

BOBBY PHILLS

*Note: This is the **first** 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 SOUTHERN STAR BOBBY PHILLS TO BE INDUCTED INTO LOUISIANA BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME

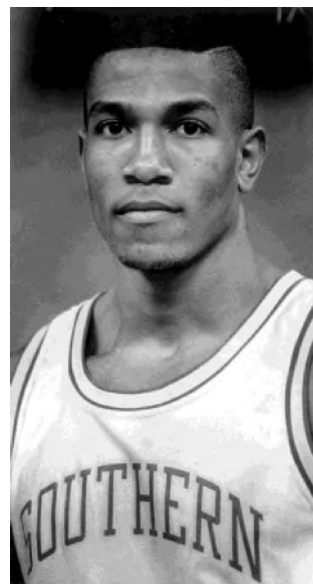
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Written for the LABC

BATON ROUGE --- They call it Scott's Bluff, the picturesque point on the Mississippi River that is home to the Southern University campus.

When Bobby Phills played basketball the name of the place didn't change. But his arching jump shots and rim rattling dunks challenged the sweeping view of the river for the most striking feature of the area.

It was impossible not to be mesmerized by Bobby Ray Phills when he took the court at Southern - in life and in death.

Phills met an untimely end at the all too young age of 30 when he died in a car crash in Charlotte, NC. At the time he was playing for the NBA's Charlotte Hornets, a solid and respected role player.



But it was at Southern where Phills polished his star power to a fine brilliance. Perhaps like no other basketball player ever he dominated the court first in high school, then in college.

Phills played his entire pre-NBA career on the Southern campus. But he did not just play when he took the basketball court, he led. With his actions and with his play.

Phills averaged 26 points and 13 rebounds per game in 1987 as he led the Southern Lab Kittens to the Louisiana Class 1A state high school championship. Later that year, he took his game across the street to the F.G. Clark Activity Center at Southern University, where he became one of the most prolific scorers in Jaguars history.

The 3-point shot was just then becoming an established part of the college game, and Phills made it his specialty. Gifted with a sturdy 6-foot-5 frame that allowed him to battle inside for rebounds and drift outside for jumpers, Phills' became the Jaguars' marksman.

He was Southern's best 3-point shooter ever. As a sophomore in 1988-89, he averaged 13.5 points per game. He increased his scoring average to 20.1 points as a junior in 1989-90, and also averaged 3.61 three pointers per game, which ranked eighth in nation.

As a senior in 1990-91, he led the nation with an average of 4.39 three pointers per game, 123 in all, still a single-season school record. Phills averaged 28.4 points per game (which ranked sixth in the nation), as Southern led the nation in scoring with 104.4 points per game.

During that season Phills also averaged 3.21 steals per game, which ranked him ninth in nation in that category. He was named a first team All-Southwestern Athletic Conference selection, and was also a member of the second team All-Louisiana squad.

For his college career, Phills scored 1,922 points for a 17.0 average, and made 282 of 788 three pointers for an average of 2.50 per game. His single game scoring high was 52 points, and he made 11 three pointers in a game on two different occasions.

The Milwaukee Bucks made Phills the 45th overall pick of the 1991 NBA Draft, taking him in the second round. Phills played for the Cleveland Cavaliers for several years before moving to Charlotte. He averaged 11 points per game during his NBA career, but was better known for his defensive prowess - being named to the second team of the NBA's All-Defensive unit in 1996.

Phills never forgot his Baton Rouge roots. He created the Bobby Phills Foundation and Club 14 to help disadvantaged children. He also sponsored an annual charity golf tournament in his name, created in part to introduce inner-city kids to golf.

"He had that certain aura about him," said Ulysses Jones, an assistant coach at Southern Lab when Phills played there. "He never caused problems. He was hard-working and diligent about everything he did."

Phills made news several months before his death for helping rescue a Charlotte man in a fiery wreck that eerily foreshadowed the accident that would claim his life.

Phills stopped at an intersection after motorcyclist Robert McCollough collided with a truck. The motorcycle caught fire and McCollough was burned on over half his body, but Phills and Charlotte Panthers football player Frank Garcia (playing at a nearby golf course) came to his aid, pouring water on McCollough's burns until help arrived.

"All I could think about was trying to put him out," Phills said at the time. "I swear it felt like 30 minutes. I just kept doing it."

On Jan. 12, 2000, Phills practiced with his Charlotte Hornet teammates at the Charlotte Coliseum. Afterward, he and teammate David Wesley started racing each other down a road leading away from the arena. But Phills lost control of his car, striking a minivan taxi. No one else was killed, but Phills died at the scene.

After a memorial service in Charlotte, Phills came home to Baton Rouge once more. The Clark Center was converted into a funeral hall, bouquets of flowers and poster-sized photos of Phills surrounding his casket, a lonely basketball goal standing at one end of the court.

All of the current Charlotte Hornets were among the 2,000 or so mourners, along with the Milwaukee Bucks ex-Bucks great Bob Lanier and San Antonio Spurs guard Avery Johnson, a Southern teammate of Phills'.

"Be mindful that it's now how long you live but how well you live," state Sen. Cleo Fields said during the service. "Bobby lived well."

Lived well and played well, in a short time becoming an enduring measuring stick for all future Southern players.

On July 19 Phills will be inducted into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame during the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches' 27th Annual Hall of Fame Awards Luncheon. The other two Hall of Fame inductees are former Tulane star John Arthurs and ex-Louisiana Tech great P.J. Brown. The awards luncheon, which is sponsored by SportsCare, will be held at noon at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge.

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.

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).