

## PERRY CLARK

*Note: This is the **second** 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 2008 inductees will be former star player Paul Thompson of Tulane and former Tulane coach Perry Clark. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2008 is long-time referee and current Coordinator of Men's Basketball Officials for the Southeastern Conference, Gerald Boudreaux of Lafayette.*

### CLARK LIVED "CAMELOT" LIFE WITH GREEN WAVE

By: Les East  
Written for the LABC

NEW ORLEANS -- Perry Clark says he won't compare any other college basketball experience to the one he had at Tulane University. It would be a waste of time.

"I've often said that Tulane was like Camelot," Clark said. "It was a very, very special time that should be placed in a time capsule. I'll never compare any other situation to it because it could never measure up."

Clark was hired to revive a dormant basketball program and he not only brought it back to life, but he raised it to heights never before seen by the Green Wave.



His historic tenure at Tulane has earned him induction into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame.

"I'm surprised, overjoyed, very, very humbled, very, very appreciative to the people who voted," Clark said, "and also to Tulane University and my players and my staff who were with me for what we were able to accomplish collectively."

Clark coached the Green Wave from 1989-2000 and compiled a record of 185-145 (a 56.1% career winning percentage).

He was the National Coach of the Year in 1992. He was also a two-time Metro Conference and Louisiana Coach of the Year, and once an NABC District Coach of the Year. He led Tulane to one Metro Conference championship and three Conference USA division championships.

Clark also led Tulane to its only three NCAA Tournament appearances and four NIT appearances, including a third-place finish in the NIT in 1996. He had six 20-win seasons – 23-10, 22-9, 22-9, 22-10, 20-11 and 20-11.

Clark reflected on numerous milestones, including the Green Wave's first win over a ranked team when his first-year squad defeated Memphis in raucous Fogelman Arena.

"It was late in the game and we were in a timeout, and (assistant coach) Ronny Everhart is looking at me and he's laughing," Clark recalled fondly. "We were up two with a few seconds left and he laughed and said, you know we didn't prepare for this one."

Clark and Tulane accelerated beyond any reasonable timetable for success in starting a Division I program from scratch.

After going 4-24 in their first season, the Green Wave had a winning record (15-13) in their second, and made the school's first trip to the NCAA Tournament in the third, knocking off St. John's in the first round.

On its way to the NCAA Tournament, Tulane won its first Metro Conference regular-season title. But the Green Wave lost five straight down the stretch and needed a road victory against a tough Southern Mississippi team that featured future NBA player Clarence Weatherspoon to win the title.

"I don't think anyone thought we would go on the road and win at Southern Miss after that losing streak," Clark said. "But we were able to go to Southern Miss and win."

Clark's fourth team also went to the NCAA Tournament and again won a game before being eliminated. But the highlight of that season might have been the regular-season home finale, during which the university retired the jersey of forward Anthony Reed of Shreveport.

Reed was Clark's first recruit and he went on to become the cornerstone for the fledgling program, becoming the school's all-time leading scorer along the way.

"The night we retired Anthony Reed's jersey and he became the all-time leading scorer," Clark said, "that was a very special night because he was a very special kid."

It took a lot of special kids to choose to become part of a program that was starting from nowhere under a neophyte head coach. Clark said he leaned heavily on what he had learned from his high school coach, mentor, and legendary DeMatha High School coach Morgan Wootten in Washington, D.C.

Clark was trying to build a college program the same way Wootten had built one of the most successful high school programs in the country, and he was doing it with high school kids.

"I was blessed to be coached and mentored by Morgan Wootten," Clark said. "We were starting out with so many young kids."

"We started by recruiting kids and stressing defense and it grew from there. Anthony Reed was so important. We knew he was a really good kid with a lot of character and that he'd

be a very good defensive player. I didn't know he would become the type of offensive weapon that he became."

Clark was effusive in praising Everhart, who was his right hand: "There aren't strong enough words to express what he meant."

The two spent countless late nights working in the office and sleeping in their car as they bounced around trying to find kids to join their program.

Their success was more a result of long hours of hard work than any sophisticated blueprint for constructing a program.

"The first kid you sign goes on to become the school's all-time leading scorer?" Clark marveled. "Come on. You can't plan that."

Clark said he didn't fully appreciate the opportunity he had until he arrived at Tulane, having been hired by Tulane President Dr. Eamon Kelly and Athletic Director Chet Gladchuk.

"I really felt like I could show I was a good coach and I didn't have to win big," Clark said. "Chet took a chance by hiring me. It wasn't until I got there that I realized the uniqueness of the place, thanks to Dr. Kelly's support and vision."

After Gladchuk left to become AD at his alma mater, Boston College, Kevin White replaced Gladchuk. White came in at a tumultuous time for mid-level and smaller athletic programs as mega-conferences were forming.

Clark praised White and his staff for navigating Tulane through that time, maintaining sufficient resources for the program to continue to thrive as a member of the new Conference USA.

White, who's now the AD at Notre Dame, had three members of his staff who are now athletic directors at major programs – Ian McCaw (Baylor), Jim Sterk (Washington State), and Sandy Barbour (Cal).

"Most people looked at Tulane as a place that could never become a big-time program," Clark said. "But our group believed in a vision and we were able to reach our potential."

Clark spoke fondly of a "love affair" with New Orleans, recalling one late night shortly after being hired when he left the office and stopped at McDonald's for dinner.

"The ladies working there recognized me," Clark recalled. "They said, you're the coach, we can't have you starving. And they paid for my McDonald's."

"New Orleans is such a unique city. I love the city and the people."

After leaving Tulane, Clark coached at the University of Miami and then later did some work as a television analyst for college basketball games. But he recently opted to return to coaching and just finished his first year at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.

“I was doing TV and enjoying it and I guess I was doing a pretty good job because I was getting assignments,” Clark said. “But the funny thing was, during the basketball season, I didn’t have anybody to talk to. All my friends were coaching. They were busy with their teams and were wrapped up in that. I realized I was still too young to sit around and not be working at the pace that I had been accustomed to my whole life.”

Clark will be inducted with former Tulane forward Paul Thompson on May 10.

The Hall of Fame induction ceremonies will be held in conjunction with the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Awards Banquet at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge. The banquet is sponsored by SportsCare and the Baton Rouge Orthopaedic Clinic.

In addition to the induction of the new Hall of Fame members, 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 long-time referee and current Coordinator of Men's Basketball Officials for the Southeastern Conference, Gerald Boudreaux of Lafayette.

A limited number of tickets for the banquet are available for \$25 and can be reserved by contacting the LABC at [labball@gmail.com](mailto:labball@gmail.com). The Embassy Suites Hotel is located at 4914 Constitution Avenue in Baton Rouge (College Drive exit off of Interstate 10).

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. You can learn more about the LABC and the Hall of Fame by visiting their website at [www.labball.com](http://www.labball.com).

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