JOHNNY ALTOBELLO

*Note: This is the **third** 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 2004 inductees are Reggie Jackson of Nicholls St. and Vernon Wilson of Northwestern St. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2004 is former De La Salle and St. Aloysius High School coach Johnny Altobello.*

LEGENDARY DE LA SALLE AND ST. ALOYSIUS COACH JOHNNY ALTOBELLO HONORED AS "MR. LOUISIANA BASKETBALL"

By: Pete Finney
New Orleans *Times-Picayune*
Written for the LABC

NEW ORLEANS -- Johnny Altobello was, far and away, the most successful high school basketball coach in New Orleans history.

When he retired from high school coaching in 1970, after a career that spanned 24 years, his teams at St. Aloysius (1946-52) and De La Salle (1952-70) had won a total of 16 city and eight state championships in Louisiana's largest classification, along with 18 invitational tournaments. He won four of his state titles at St. Aloysius (1947, 1949, 1951 and 1952) and four at De La Salle (1957, 1958, 1959 and 1962). He also had two state runner-up finishes (1950 and 1956) and reached the state semi-finals on three other occasions (1948, 1954 and 1965).

His amazing career record of 589-92 (86.5% winning percentage) included three perfect seasons, 20-0 in 1949 and 30-0 in 1951 at St. Aloysius, and 23-0 in 1957 at De La Salle.

In recognition of his career accomplishments, Altobello will be honored at the 30th Annual Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches Hall of Fame Awards Banquet in Baton Rouge on May 1.

The organization has chosen Altobello to receive its "Mr. Louisiana Basketball" award for 2004, an award given annually to someone who has made a significant contribution to the game of basketball at any level in the State of Louisiana.

A football, basketball and baseball letterman at Warren Easton High School, Altobello spent one year at LSU, where he played freshman basketball, then moved on to Loyola where he was a three-year basketball letterman and was honored as the school's outstanding athlete in 1942.

Altobello attended midshipman school at Notre Dame University in '42 and was commissioned as an ensign in the U.S. Navy, going on to serve in the Mediterranean Theater during World War II and being honorably discharged with the rank of Lieutenant Commander.

Following his distinguished coaching career, he served as athletic director at De La Salle from the mid-1970s until his retirement in 1985.

"It goes without saying the years I spent in coaching were wonderful,'' said the 84-year-old Altobello. "The greatest thing about it was not money, but all the relationships along the way, having players you've coached come back and talk about old times, the games, the experiences. Those kinds of things money cannot buy.''

Altobello was inducted into the Louisiana High School Athletic Association Coaches Hall of Fame in 1980, the Greater New Orleans Sports Hall of Fame in 1982 and the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame in 1994.

Altobello and wife Merle are the parents of three children, Carolyn, Sharon and John Jr., and the grandparents of 10.

The LABC's annual awards banquet, sponsored by SportsCare, will be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge on Saturday, May 1, 2004 at 7:00 p.m.

In addition to the presentation of the prestigious Mr. Louisiana Basketball award, the banquet will include the induction of two new members into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame. There will also be recognition of Louisiana's major college, small college, junior college and high school players and coaches of the year, along with the top pro player from the state.

Tickets for the banquet are $15 and can be obtained 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). You can learn more about the LABC by visiting its website at www.labball.com.

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