

TIM FLOYD

*Note: This is the **second** in a series of three feature stories on this year's inductees into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame and this year's recipient of the LABC's Mr. Louisiana Basketball award. The 2014 inductees will be former University of Louisiana at Lafayette player Roy Ebron (1970-73) and former University of New Orleans coach Tim Floyd. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2014 is long-time Baton Rouge area high school coach Kenny Almond.*

FOR SIX SEASONS, FLOYD KEPT UNO'S PRIVATEERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

By: Ed Cassiere
Written for the LABC

NEW ORLEANS, LA – Think about this: In 20 seasons as a college basketball head coach, Tim Floyd won his only regular-season conference championships -- four of them -- while at the University of New Orleans.

And this: Of Floyd's 12 college teams that won 20 games, his winningest was at UNO, when the Privateers were 26-4 in 1992-93 (ranking 17th in the nation in the final regular season AP poll).

And then this: Of the five college programs and two NBA teams that Floyd has led, his longest stint so far -- six seasons (1988-94) -- has been at UNO.

Or this: Since Floyd left UNO for Iowa State 20 years ago, the Privateers have hired seven head coaches. None lasted as long as Floyd.

But those are just numbers. Here's Tim Floyd, a 2014 Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame inductee, speaking from the heart: "I can honestly say that I never had more fun coaching than I did at UNO. I was never happier than I was at UNO."

No offense to Idaho, Iowa State, Southern California, UTEP or the NBA. UNO struck gold when it hired Floyd at age 34, and for the majority of his tenure with the Privateers, he had the Midas touch. The timing was perfect -- up-and-coming program paired with up-and-coming coach -- and Floyd rarely missed a beat.

Floyd had four 20-win seasons and led two teams to the NCAA Tournament. Three teams received bids to the NIT, including Floyd's first, a major rebuild thanks to no returning starters from the previous year.



If you could guard or rebound relentlessly or get to the free-throw line frequently, you had a chance to play for Tim Floyd. And it was even better if you could do any of these things on the road, where Floyd's Privateers won nearly two-thirds of their conference matchups.

But . . . why UNO? And why at UNO?

"It was an urban job in city that was loaded with basketball talent," Floyd said, "with a relatively new building (Lakefront Arena) in a city that I loved. I didn't have the pulls from the outside that I would experience at other places."

Floyd gives an assist to city rival Tulane, whose return to basketball after a self-imposed 4-year shutdown coincided with Floyd's second season at UNO.



"Tulane coming back forced us to work really hard," Floyd said. "It was like a new Burger King opening across the street from McDonald's. The service gets better, the pricing gets better, the bathrooms get cleaner."

"Fortunately, there were a lot of players in the area available, and we had assistant coaches who could go outside the area and find good players when necessary. This was a time when the state was really strong in college basketball. There were enough good players around to service many good teams in the state."

And, on occasion, there was some lagniappe.

"We were very, very fortunate at UNO," Floyd said, "to have three big guys in Ervin Johnson, Sydney Rice and Michael McDonald who never played in high school but wanted to become something better and were willing to work for it."

Johnson was the most famous of those three, parlaying a longshot tryout into a record-setting UNO career, then 13 seasons in the NBA.

"Meeting Tim Floyd was everything to my life and my personal success," said Johnson, a 1999 Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame inductee.

During his six seasons at UNO, Floyd won 126 games and lost only 59, for a 68.1% career winning percentage. He was a two-time conference Coach of the Year, Louisiana Coach of the Year and NABC District Coach of the Year. His 1990 team reached the NIT quarterfinals, while his 1994 squad advanced to the second round of the NIT.

This will be Floyd's third hall-of-fame induction. The El Paso Athletic Hall of Fame chose him in 1999, based primarily on eight seasons (1978-86) as a UTEP assistant to legendary coach Don Haskins. Iowa State inducted Floyd into its hall of fame in 2011 despite just four seasons (1994-98) as coach of the Cyclones.



"There are a lot of great coaches and players in the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame," Floyd said. "I am truly humbled and honored to become part of it." He will be inducted during the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches' 40th Annual Awards Banquet on Saturday, May 3, at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge. The banquet is sponsored by SportsCare, the Baton Rouge Orthopaedic Clinic, and Universal Coin & Bullion, Ltd.

Floyd asked his athletics director at UNO, Ron Maestri, to introduce him at the Hall of Fame induction. But a baseball commitment -- Maestri is in his first season of a second stint as the Privateers' coach -- prevented that. Instead, UTEP Athletic Director Bob Stull will introduce Floyd.

However, no story of Floyd's success at UNO is complete without proper credit for Maestri.

"Ron Maestri relieved a lot of my paranoia as a young head coach," Floyd said. "Once a week he would walk into my office and say, 'what can I do to help?' Occasionally he had tell me no. But I always knew he was trying to help."

After Floyd left UNO, Maestri joined Haskins as another former influential colleague "whose advice provided the logic and the balance for me. When coach Haskins died, the sole voice became Mase."

That talented young UNO coach of the '80s turned 60 in February. Floyd is grandfather to two toddler girls. He once expressed public concern that family medical history would not allow him to reach such milestones. His father, former Southern Miss coach Lee Floyd, died at age 52 in 1974. A specialist in preventative heart care in Chicago, where Floyd coached four seasons with the NBA's Bulls, read about Floyd's fears and sought him out for treatment. Since then it's been a continuing regimen of exercise and medication, with ebbs and flows of his workouts dictated by the demands of coaching, but Floyd calls it a success.

In addition to the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame induction, the May 3 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 long-time Baton Rouge area high school coach Kenny Almond.



A very limited number of tickets for the banquet are available for \$25 and can only be reserved by contacting the LABC in advance at labball@gmail.com.

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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