

JOHN “HOT ROD” WILLIAMS

*Note: This is the **second** 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.*

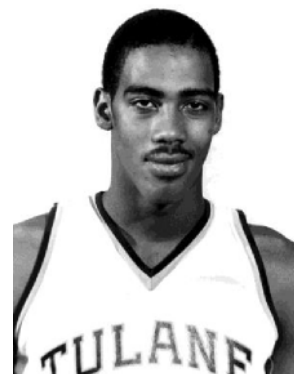
WILLIAMS NEVER STRAYED FAR FROM HOME

By: Les East
Written for the LABC

NEW ORLEANS -- John “Hot Rod” Williams has never strayed very far from his roots in Sorrento, Louisiana.

He became a standout player at nearby St. Amant High School. That attracted numerous colleges to him. He considered playing just up the road at LSU, but ultimately settled on Tulane University, a little farther away but still close enough for his family to follow him.

Though his NBA career brought him to Cleveland and other cities, Williams still called Louisiana home. He still lives just a few miles from his boyhood home, residing in Gonzales.



“I want to be near where my mother is,” Williams said. “I want to be able to go back home every day.”

Williams’ home base will prove to be convenient when he’s inducted into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame on May 2 in Baton Rouge.

During his high school career at St. Amant, Williams grew eight inches and his game grew nearly as much under the tutelage of Coach Tommy Wall. He became a well-decorated high school player and much sought-after college prospect.

“Coach Wall trained us to use our talent most effectively for the team to be successful,” Williams said.

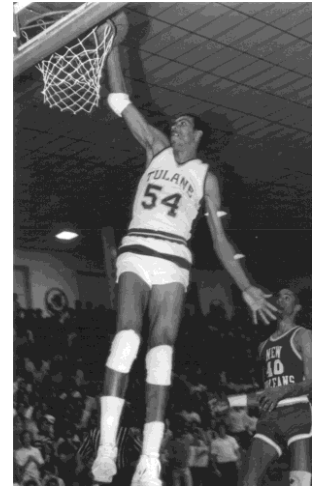
Defense was Williams’ most obvious attribute. At nearly seven feet tall, he was a natural rebounder and shot blocker, but he developed into an equally proficient scorer.

Following an honor-filled high school career, he considered attending college nearby at LSU, but then Tigers coach Dale Brown’s plan to redshirt Williams didn’t mesh with Williams’ desire to play right away and belief he would succeed right away. He would be proven right.

Tulane coach Roy Danforth impressed Williams and even after Danforth relinquished his coaching duties to become athletic director at the New Orleans school, Williams stuck with the Green Wave and new coach Ned Fowler. Things worked out, as Williams became a standout player from 1981-85.

“If I had it to do all over again,” Williams said, “I’d do the same thing.”

Williams had an instant impact with the Green Wave, making not only the Metro Conference All-Freshman team, but being named first-team all-conference and Louisiana Newcomer of the Year as a rookie.



He went on to become the Metro Conference Player of the Year as a junior and again first-team all-conference as a senior.

“The Metro Conference included Louisville and Memphis State, who were always two of the top teams in the country,” Williams said. “Virginia Tech and Florida State were top notch too, so it was a good conference, and we played a tough non-conference schedule, facing teams like North Carolina and Kentucky.”

Williams was a three-time honorable mention All-American, three-time first-team All-Metro Conference choice, three-time All-Louisiana and three-time NABC All-District selection.

He finished his college career as the second-leading scorer (1,841 points and a 16.0 average) and fourth-leading rebounder (809 and a 7.0 average) in Tulane history.

Williams set school records with a 54.9% career field goal percentage and had 192 blocked shots for a 1.67 per game average.

He helped lead Tulane to two consecutive NIT appearances, reaching the quarterfinals in 1982.

Williams was a second round selection of the Cleveland Cavaliers in the 1985 NBA Draft. However, he began his professional career with the Rhode Island Gulls of the United States Basketball League, where he was named Rookie of the Year and Player of the Year. That helped launch him into the NBA, where he joined the Cavaliers the following season and promptly made the NBA All-Rookie first team.

He was a consistent scorer, rebounder, and shot blocker who teamed with Mark Price, Ron Harper and Brad Daugherty to make Cleveland a perennial playoff participant.

Fittingly, his induction comes one year after that of a former Tulane teammate – forward Paul Thompson – who also played with the Cavaliers.

“That’s great,” Williams said. “Paul deserved it and to follow him in is nice.”

Williams played a total of 13 seasons in the NBA, participating in more games than any other Cavaliers player, and until this season was the franchise’s career leader in blocked shots. Perhaps his best season came in 1990, when he averaged career highs of 16.8 points and 8.1 rebounds and finished 10th in the NBA in blocked shots with 2.04 per game, while mostly serving as Cleveland’s sixth man.

He now resides in Gonzales with his wife, seven children and two grandchildren.

Williams will be inducted into the Hall of Fame along with another former Tulane great, Phil Hicks.

The Hall of Fame induction ceremonies will be held in conjunction with the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches 35th Annual Awards Banquet at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge. The banquet is sponsored by SportsCare and the Baton Rouge Orthopaedic Clinic.

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 Haughton High School coach and Louisiana legislator, Billy Montgomery.

A limited number of tickets for the banquet are available for \$25 and can be reserved by contacting the LABC at labball@gmail.com. The Embassy Suites Hotel is located at 4914 Constitution Avenue in Baton Rouge (College Drive exit off of Interstate 10).

The Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame 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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