

LARRY WRIGHT

*Note: This is the **first** in a series of four articles on this year's inductees into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame and the LABC's Mr. Louisiana Basketball award recipient. The 2006 inductees will be former star players Larry Wright of Grambling St., Gerard King of Nicholls St. and Jerald Honeycutt of Tulane. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2006 is former UL-Monroe coach Mike Vining.*

FORMER GRAMBLING ALL-AMERICAN LARRY WRIGHT TO BE INDUCTED INTO LOUISIANA BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME

By: Nick Deriso
Sports Editor
Monroe *News-Star*
Written for the LABC

GRAMBLING, LA -- Something burned inside small guard Larry Wright, the product of a single-parent home in the poorest part of southside Monroe.

He'd use that fire to win championships for his Louisiana high school and college — then a title in the National Basketball Association and overseas.

"I hope it says something to our youth today, that just because you come from a household with just a mother and nine kids, it doesn't mean you can't go out and make something of yourself," Wright said.



Now, the former Richwood High and Grambling State standout has been selected for induction into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame.

Wright is the fifth GSU product to be inducted, along with players Bob Hopkins, Aaron James and Willis Reed and the man who led them all, coach Fred Hobdy (who died in 1998 as the winningest men's college basketball coach in Louisiana history, with nearly 600 victories over a 30-year career).

Hobdy remains an inspiration to Wright, who succeeded his college mentor as GSU coach in 1999.

"He would be drilling you, running you like there is no more tomorrow, but afterwards if you had a problem he would switch hats," Wright said. "Instead of your coach, he became your father — so understanding of the problem, whatever it might have been. There was no way you could think a guy who had just been screaming at the top of his voice could do that, but he did. I will always remember that."

Wright was a high school All-American at Richwood High in Monroe, where he won a Louisiana state Class 3A title in 1972 as a junior, then transferred to Western High in Washington D.C. as a senior.

Hobdy had his eye on Wright all along.

"Coach Hobdy saw me as a sophomore at Richwood High School and he told me: 'If I don't see you anymore, you will be my starting guard two years from now,'" Wright said. "That was overwhelming for me. I didn't know what he saw. When I became a senior and was being recruited by schools all over the nation, I remembered what Coach Hobdy told me. That's the reason I came to Grambling."

The Southwestern Athletic Conference's freshman of the year in 1973, Wright would go on to garner all-conference and NCAA small college All-America honors twice. He averaged 18.9 points in 1974, 26.7 points (5th in the nation) in 1975, and 25.3 points in 1976. In only three college seasons, he scored 2,042 points for a 23.7 career average.

"The best small guard we've ever had, pound for pound the best guard," Hobdy once said. "A great jumper, he gets an 'A' in every category."

Wright finished his Grambling career on a high note, leading the Tigers to the 1976 SWAC tournament championship and the NCAA Division II tournament, on the way to SWAC player-of-the-year honors.

"That was the last time we won the SWAC tournament," said teammate Theodis Johnson, a 1978 GSU graduate who now works as an assistant to Wright.

"Nobody gave us a chance that particular year," Johnson continued. "We played all the Mississippi schools (Alcorn State, Jackson State and Mississippi Valley) and we ended up defeating all of them. It was a Mississippi sweep for us. That was one of the bright spots in Coach Wright's career. That's when everybody took notice."

Then a junior, Wright entered the 1976 NBA draft — where Washington selected him as the 14th pick in the first round. Wright's Bullets won the 1978 NBA championship in his second professional season, part of a six-year NBA career that included a two-year stint at Detroit. Wright also helped Italy's Banco DiRoma to the European championship and was named the best player in Europe in 1984.

Wright's first return to Grambling was to complete the degree he'd never gotten: he graduated in health and physical education at Grambling in 1982, and served as an assistant coach at GSU while he pursued a master's degree in sports administration in the early 1990s.

Wright then worked as an NBA scout and as an assistant at Ouachita High in Monroe before returning to coach at his alma mater seven seasons ago.

It's given him a chance to continue that tradition of close-knit family.

Wright's daughter Ashana played basketball for GSU, where she earned a master's in social work. Son Larry Jr. also received a master's at Grambling, and son Lance earned a bachelor's while playing as a multi-year starter on the football team.

Wright traveled all over — only to find himself, and his family, right back at home. That's why, he said, this recognition is so meaningful.

Every coach he played for in high school and college was a Louisiana native. Richwood's Hershell West and Western's Robert Piper are Rayville products, while Hobdy hailed from Winnfield.

"It means a lot of that we were all Louisiana folks," Wright said. "Then to go to Grambling and be a first-round draft choice after my junior year, that says something about the teaching they gave me."

Those roots run further back, too, all the way to the southside of Monroe — where Wright used his mother's love as a catalyst to get out.

"It makes me think of all the values that she taught me," Wright said. "I worked hard, and kept working, and things worked out. It's rewarding when you get my age and look back over your career like that. I always dedicate awards like this to my family. They got me here."

Wright will be inducted into the Hall of Fame on May 6, along with former stars Jerald Honeycutt of Tulane and Gerard King of Nicholls St.

The Hall of Fame induction ceremonies will be held in conjunction with the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches' 32nd Annual Awards Banquet at the Holiday Inn Select in Baton Rouge. The banquet is sponsored by SportsCare.

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 UL-Monroe coach Mike Vining.

A limited number of tickets for the banquet are available for \$20 and can be reserved by contacting the LABC at labbal@gmail.com. The Holiday Inn Select is located at 4728 Constitution Avenue in Baton Rouge (College Drive exit off of Interstate 10).

The Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame, which is located in LSU's Pete Maravich Assembly Center, 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.labbal.com.

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