

## CHARLES SMITH

*Note: This is the **fourth** in a series of four 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 2025 inductees will be former University of New Orleans stars Ledell Eackles and Bo McCalebb, along with former University of Louisiana at Lafayette star Elfrid Payton. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2025 is long-time Peabody Magnet High School coach Charles Smith.*

### CHARLES SMITH, STATE'S WINNINGEST PREP BASKETBALL COACH, NOW LABC'S "MR. LOUISIANA BASKETBALL"

By: Bob Tompkins  
Written for LABC

ALEXANDRIA, LA -- It seems only fitting that longtime Peabody boys' basketball coach Charles Smith is going to be this year's recipient of the "Mr. Louisiana Basketball" award.

This award is the most prestigious annual award given by the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches (LABC). It is presented annually to someone who has made a significant, long-term contribution to the game of basketball at any level in the state of Louisiana. Coach Smith will receive the award during the LABC's 51st Annual Awards Banquet on May 3 in Baton Rouge.

This honor is just the latest in a string of honors Smith has received in a legendary coaching career at Peabody that started 50 years ago. In 1975, he accepted Ernest Bowman's invitation to be his assistant basketball coach at Peabody.

Smith had been a math teacher for four years at two different schools when he took the job at Peabody.

"Coach Bowman showed me the ins and outs (of coaching basketball)," said Smith, "and after he retired in 1985, I took over, and the rest, as they say, is history."



As Bowman's assistant, Smith helped guide the Warhorses in the 1975-76 season to a 32-0 record before suffering their only loss of the season to Plaquemine in the Class 3A state championship game. Peabody won the school's first state championship in 1979, beating Redemptorist-Baton Rouge in the Class 3A finals.



As Peabody's head coach for 40 years, Smith has more than 1,200 career wins and his teams have won nine state championships. He is Louisiana's all-time winningest high school head coach and ranks fourth nationally. His 1,236-219 career record (84.9% winning percentage) includes two perfect seasons, going 41-0 in 2004, when the Warhorses earned a national top five ranking, and 2010.

Smith coached Peabody teams to state championships in 1991, 2000, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2017, 2020 and 2024.

The nation's all-time winningest prep basketball coach is Robert Hughes of Dunbar & I.M. Terrell (in Fort Worth, Texas), who logged 1,333 victories from 1959-2005.

Within reach of becoming the nation's all-time winningest prep basketball coach, will Smith, at age 75, coach long enough to achieve that landmark?

"I still enjoy it," Smith said after completing his 39<sup>th</sup> season. "The main thing that keeps me going is I am making a difference in kids' lives. The main things I wanted when I started coaching was to improve the academic level of the kids and to produce kids who could play at the next level."

Smith continues to be a math teacher as he was at the start of his career as an educator, and as someone who received his master's degree in education at Northwestern State University, Smith received in January the university's prestigious Nth Degree. This award not only was given for his basketball success but for his educational impact on generations of students at Peabody and in Rapides Parish, not to mention for his strong community influence.

Many of his players are "at-risk" guys from "mostly low-income families," said Smith, whose former players include an executive vice president of a Fortune 500 company, doctors, lawyers, pilots, engineers, business owners, educators, coaches and two NBA players.

The two Peabody players who made it to the NBA were Paul Thompson and Markel Brown.

A 1979 graduate who played collegiately for Tulane, Thompson competed in the NBA for the Cleveland Cavaliers (1983-85), Milwaukee Bucks (1984-85) and Philadelphia 76ers (1985-86). Brown, a 2010 graduate who was voted Louisiana's "Mr. Basketball" by the Louisiana Sports Writers Association that year, competed collegiately at Oklahoma State and played in the NBA for the Brooklyn Nets (2014-16) and Houston Rockets (2017-18).

More than a dozen of his former players played collegiately, and one of them, Lance Brasher (UL-Monroe, 2005-08) regularly coaches against him as the head basketball coach at Alexandria Senior High.

"As someone who played for him, he's an icon and you never wanted to disappoint him or let him down, be it at practices or in games or wherever," Brasher said. "I don't know in my time as a player and coach anyone who is as competitive as he is in everything. He's even that way in the classroom. So that's what I try to emulate and have that same mindset: not that you're going to win every game, because you're not; but as long as you tried your best to win in everything, that's what matters."

Voted six times as the state's coach of the year, Smith was the ESPN National Coach of the Year in 2010. He was inducted into the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame in 2019, and he was selected to serve as a head coach at the 2020 McDonald's All-American game. In 2021 he was inducted into the National High School Athletic Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

Last October he was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts, becoming only the sixth high school coach to be so honored and the first one from Louisiana. This is the highest Hall of Fame that exists in the sport of basketball, with legendary honorees such as Michael Jordan, Shaquille O'Neal, Pete Maravich, Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, Kim Mulkey, Cheryl Miller, Karl Malone and Kobe Bryant.

"That's top of the mountain type stuff, right there," said Smith last fall when he learned he was a finalist for that honor. He was the only high school coach considered for the 2024 class.



Considering all he has experienced as a coach through five decades, Smith has adapted well to changing times and seasons and players.

“The way he gets his players to play hard, all game, every game, with this ‘entitled’ generation or ‘soft’ generation, as some call it, speaks volumes,” said Brasher.

Asked about the LABC’s “Mr. Louisiana Basketball” award coming his way, Smith said, “That’s a great honor. Anytime you’re being recognized by people from your home state, and from your peers in the profession, that means a lot.”

In addition to honoring Smith, the May 3 awards banquet will include the induction of former University of New Orleans stars Ledell Eackles and Bo McCalebb and former University of Louisiana at Lafayette star Elfrid Payton 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. More information about the LABC can be obtained by visiting their website at [www.labball.com](http://www.labball.com)

*April 10, 2025*