

P.J. BROWN

*Note: This is the **third** in a series of three articles on this year's inductees into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame. The 2001 inductees are Bobby Phills, John Arthurs and P.J. Brown.*

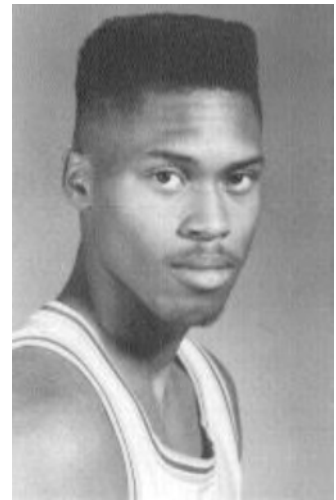
FORMER LOUISIANA TECH STAR P.J. BROWN TO BE INDUCTED INTO LOUISIANA BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME

By: O.K. "Buddy" Davis
Executive Sports Editor
Ruston *Daily Leader*
Written for the LABC

RUSTON, LA --- P.J. Brown admits that, by nature, he's sometimes a very pessimistic person.

So imagine his reaction when he was informed about being one of the 2001 inductees into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame.

"I had a message left on my answering machine by Dr. Gary Stokley (Louisiana Tech University faculty member), a good friend of the family, and it said 'Congratulations, P.J., you've been named to the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame,'" recalled the eight-year veteran forward in the NBA. "I mean, this came totally out of left field. It was one of those left hooks that hit you when you're not expecting it."



Then he added:

"But it was a left hook you don't mind getting. To be recognized with such a great honor, it's very humbling and satisfying and I appreciate the people who thought I was worthy of this award."

The Winnfield native and former Louisiana Tech University star is, indeed, worthy of the honor that will be bestowed upon him during ceremonies scheduled in Baton Rouge on July 19, along with former Louisiana college greats, Bobby Phills of Southern and John Arthurs of Tulane.

Once just happy to be a part of a college program, Brown has developed into one of the NBA's top rebounders and defenders.

This past season, his first as a member of the Charlotte Hornets, he ranked in the top 15 of four different rebounding categories. He averaged 9.3 rebounds per game, plus rejected shots at a 1.15 clip each contest.

“I was very pleased with the year I had,” said Brown. “It was my best season ever for rebounding. My main goal every year in the league has been to try and improve in all areas and do whatever is necessary to help the team. I think the Hornets are definitely a team to be reckoned with. We’ve got a great mix of young and veteran players and I think the future is very bright there.”

Early in his college career, a future in the pro ranks certainly didn’t appear to be a part of Brown’s resume.

“My first couple of years at Tech, I was just happy to be playing and getting an education,” he said. “I was playing basketball strictly for the fun of it and because I loved the game. At that time, I wasn’t even thinking about playing in the NBA.”

An encouraging talk from Tommy Joe Eagles, the late head coach of the Bulldogs, and a 1990 summer camp in Michigan completely changed his perspective.

“Coach Eagles started telling me that I had the potential to go places in the pros, that I had the skills to do it if I wanted it bad enough and if I worked hard enough,” remembered Brown. “He told me he had seen other players at Tech who had gone on to the NBA, like Karl Malone and Randy White, and that I could also do it.”

Brown entered a summer camp in 1990 along with such well-known collegiate players as Juwan Howard, Derrick Coleman and Steve Smith.

“It was called the St. Cecilia Summer Camp and it had a lot of the really good college players from all across the country,” he said. “But I got up there and started playing pretty well and left thinking, ‘You know, I can hold my own against these guys, too’. I don’t mean that as bragging or anything, but I felt very confident I could hold my own against anybody.”

From then on, P.J. Brown focused on going to the next level. In 1991, he received second team All-American South Conference and All-Louisiana recognition after averaging 14.4 points, 9.7 rebounds and 2.48 blocked shots per game.

A year later, Brown made the first unit of the All-Sun Belt Conference squad with averages of 12.7 points, 9.9 rebounds and 2.42 rejections per game, plus was a third team All-Louisiana selection.

For four straight years, he was the Bulldogs' leader in blocked shots and finished No. 2 on the club's all-time list with a 1.99 average. He also ended as the No. 5 ranked career rebounding leader with an 8.4 average.

It was on defense where Brown made a lasting impression on Tech fans and certainly the opposition. He remains as the school record-holder for most blocks in a single game with 10.

And on the boards, he was the Bulldogs' top performer in three of his four seasons.

After completing his Tech career with averages of 10.1 for scoring and 8.4 for rebounding, he was chosen in the second round of the 1992 NBA Draft by the New Jersey Nets.

He opted for a one-year (1992-93) stay in Greece before joining the Nets the following season and remaining with that franchise for three years before being traded to the Miami Heat in 1996.

Brown closed out his career with the Nets by averaging 11.3 points and 6.9 rebounds during the 1995-96 campaign, then became a major defensive and rebounding force for a four-year stay in Miami. While with the Heat, he averaged at least 9.5 points and seven boards per game.

"I'm still young in my NBA career," said Brown, who will be 32 in October. "I still have a lot of good years left. To think I've already been in the league eight seasons is hard to believe, but I've always had fun playing. That's what it is all about, just going out, having fun and helping your teammates."

"It's nice when fans come up to me and say, 'P.J., we like watching you play because you seem to enjoy it so much out there.' And I do."

He is a huge success off of the court, too. Among the league's most civic-minded players, Brown was the Hornets' 2000-2001 spokesperson for the Stay-in-School program, one that reaches out to an estimated 60,000 students. He has also started a summer basketball youth camp in his hometown of Winnfield. He is a past recipient of the NBA's prestigious Walter Kennedy Award given for charity work and interacting with youth groups.

"He's as nice a person as he is a very fine basketball player," said Scotty Robertson, former head coach at Tech and an ex-NBA head coach, assistant and scout. "P.J. is just a good person. When I was on the Heat's staff, I can remember him always coming to practice early and always working hard. He was a pleasure to coach."

Brown calls his upcoming hall induction as "just another chapter in a storybook life."

“It’s been an unbelievable journey and it’s all been possible because of God and the gift that He has given me to play this great game. I hope I can stand as an example to young players that anything is possible when you believe in God and yourself.”

His induction into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame is certainly proof enough.

The Hall of Fame, which is located in LSU's Pete Maravich Assembly Center, is sponsored by the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches. The Hall of Fame was created in 1975 to honor former great basketball players and coaches from Louisiana colleges. The Hall of Fame induction ceremonies will be held in conjunction with the LABC's 27th Annual Hall of Fame Awards Luncheon. The awards luncheon, sponsored by SportsCare, will be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge at noon on July 19.

In addition to the induction of the new Hall of Fame members, the luncheon will include recognition of Louisiana’s college, junior college and high school players and coaches of the year, the top pro player from the state and the announcement of the recipient of the prestigious Mr. Louisiana Basketball award.

Tickets for the luncheon are \$15 and can be obtained by contacting the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge. The Embassy Suites Hotel is located at 4914 Constitution Avenue in Baton Rouge (exit 158 off Interstate 10).