

## **BILLY MONTGOMERY**

*Note: This is the **third** in a series of three articles on this year's inductees into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame and the LABC's Mr. Louisiana Basketball award recipient. The 2009 inductees will be former Tulane University star players Phil Hicks and John "Hot Rod" Williams. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2009 is former Haughton High School coach and Louisiana legislator, Billy Montgomery.*

### **BASKETBALL'S ALLURE DEFINED REMARKABLE CAREER FOR BILLY MONTGOMERY**

By: Doug Ireland  
Northwestern State University  
Written for the LABC

NATCHITOCHES, LA -- Even though his 10-year high school basketball coaching career ended in 1970, Billy Montgomery never left the game of basketball.

Since his days growing up in rural Natchitoches Parish and playing at now-defunct Provencal High School, and then playing freshman basketball at nearby Northwestern State, Montgomery has enjoyed a magnetic attraction to the game.

"I never have gotten away from basketball," he proudly says. "It's my hobby, my pastime, and for 10 special years, it was my job to coach high school basketball. It has shaped who I am and what I've been able to accomplish and I'm better for it."



The game of basketball in Louisiana is stronger because of Montgomery's influence. Regarded as an exceptional tactician and teacher in his coaching days, and a mentor to many coaches and educators since then, he is best known statewide for serving 20 years in the Louisiana House of Representatives from 1988-2008.

While representing Bossier Parish from his adopted hometown of Haughton, Montgomery was the leading legislative advocate for the Louisiana High School Athletic Association and was a pivotal figure in obtaining funding for the under-construction Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame museum in Natchitoches. He remains in public service working for the Bossier Parish Police Jury.

As basketball coach at Haughton High School from 1960-69 and Lafayette High School in 1969-70, Montgomery posted a 305-68 (81.8%) record, reaching the state playoffs all 10 seasons, winning two state titles, finishing second another time, reaching the "Top 20" state tournament in five seasons and compiling a 102-9 mark in district competition.

Montgomery has now been chosen as “Mr. Louisiana Basketball” for 2009 by the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches. He will receive that award during the group’s 35<sup>th</sup> annual awards banquet on May 2 at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge. The banquet is sponsored by SportsCare and the Baton Rouge Orthopaedic Clinic.

He already has been enshrined in the Louisiana High School Sports Hall of Fame in 1991 and has been honored by the Louisiana Sports Writers Association both as state basketball coach of the year twice (1967 and 1968) and for his pivotal role in advancing the Hall of Fame construction project. Last month, Haughton High named its basketball court in his honor.

Montgomery spent 18 years after coaching as a school administrator (assistant principal and then principal) at Haughton before running for public office. He based his political campaigns on his coaching identity and is humbled that friends and colleagues from all walks of life still refer to him as “Coach Montgomery.”

It’s appropriate since he continues to work and speak at basketball clinics around the state. Within the last month, he spent time talking defense with a college coach.

“Coaching basketball has been the big deal in my life,” said Montgomery.

“Growing up where I did, in a smaller community, the most professional people you encountered were the teachers at the school. Coaches were the most elite of that group, in my eyes, and I still believe that. Coaches have the opportunity to impact so many lives, not only their players but layers of people around them,” he said.

“So to be voted this award, by the elite coaches in our state, the college coaches, is very, very special. I’m not saying I belong on that list, but they chose me and I accept it with great appreciation for those who have helped me along the way,” said Montgomery.

One of the elite coaches in the game’s history has the highest regard for Montgomery’s coaching abilities. Leon Barmore, enshrined in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame for his incredible career as the mastermind of the Louisiana Tech women’s program, was previously a highly successful boys coach at his alma mater, Ruston High School, a north Louisiana rival of Haughton’s.

“In 35 years of coaching basketball, the two coaches I faced who had their teams prepared the best were (Tennessee Lady Volunteers coach) Pat Head Summitt, and Billy Montgomery,” said Barmore.

“One of the most valuable lessons that I ever learned was watching his practice and seeing the importance that he placed on valuing every possession. Taking care of the basketball was of the utmost importance. He was one of the best, bar none, at coaching the game,” said Barmore, “and it helped me tremendously to see how he imparted that knowledge to his players.”

At Haughton, Montgomery began coaching at the Class B level, but as the school grew, it developed into what is today classified as Class AA. When he was at Lafayette High, that school was one of the five largest in the state. Winning the storied Bossier High Tournament early in his tenure at Haughton ranks among his greatest thrills in coaching, because it came against a field of quality teams from much larger schools.

“Coaching at the various levels of high school basketball was a great learning experience,” he said. “I wanted to try college coaching and never did, and that’s a regret. When I looked down the sideline at the other coach, my goal was to have outworked him in our preparation. That’s the cornerstone for success, I believe.”

That approach carved a niche in state prep hoops history for Haughton and its coach.

“We were getting ready for the playoffs one year, and a reporter asked a coach in our bracket if it mattered who his team played going forward,” said Montgomery. “He said he didn’t know anything about the Haughton team, but he didn’t want to play that program. That was one of the finest compliments I ever received, because it meant other coaches respected what we were doing year after year. You want to create that culture in your kids, for your school, and I think we did that.”

His upcoming honor, courtesy of the LABC, confirms it.

In addition to the honoring of Montgomery, the banquet will include the induction of two new members into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame. There will also be recognition of Louisiana’s major college, small college, junior college and high school players and coaches of the year, along with the top pro player from the state.

A limited number of tickets for the banquet are available for \$25 and can be reserved by contacting the LABC at [labbal@gmail.com](mailto:labbal@gmail.com). The Embassy Suites Hotel is located at 4914 Constitution Avenue in Baton Rouge (College Drive exit off of Interstate 10). You can learn more about the LABC by visiting their website at [www.labbal.com](http://www.labbal.com).

*April 27, 2009*