



GET THE TROPHY AND ADVANCE.

The **Cleo Hill Game** is one of five games to be participated in the first round of The Basketball Classic presented by Eracism, with the winner receiving a trophy and advancing to the second round of the tournament.

“These five games are one of the unique aspects of our tournament,” said Gary Stewart, President of Eracism. “Student-athletes have an opportunity to raise a trophy and advance to the second round. It also gives players, fans, and the media an opportunity to learn more about some of the legends of our game like Zelmo Beaty, Travis Grant, Marques Haynes, Cleo Hill and Willis Reed. These men were giants in the history of the game.”

Elite athleticism, a deadly jump shot and crafty hooks with either hand enabled Cleo Hill to be the eighth overall pick in the 1961 NBA Draft. He was the fifth black player ever chosen in the first round.

In four seasons at Winston Salem Teachers College (1957-61), the native of Newark, N.J. averaged an impressive 25.4 points per game, making him the second-highest scorer in program history at the school known today as Winston Salem State. Playing for the legendary Clarence “Big House” Gaines, Hill helped the Rams to consecutive Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association titles in his final two seasons.

Gaines described Hill as “the most complete player he ever coached.” The longtime Final Four broadcaster Billy Packer called Hill the “forerunner to David Thompson and Michael Jordan.” Packer is qualified to make the claim because he played at neighboring Wake Forest during the same era and they frequently played pickup games against the players from Winston Salem Teachers College.

"What Billy and his teammates and Cleo and his teammates did was unofficially integrate Winston-Salem," Gaines said in his book, 'They Call Me Big House.' "I don't think a single one of them was ever supervised or even witnessed by a coach."

Black players were prohibited from competing in the Atlantic Coast Conference at the time however Packer had no doubt Hill would've been a star in the league.

Hill poured in 26 points in his NBA debut in a game against Oscar Robertson and the Cincinnati Royals. But his career in the league ended after one year because of the segregated culture within the St. Louis Hawks franchise.

"It wasn't racial," Hill told The Newark Star-Ledger in 2008. "It was points. They never said anything to me. But they knew they were getting paid for the points they scored. And here I was, taking their points."

After toiling for six years in two basketball minor leagues, he returned home and coached 24 seasons at Essex County College, winning 489 games.

Hill, a two-time All-CIAA selection and first-team NAIA All-American as a senior in 1961, ranks second on the school's career scoring list behind Earl "The Pearl" Monroe.

The Cleo Hill Award is presented annually to the college basketball player with the highest per-game assist average.

