

JERALD HONEYCUTT

*Note: This is the **third** in a series of four articles on this year's inductees into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame and the LABC's Mr. Louisiana Basketball award recipient. The 2006 inductees will be former star players Larry Wright of Grambling St., Gerard King of Nicholls St. and Jerald Honeycutt of Tulane. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2006 is former UL-Monroe coach Mike Vining.*

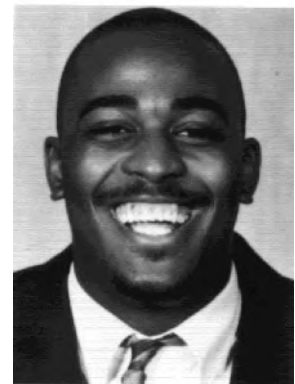
AN 18-YEAR OLD BOY USED BASKETBALL AT TULANE TO BECOME A MAN

Jerald Honeycutt Rewrote the Tulane Record Books While Growing Up On and Off the Court

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Written for the LABC

NEW ORLEANS -- At 6-8, 265 pounds, Jerald Honeycutt punished opponents in the post during his Grambling High School days. His relentless inside attack resulted in a pair of trips to the state semifinals, a trip to the U.S. Olympic Festival, and Parade and McDonald's All-American selections as he became the top recruit in Tulane basketball history in 1993. Then the big man took his game to another level.

At the college level, Honeycutt expanded his range, improved his ball-handling and began to take charge on the court, re-writing the Green Wave record books during his four-year career.



"Jerald Honeycutt was probably the most versatile player that I ever coached and probably was the most versatile player ever at Tulane – maybe in the entire state of Louisiana," said Perry Clark, Tulane's coach at the time. "He had a point guard's mentality and passing ability; he had the body of a post man and the shooting touch of a wing player."

"At 6-8, there were things he could do that were shocking," said Julius Smith, the Tulane assistant who spearheaded the recruiting effort to land Honeycutt. "He could play anywhere on the court for us. He could dribble like a guard, pass like a point guard, shoot jumpers. If you put a small forward on him, he would overpower you, if you tried to guard him with a bigger guy, he was quick enough to blow by him."

Honeycutt's career statistics show his amazing versatility, as well as his success – from 1993-97, he scored 2,209 points (first all-time at Tulane) and tallied 193 three-pointers (first), 434 free throws (first), 419 assists (first), 235 steals (second), 163 blocked shots (third) and 870 rebounds (fifth).

During those years, the Green Wave posted an 83-42 mark (66.4%), with Honeycutt never missing a game. The 83 victories in a four-year span were surpassed just twice (during the legendary Clifford Wells era in the late 1940s) in the 95-year history of Tulane basketball. The Wave also advanced to postseason play four times, reaching the second round of the NCAA Tournament in 1995 and capturing third place in the NIT in 1996, while winning a pair of Conference USA division titles and finishing second in the Metro Conference the other two years.

Along the way, Honeycutt averaged 15.3 points and 6.7 rebounds as a freshman, 17.3 points and 7.5 rebounds as a sophomore, 18.0 points and 7.2 rebounds as a junior, and then 19.9 points and 6.5 rebounds as a senior.

Despite the individual and team success that he and Tulane reached, Honeycutt's competitive edge still makes him wish his teams had achieved more.

"I would have loved to get to the tournament more, we had injuries and other problems and it was disappointing to us," Honeycutt said. "But when I look back, there are not many guys in college who have three consecutive 20-plus win seasons, so I guess we did okay. I just would have loved to get to the tournament more and also done better in the conference tournaments."

A competitive flair is the driving force behind Honeycutt on the basketball court to this day, as he was named to the "Super Five" as one of the top five players in the Japan Professional League this winter.

"He was a really fierce competitor and he had that spirit of always wanting to win," Clark said. "I think people misunderstood that. He liked challenges and he was always trying to expand his game. Jerald would get upset on the court, people would think he was upset with coaches or teammates, but he was upset with himself, because he thought he could have given more or done more. He always pushed himself to reach a higher level."

After his standout career with the Green Wave, which included two Louisiana Player of the Year awards, four all-conference and NABC All-District selections and being tabbed to the NABC All-American third team in 1997, Honeycutt was selected in the second round of the 1997 NBA Draft by the Milwaukee Bucks. The jump to the highest level of basketball in the world brought about more changes in his game.

"In high school, I only played the five position," Honeycutt said. "At Tulane, I worked on being a small forward and power forward, worked on ball-handling and my outside shooting. But I never learned to play perimeter defense until the NBA. I did a lot with my athleticism and I was blessed with talent, but once I got to guys with my same talent level, the work came into play."

In addition to playing in the NBA with the Bucks and the Philadelphia 76ers, Honeycutt has seen action around the world on the hardwood. He has played the game in Japan, the Philippines, Russia, Puerto Rico, Greece, Italy, Spain and Korea.

“I have grown up a lot [since my Tulane days]; I am married with kids,” he said. “My biggest thing at Tulane was accepting responsibility for the team. During my sophomore year, I thought that getting respect for myself was going to help the team, instead of taking my blessings and elevating the team that way. Sometimes I look back at some of my decisions; I could have done a lot more. Instead of carrying the team, sometimes I wanted to prove myself. It comes with experience. I have learned a lot from the opportunities which basketball has given me.”

Despite his many travels and a myriad of honors won around the world in his professional career, being selected for the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame is an honor which Honeycutt will cherish.

“It was unbelievable when they told me,” he said. “It took three people telling me before I really believed it. There is some pretty good company. Willis Reed, P.J. Brown, Karl Malone, Pete Maravich, so many great players. It is just a great honor to be considered in a class with those guys.”

Some of his performances during his playing days with the Green Wave clearly warrant his being included with the greats in Louisiana basketball history.

“His first half as a freshman against VCU was one of the best first halves I have ever seen played,” Clark said. “He had 20 at the half and was flawless.”

In that game, a 78-64 Green Wave victory at Fogelman Arena, Honeycutt poured in 20 points in the first 7:17 of the contest. He finished with a then career-high 28 points.

“He was courageous,” Clark said. “The performance that he put on against Louisville in his final home game...we wound up beating them at our place, they were nationally-ranked. He passed, rebounded, everything. Their announcer said that Jerald toyed with the Cardinals.”

In that game, Honeycutt finished with 23 points and nine rebounds before a sold-out Fogelman Arena as the Wave topped the 20th-ranked Cardinals, 83-71, to clinch first place in the Conference USA Red Division.

“I will never forget that game against Louisville,” Smith said. “It was a game we had to have and he just took the game over. It got to a point where the coaches weren’t coaching, he was just playing. He had the ability to make people around him better. He truly had that ability. He just said ‘I am getting it done.’”

Other Honeycutt performances jump from the stat pages – a 20-point second half against UAB, 32 points and 16 boards against Nicholls State, 24 and 13 in a win over Virginia Tech, 19 and 10 as a freshman in the Metro Conference tourney against Southern Miss – but the single-most talked about play in his great career happened on December 5, 1995.

Trailing 77-75 in the final seconds against Florida State in a game at the Louisiana Superdome, Honeycutt retrieved a loose ball in the corner and as he was falling out of bounds, he lifted off, turned and released the shot just before crashing into the courtside seats. While it looked like he had just turned and heaved a prayer, slow-motion replays show Honeycutt square up as he is falling and release the perfect shot to lift the Green Wave to victory.

“It happened so fast, it is one of those things where you are caught up in the game,” Honeycutt remembered. “I didn’t think. My teammate was feeding me in the post, it got deflected, all I was thinking was ‘time is running out, get it to the rim.’ When I spun and heaved it, I thought, ‘we lost the game.’ A lot of times the moment takes over.”

In addition to being replayed endlessly on ESPN, that game-winner earned an ESPY following the season.

“That was one of the greatest shots I have ever seen, but that was luck!” Smith laughed. “I took him back to the gym and he couldn’t make it again. He had so many other plays where it was all his ability that made it happen. He was a special player.”

Despite the success on the court, Honeycutt never fully embraced his role as the star of the team off the court.

“He just loved to play the game of basketball,” Smith said. “I don’t think he ever missed a practice, he came to work day-in, day-out. I don’t think he ever embraced the attitude that he was ‘the man’ off the court. He just wanted to be one of the guys and left alone.”

“Jerald was fun,” Clark said. “He is very intelligent, very perceptive. He was easy-going, a great human being; never got in any trouble off the court. Came from humble background, was always very humble, kind of shy in a lot of ways.”

After his years of success in basketball, Honeycutt now looks back at one piece of unfinished business at Tulane.

“My main thing is to get back to school,” he said. “I want to get back to school and get my degree. Basketball is lovely, but you need to have that degree. Basketball has been so good to me; I want to be around it, so I hope to get into coaching when I am done playing.”

It would be fitting for Honeycutt to come full circle back to Louisiana. After using his days at Tulane to launch a career playing basketball throughout the world, the veteran athlete is looking at his future in the game – planning to finish his education and go into coaching. No longer is he the shy college student looking for respect. Now he is looking to give back to the game which has shepherded him into adulthood.

“The most impressive thing about Jerald, in my mind, is to see a kid come out of Grambling, La., and grow into the young man that he has grown into,” Smith said. “That is more impressive to me than anything else. It is unbelievable to see the growth in this guy. He has a

beautiful wife and a beautiful family. To see how far he has come, how mature he is now, I saw an 18-year old turn into a man. He came from Grambling, La., and traveled the world.”

Honeycutt will be inducted into the Hall of Fame on May 6, along with former stars Gerard King of Nicholls State and Larry Wright of Grambling State.

The Hall of Fame induction ceremonies will be held in conjunction with the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches’ 32nd Annual Awards Banquet at the Holiday Inn Select in Baton Rouge. The banquet is sponsored by SportsCare.

In addition to the induction of the new Hall of Fame members, the 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 prestigious Mr. Louisiana Basketball award to former UL-Monroe coach Mike Vining.

A limited number of tickets for the banquet are available for \$20 and can be reserved by contacting the LABC at labball@gmail.com. The Holiday Inn Select is located at 4728 Constitution Avenue in Baton Rouge (College Drive exit off of Interstate 10).

The Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame, which is located in LSU's Pete Maravich Assembly Center, is sponsored by the LABC. The Hall of Fame was created in 1975 to honor former great basketball players and coaches from Louisiana colleges. You can learn more about the LABC and the Hall of Fame by visiting their website at www.labball.com.

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