

BILL BUMGARNER

*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 2012 inductee will be former UL-Monroe coach Mike Vining. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2012 is long-time New Orleans sportswriter Bill Bumgarner.*

LONG-TIME NEW ORLEANS SPORTSWRITER TO RECEIVE TOP LOUISIANA BASKETBALL HONOR

By: Lori Lyons
New Orleans *Times-Picayune*
Written for the LABC

NEW ORLEANS -- Looking at Bill Bumgarner, images of basketball do not immediately come to mind.

But his name has appeared on thousands of newspaper stories over the past 40 years and he has shared space on front pages with some of the greatest basketball legends the state of Louisiana has produced – even before they were legends.



And he was afforded a front row seat.

He covered the USL Ragin' Cajuns and was in the Superdome for every game the New Orleans Jazz played there.

He also made it to every Top 28 prep basketball tournament from 1975 to 2009 and was in on every All-State team selected.

Karl Malone, Randy Livingston, Larry Wilson, Rick Robey, Chris Jackson, they all saw their names next to that of Bumgarner.

It was all part of the job for a veteran newspaper reporter who has spent 40 years as an acclaimed sportswriter and one of Louisiana's foremost experts on high school sports.

And now Bumgarner has been chosen as the 2012 "Mr. Louisiana Basketball" by the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches. Selected by the men's college basketball coaches throughout the state, it is the most prestigious annual award given by the organization, and is presented annually to someone who has made a significant, long-term contribution to the game of basketball at any level in Louisiana.

Bumgarner will be honored during the LABC's 38th annual awards banquet to be held May 5 in Baton Rouge.

Not bad for a 5-foot-6 fellow who played only one year of organized basketball for a high school team that won three games.

“I am very surprised,” Bumgarner said. “I thought they were calling me to ask me to vote for someone else.”

Bumgarner said his lack of skills on the court in no way diminished his love for the game. In fact, he said the sport doesn’t get the recognition he thinks it deserves.

“I think basketball on the high school and college levels is a little underappreciated in Louisiana. When you look at the list of players we have produced, it’s very impressive.”

Bumgarner said he has seen such greats as Malone and Wilson, Pete Maravich, Mike Sanders and Livingston, whom Bumgarner said was “the best player I ever saw.”

After serving on the student newspaper, *The Vermillion*, at the University of Southwestern Louisiana (now the University of Louisiana at Lafayette), where he covered the Ragin’ Cajuns team from 1967-1971, Bumgarner began his professional sports writing career at the New Orleans *States-Item* in 1972.

In 1980, the paper merged with the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* and Bumgarner remained on staff until his retirement in 2009.

He has continued to keep his finger on the pulse of local sports by writing a regular column for the website SportsNola.com.

As part of the newspaper sports team Bumgarner covered every prep boys basketball state tournament and helped select the paper’s All-Metro teams, as well as the Louisiana Sports Writers Association’s All-State teams.

As a member of the LSWA, Bumgarner was the Louisiana Prep Writer of the Year in 1979, and in 1990 he received the prestigious Mac Russo Award for contributions to the association’s progress and ideals. He also served as the organization’s president for two years, spearheading the progress of the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame and Museum currently under construction in Natchitoches. He is also a member of the Hall of Fame Selection Committee.

This June, he will receive the LSWA’s Distinguished Service Award in Sports Journalism, which will earn him a permanent spot in the very Hall of Fame he helped create.

Bumgarner is the third Louisiana sportswriter to be named Mr. Louisiana Basketball. The Shreveport *Journal* writer Jerry Byrd received the award in 1992 and O.K. “Buddy” Davis of the Ruston *Daily Leader* received it in 2010.

The LABC's awards banquet will be held 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 honoring Bumgarner, the 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 labball@gmail.com. More information about the LABC can be obtained by visiting their website at www.labball.com.

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