Nicholls and was confident the team could turn things around soon.

But things changed soon after the conclusion of the season, when Broussard received a call from then LSU coach John Brady to join his staff as an assistant coach. Broussard stayed on Brady's LSU staff from 2002-05.

Broussard said he decided to leave Nicholls because it could help open the door to a head coaching job at a bigger university down the road.

"It was a difficult decision to leave Nicholls, but at the time, I felt it was the right decision for my family and for my career," he said. "If I had to make that decision again, I wouldn't leave. But because of budgetary concerns at that time, I felt that it was the right decision. I would be lying to myself and anyone that asked to say that I didn't regret leaving Nicholls because I did."

Broussard left Nicholls as the school's second winningest coach behind Landry. He coached one Southland Conference Player of the Year (Jackson in 1995), two SLC Freshmen of the Year (Jackson in 1992 and Earl Flowers in 1996) and three SLC Newcomers of the Year (Russell McCutcheon in 1998, Arthur Haralson in 2000 and Chris Bacon in 2001).

Four years after taking the LSU job, Broussard decided that it was time for a career change, so he hung up his coaching whistle and decided to take on a new career as a recruiter with State Farm Insurance.

Broussard said he used the same approach in coaching to succeed in his new profession.

"When I left coaching, I started a new career with State Farm which was totally different," he said. "I did not watch games on TV and I didn't go to games. I dedicated myself in learning a new trade, and I think that helped me when I came back to basketball I was more of a fan."

Although he left Nicholls in 2002, Broussard actually never left Thibodaux, as he and his wife, Paula, still call Thibodaux home.

"Paula and I knew that Thibodaux was the place we wanted to be as a couple and as a family," he said. "When we had the opportunity, we moved back to Thibodaux because this place is home."

Now, Broussard can also call the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame home, as he will become the seventh member from Nicholls, joining Landry, Jackson, King, Larry Wilson, Cleveland Hill and Shelby Hypolite.

Former high school coach and state legislator Billy Montgomery, Broussard's longtime mentor and friend, said it is an honor that is well- deserved.

"He is one of the bright spots of basketball in Louisiana because of the kind of person he was and his ability," Montgomery said. "It doesn't matter what level you are coaching because when you are good you are good, and Rickey was that type of coach."

In addition to the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame induction, the April 30 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 LSU radio announcer Jim Hawthorne.

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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