

COLLIS TEMPLE, JR.

*Note: This is the **second** in a series of two feature stories on this year's inductee into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame and this year's recipient of the LABC's Mr. Louisiana Basketball award. The 2015 inductee will be former Tulane University player Anthony Reed (1989-93). Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2015 is former LSU player Collis Temple, Jr.*

COLLIS TEMPLE, JR. BROKE BARRIERS FOR LSU

By: Jim Engster
Tiger Rag
Written for LABC

BATON ROUGE, LA – Collis Temple, Jr. was the first of 89 African-American players coached by Dale Brown in his 25 years at LSU. “He’s far greater than a pioneer,” Brown beams when asked about the most prominent member of his first team with Tigers. “What he had to go through with his teammates and on the road, the cold shoulder, nobody knows about that.”

Temple has been selected as Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2015 by the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches. He will receive the award during the LABC’s 41st Annual Awards Banquet on May 2 at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge. The banquet is sponsored by the Baton Rouge Orthopaedic Clinic, Universal Coin & Bullion, Ltd. and MidSouth Bank.

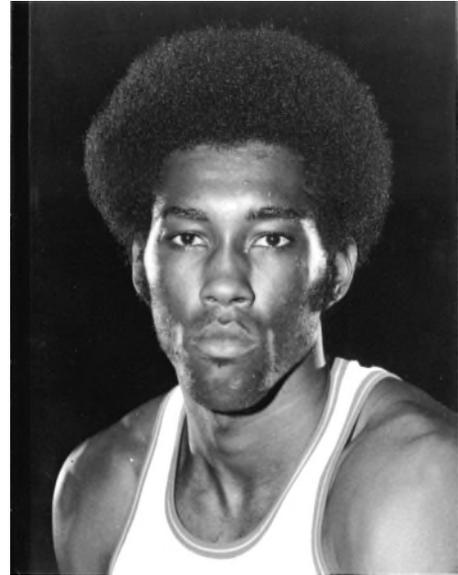


The award is presented annually to someone who has made a significant, long-term contribution to the game of basketball at any level in the State of Louisiana. Temple was previously inducted into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame in 1995.

LSU progressed to the 1981 NCAA Final Four with a starting lineup that featured five black starters a decade after Temple broke the color barrier in the program. Temple was a trailblazer for that SEC championship team, which featured Rudy Macklin, Howard Carter, Ethan Martin, Greg Cook and Leonard Mitchell.

When Temple enrolled, LSU was just four years removed from head basketball coach Frank Truitt resigning because he was prohibited from recruiting black athletes. The LSU basketball coach in the fall of 1970 was Press Maravich, whose son, Pete, had recently departed after establishing NCAA scoring records that still stand.

Two years later Collis got a new coach in Dale Brown, who winces in repeating an account of a teammate sliding a racially charged note under Temple's dormitory door. Temple answered his critics by averaging 15.0 points and 10.5 rebounds and earning All-Southeastern Conference honors in a strong senior season in 1973-74. He finished his career as the eighth leading rebounder in LSU history. The 6-8, 220-pounder was a draft choice in three professional leagues in 1974: the NBA (Phoenix), ABA (San Antonio) and NFL (Detroit).



Temple's college career is remembered for a fight in a game against unbeaten Vanderbilt. The Tigers prevailed 84-81 in a Jan. 12 battle in Baton Rouge that culminated with a fistic encounter between Temple and Commodores star Jan van Breda Kolff.

When LSU arrived in Nashville for its date with Vanderbilt at Memorial Gym the following month, a packed house of 15,581 was in a frenzy. Some Vandy fans wore t-shirts with obscenities directed at Temple printed on them. Brown was informed at halftime of a death threat.

Brown recalled police warning that "if Collis Temple comes out on the court for the second half, both of you will be shot." Brown and Temple disregarded the prospect of violence as LSU narrowly lost, 91-88.

Temple said he was interested in attending Kansas, Colorado or Houston before he enrolled at LSU as a heavily recruited standout from Kentwood. His father, Collis, Sr., was denied admission to LSU because of his race and served as principal at the local black school, O.W. Dillon. Collis, Jr.'s mother was an English teacher.

Louisiana Governor John McKeithen, a master of stump speaking, employed his considerable oratorical gifts to lure Collis, Jr. into becoming a Tiger. "I told his father that I would treat him like my own son," McKeithen said years later when he was serving as a member of the LSU Board of Supervisors.

Temple reared three sons, Collis III, Elliot and Garrett, who followed dad to the college court. Elliot played basketball at Louisiana-Lafayette, while Collis III and Garrett were standouts at LSU as were other players who tutored under Collis, Jr. with his AAU teams.

"The John Brady team that went to the Final Four in 2006. That was Collis Temple's team," Dale Brown said. "Those were players he coached in the AAU."

Temple opened the Baton Rouge Sports Academy where Garrett Temple and Tyrus Thomas were playing when they were three years old in 1989. Glen “Big Baby” Davis and Tasmin Mitchell began showing up when they were nine years old.

The Sports Academy remains a passion for its founder. “It is doing well,” says Temple. “We are uniting support to develop a new facility in the inner core of the city.” Temple boasts that LSU’s Jarell Martin is the latest player to pursue the NBA after playing AAU ball under his watch.

Temple has amassed a substantial legacy by tutoring and inspiring a legion of young men to pursue the game he treasures. He traces the hour that began his path to being named Mr. Louisiana Basketball to a day 45 years ago. “It was when John McKeithen called my mom and dad. That started it all.”

In addition to honoring Temple, the LABC’s awards banquet will include the induction of a new member 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 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. More information about the LABC can be obtained by visiting their website at www.labball.com.

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