

KENNY HIGGS

*Note: This is the **first** in a series of two articles on this year's inductee into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame and the LABC's Mr. Louisiana Basketball award recipient. The 2011 inductee will be former LSU star player Kenny Higgs. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2011 is the long-time coordinator of the LHSAA Top 28 state basketball tournament in Lafayette, Gerald Hebert.*

KENNY HIGGS OF LSU TO JOIN LOUISIANA BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME

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BATON ROUGE -- He's remembered as the most prolific assist-maker in LSU men's basketball history.

That may be why Kenny Higgs, of Owensboro, Ky., is going into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame on May 7.

But Higgs will tell everyone very quickly that it was the guys he was throwing all the basketballs to that made him the player he was.

"It means a lot," Higgs said recently of his upcoming induction. "Not only for me personally but I'm proud of what it means to the players that I played with and that I shared the time that I was down there with and what we accomplished together. Every player wants to be inducted or be remembered for something they've done in life. LSU was the beginning of the whole start of life for me."



"Coming to LSU I didn't just make friends but I became a family with the brothers that I played with. We didn't accomplish winning the NCAA Championship, but we accomplished more than that. We accomplished a unity in life together. We'll always know and believe in each other and always have memories of what we did in life and where the beginning started at."

That is simply why when Higgs makes his acceptance speech, he will salute the teammates that he bonded with over his time in Baton Rouge.

Higgs certainly had a chance to go to a lot of places when Dale Brown and his coaching staff were able to lure the prep All-American from the state of Kentucky. But Higgs, a 1974 graduate of Owensboro High who scored over 2,200 points while averaging 27.1 points and 6.1 assists, saw something in the Tiger program that struck his fancy.

"I wanted to come help build a program," Higgs, who played at LSU from 1974 to 1978, said. "I wasn't concerned about being on a championship team. I had offers from all over the

country, including Kentucky and Louisville, but I just thought at LSU I could help build a program. Schools like North Carolina and Kentucky were already built, but LSU at the time was known for more of a football team. Under Coach Dale Brown we were there to build the program. We wanted something to be built and be remembered and accomplish a lot by being the building blocks. That's what I wanted to be part of."

Brown gave a lot of the credit to one of his former assistants.

"I did not discover Kenny, my assistant (the late) Art Tolis did. (Higgs) was I believe runner-up for Mr. Basketball in Kentucky to Jack Givens. He was a delight to coach and made major in-roads to recruiting top players. He was quick, a great scorer and assist man. He is just a very nice man," Brown said.

Even a guy who would play at LSU when Higgs was a senior, another Kentucky star named Durand "Rudy" Macklin, noticed as well.

"When I first saw Kenny Higgs play at Owensboro High back in the 1970s, he was by far one of the best point guards in the state and that's saying a lot because basketball was and still is the number one sport in the state of Kentucky," Macklin remembered.

Higgs left his mark on LSU as a two-time honorable mention All-American, three-time second team All-Southeastern Conference and three-time All-Louisiana selection, finishing his career as the third leading scorer in school history with 1,896 points (17.9 average). Today he still ranks seventh in total points and 10th in scoring average. But he was most remembered for ball distribution. He set a school and SEC record with 645 career assists (6.08 average), a mark threatened by only one player at LSU, the point guard who followed him, Ethan Martin, who finished with 638.

Higgs made an immediate impact as a freshman in 1975, averaging 18.1 points and earning Louisiana Freshman of the Year honors. He increased his scoring average to 22.2 points as a sophomore, to go along with 6.65 assists per game. In 1977 Higgs led the SEC in assists (8.85 average), while still scoring at a 17.7 clip. During his senior season his scoring average dipped to 13.7 points, as LSU added other talented scorers around him on its way to becoming an SEC and national power.

And while he had single game highs of 44 points and a school record 19 assists (tied just once since), his memories are of a much broader scale.

"I don't have a specific memory I just have a memory of the whole picture that we built; the whole picture of LSU," Higgs said. "It's the whole view and college of LSU. I rooted for everything and everybody. It wasn't just basketball alone, it was school and everything. Just going to eat, going to just sit out on the Parade Grounds or going down to Tigerland. The whole picture of LSU just meant everything to me. It was the whole. It wasn't a piece of it or a half of it, it was everything. I had just as many brothers that weren't on my team but were in class that were part of that. It became another family for me up there."

When asked about his assist marks, he came back to his brothers on the team. “What made me special were the guys I was playing with. If they didn’t make the right movements, understand the eye contact or what we were doing together, it wouldn’t have worked. It was the whole situation and the moment. Without my brothers there wouldn’t be a Kenny Higgs. I delivered it and they finished it for me.”

“To have a group of brothers to build this foundation like we did was all very special. Each and every one of them pulled their own weight and put what they had to give. They were all special to me. Each one of them had a goal of what they wanted LSU to be and I was just a part of it,” he said.

Macklin was one that quickly understood that when he arrived.

“Doc’ as we liked to call him, impressed me very much as a passer,” the school’s second leading scorer and all-time leading rebounder said. “All I had to do was get open and the ball would be in my mitts! He was truly amazing to watch and have as a teammate.”

But if Higgs was the floor director, there had to be someone overseeing the project and that person was Coach Brown.

“He was the director of the whole thing,” said Higgs, who was a third round selection by the Cleveland Cavaliers in the 1978 NBA Draft and played three years in the NBA. “Without the director we wouldn’t know which way we were supposed to be going. Coach Brown taught me more about life than he did about basketball. He was just as concerned about after basketball. He would always ask you what you were doing and how you were doing. He would want to know what road you are going to take after basketball, and he would tell you what paths you need to have when you go down there. That’s real life. He prepared us for life.”

Now his life leads him back to Baton Rouge and induction in the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame.

The Hall of Fame induction ceremonies will be held in conjunction with the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches’ 37th Annual Awards Banquet at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge. The banquet is sponsored by SportsCare, the Baton Rouge Orthopaedic Clinic and Chesapeake Energy Corporation.

In addition to the induction of the new Hall of Fame member, 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 the long-time coordinator of the LHSAA Top 28 state basketball tournament in Lafayette, Gerald Hebert.

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 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. More information about the LABC and the Hall of Fame can be obtained by visiting their website at www.labball.com.

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