

LOUIS BONNETTE

*Note: This is the **second** 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 2013 inductee will be former Tulane University player Jeff Cummings. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2013 is former long-time McNeese State University sports information director Louis Bonnette.*

BONNETTE ADDS MR. LOUISIANA BASKETBALL

By: Matthew Bonnette
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Written for the LABC

LAKE CHARLES, LA -- Louis Bonnette carried many responsibilities throughout his 46-year career as the Sports Information Director at McNeese State University, everything from travel coordinator to business manager to his SID duties.

But one thing was never slighted despite all the duties which he took upon himself – his professionalism in the profession for which he became the face of.

That professionalism along with his dedication and loyalty is one of the many reasons why he has been selected to receive the most prestigious annual award given by the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches – the 2013 Mr. Louisiana Basketball award.

The award is presented annually to someone who has made a significant, long-term contribution to the game of basketball at any level in Louisiana. It will be presented to Bonnette during the LABC's 39th Annual Awards Banquet on Saturday, May 4, at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge. The banquet is sponsored by SportsCare and the Baton Rouge Orthopaedic Clinic.

“This is a tremendous honor, said Bonnette. “Just to be slightly mentioned with those who have won this award before is something I could never have imagined. I have always admired and respected the collegiate basketball coaches in our state and in my 46 years as a sports information director I can say that I have worked with the best.”

Bonnette retired from McNeese in 2012 after a distinguished 46-year career in which he was recognized nationally for his news releases, game programs and media guides. As McNeese's first sports information director, he worked to bring the story of Cowboy athletics to the state, region and nation and promoted numerous McNeese players to All-America honors, including Hall of Famer Joe Dumars and more recently, Patrick Richard.



Over his career he witnessed and was apart of the vast changes in the manner in which sports information was disseminated – from telephone dictation, telecopier, typewriter, computer, the Internet and now social media.

He began his journalism career as a sportswriter for the Beaumont (Texas) *Enterprise* and after three years joined McNeese as the SID.

He worked with legendary McNeese head coach Ralph O. Ward, who is a member of the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame, the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame and the McNeese Hall of Fame and was named Mr. Louisiana Basketball in 1977. Ward was one of eight McNeese basketball head coaches Bonnette worked with.

Some of his McNeese basketball highlights include:

- Working the McNeese-Louisiana Tech game that featured the play of Joe Dumars and Karl Malone, where one entire row at courtside was made up of NBA scouts, general managers and owners to see the two players.
- Covering and working games that featured such Louisiana greats as Dumars, Malone, Jackie Moreland of Louisiana Tech, Robert Parish of Centenary, Calvin Natt and Glynn Saulters of Louisiana-Monroe (then Northeast Louisiana), Shaquille O’Neal and Chris Jackson of LSU and Bo Lamar of Louisiana-Lafayette (then USL), just to name a few.
- McNeese putting together a 19-game winning streak and winning the 1968 Gulf States Conference championship and hosting an NCAA Division II regional tournament.
- The Cowboys’ 1989 team, coached by Steve Welch, winning its first-ever Southland Conference Tournament and then almost beating Top 10 ranked and No. 1 seed Illinois in the first round of the NCAA Tournament (lost 77-71).

Bonnette was a part of seven conference championships, helped promote 31 first team all-conference selections, nine conference players of the year, six conference coaches of the year and four all-Americans. He was also a part of 644 McNeese victories, nine 20-win seasons and eight national postseason appearances.

Also during his 46-year career, he did not miss a Cowboy football game, working a national record 527 consecutive games.

A native of Pineville and graduate of Louisiana Tech University (BA in Journalism in 1963), Bonnette has been honored both statewide and nationally for his work. He served two terms as president of the Louisiana Sports Writers Association and has been the recipient of the LSWA’s prestigious Mac Russo Award (1995).

He founded the McNeese Hall of Fame and served as its chairman until his retirement in 2012.

He was inducted into the CoSIDA Hall of Fame in 2009 and into the Southland Conference Hall of Honor in 2007, along with garnering a spot in the Louisiana Sports Hall of

Fame as the 2002 recipient of the LSWA's Distinguished Service Award in Sports Journalism. He was named a winner of the Scoop Hudgins outstanding SID award from the All-American Football Foundation in 2008.

The Southland Conference recently named its sports media award in his honor – the Louis Bonnette Sports Media Award – and he was the first recipient in 2012.

“Louis Bonnette is a legend among legends in the Southland Conference,” said Southland Conference commissioner Tom Burnett. “He has served as a mentor and role model for so many in this business including myself and countless others who started their careers in sports journalism.”

He continues to write a golf column for the Lake Charles *American Press* (since 1970) and also writes a weekly outdoor column during his retirement. Sons Michael (LSU) and Matthew (McNeese) have followed in his footsteps as collegiate sports information directors.

Bonnette is only the second sports information director to be named Mr. Louisiana Basketball. Former Louisiana-Monroe SID Bob Anderson received the award in 1997.

In addition to honoring Bonnette, the LABC's awards banquet will include the induction of one new member 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.

A limited number of tickets for the banquet are available for \$25 and can be reserved by contacting the LABC at labbal@gmail.com. More information about the LABC can be obtained by visiting their website at www.labbal.com.

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