

## G. O. WRIGHT

*Note: This is the **second** in a series of three articles on this year's inductees into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame. The 2000 inductees include Leonard Mitchell, G. O. Wright and Tommy Canterbury.*

### XAVIER BASKETBALL'S GREATEST AMBASSADOR

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NEW ORLEANS --- It was 1938 and athletics at Xavier University was in its heyday.

Spectators came from areas throughout the southeast to watch the football games and the track meets, but professional players, coaches, scouts – *everyone* – came to The Barn to see “The Ambassadors of Basketball” led by Giles Owens Wright.



During his nine-year career as the head coach of the Xavier men's basketball team, Wright amassed the greatest coaching record in the school's athletic history. From 1937 to 1946 Wright led the Ambassadors, as the team was then known, to a 160-40 record and an 80 percent career winning percentage.

On July 20 in Baton Rouge, Wright will be inducted posthumously into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame. Joining Wright in this year's induction class are former LSU star Leonard Mitchell and ex-Centenary coach Tommy Canterbury.

Known as “Unk” to the Xavier community, Wright came to Xavier at the request of his brother Ted Wright who had just been named as Athletic Director and head coach of the football team.

Giles was a graduate of Baker University in Baldwin City, Kansas where he returned to work in the recreation department before joining the staff at Xavier at the age of 37.

Like his brother Ted, Wright worked his entire career in athletics. From 1921-23 he was director of athletics and head basketball coach at George Smith College in Sedalia, Missouri. He later completed his graduate work in physical education at the University of Michigan.

Though he reached the pinnacle of his coaching success at Xavier, Wright did not show signs of greatness immediately upon entering his coaching career. During his very first season coaching in his first job at George Smith College, Wright lost the first six games he coached.

However, displaying what would prove to be a staple of his personality, he rallied the following season with a 5-2 record.

By the time he took the bench at Xavier his coaching was in full form. His very first squad in 1937-38 surpassed expectations by winning 35 games and losing only four, capturing the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SIAC) championship. The following season also ended impressively with a record of 23-2 and a second straight SIAC championship.

In an article about Wright in the 1940 sports section of the school's paper it was written, "He is rated as one of the best liked coaches because he exemplifies in his simplicity his daily teachings."

"His accurate and unbiased judgement, his frank expression of opinions, and his inimitable sense of humor have preserved the ideals of his motto, 'Be cautious, but when a bargain is made, stick to it.'"

Stick to it he did. The 1941 season was the most successful of his career at Xavier. Wright coached the Ambassadors to an undefeated 29-game season and created a school record 32 consecutive victories. That team ended the season as SIAC regular season and tournament champions.

To Wright's credit goes the elevation of the game of basketball, not only at Xavier, but throughout the South and ultimately the country as many of his players entered the professional ranks, including Nat "Sweetwater" Clifton - the first African-American player to sign a contract with an NBA team in 1950.

In the years following his departure from Xavier in 1946, many coaches would attempt to equal his winning percentage, but to this day his record is untouched.

By the end of his nine years at Xavier, Wright's teams won three SIAC championships. In addition to his 29-0 season in 1941, he posted seasons of 35-4, 23-2, 18-7, 17-4 and 15-3.

In 1938 an observer wrote, "There is no doubt that in years to come, the marvelous record of this team will stand as a goal or standard toward which future Xavier teams will strive." Indeed it has.

The Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame, located in LSU's Pete Maravich Assembly Center, is sponsored by the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches. The LABC's 26th Annual Hall of Fame Awards Luncheon, sponsored by SportsCare, will be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge at noon on July 20.

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).