

JOEL HAWKINS

*Note: This is the **fourth** in a series of four articles on this year's inductees into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame and the LABC's Mr. Louisiana Basketball award recipient. The 2005 inductees will be former LSU All-American Dick Maile and former coaches Bobby Paschal of UL-Lafayette and Dale Brown of LSU. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2005 is Southern Lab High School coach Joel Hawkins.*

RECORD-SETTING SOUTHERN LAB COACH JOEL HAWKINS TO BE HONORED AS "MR. LOUISIANA BASKETBALL"

By: Robin Fambrough
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Written for the LABC

BATON ROUGE -- It didn't take Joel Hawkins long to answer why he's spent 40 years working as a basketball coach.

"You know, I really don't think of it as work," Hawkins said. "Coaching basketball was always something I wanted to do. It's never really been a job, because I love it so much. Maybe if I was working in another profession, it would be different. I can't think of anything else I'd rather do."



Hawkins, the Southern Lab High School boys' basketball coach, caps a record-setting season with a prestigious honor . . . the 2005 Mr. Louisiana Basketball Award from the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches.

The 66-year-old Hawkins made his 40th season as a coach one of Louisiana's most memorable. In addition to coaching Southern Lab to its 11th Class 1A state title in 13 seasons, Hawkins broke Louisiana's all-time record for victories as a high school coach previously held by the late Leslie Gaudet of Pine Prairie. With a 104-73 victory over Plain Dealing in the 1A title game, Hawkins recorded his 1,027th win and now has a record of 1,027-248 for an 80.5% career winning percentage

"This is very exciting for me," Hawkins said. "I've been a member of the LABC and I know what this award means. And to receive an award that others, great people like Bob Pettit and Fred Hobdy have gotten, is really special to me."

Hawkins says he never really thought about becoming a record-setting coach. His goal was just to coach, which he began doing in 1965 after graduating from Southern University and spending two years in the military.

The first four years Hawkins spent at his alma mater, G.W. Griffin High in Lake Providence. Next, Hawkins became head coach Lake Providence High, where his team won the Class 2A title in 1985.

Hawkins made an impression on another coach in what was his last game at Lake Providence a few years later.

"The first time I met Joel Hawkins I coached against him," St. Amant coach Gary Duhe said. "I was at Trafton at the time. I remember being very impressed with his team and how disciplined they were. They were truly a team. Sometimes I think he and I are two of the dinosaurs left in the game. We put the team above everything else in basketball. That's why I enjoy watching his teams play now. He's had some talented players, but they always play like a team."

Since moving to Southern Lab in the late 1980s, Hawkins has used a team concept as the cornerstone for 11 state championships and appearances in numerous national tournaments, including a No.18 national ranking in the final USA Today poll in 2000.

"Basketball is supposed be a team game," Hawkins said. "It's not about me as a coach or about one player. The goals of the team have to come first."

Hawkins gives credit to his players and his wife, Geraldine, for making what he has done - 39 winning seasons, 21 district championships and 12 state titles -- possible. He was named the National High School Coach of the Year by Student Sports in 2004 and has been a three-time Louisiana Class A Coach of the Year. He is also a member of the Louisiana High School Athletic Association Hall of Fame.

Hawkins also takes pride in the accomplishments of his former players. Most fans might know that LSU football standout Marcus Spears, a first-round draft pick of the Dallas Cowboys, was an all-state player for Hawkins at Southern Lab, but there are others to note (including seven state players of the year).

None of those other former players are pro athletes. They are attorneys, businessmen and are in the military.

"Watching what some of these young men have gone on to become means more to me than anything else," Hawkins said. "Now, every player I've coached didn't turn out perfectly, but that goes with the job. The chance to impact someone's life in a positive way is something coaches should never take for granted."

The chance to watch Hawkins do his job has influenced others, including a long-time rival, White Castle coach Ronald Johnson. "Coach Hawkins is one of the greatest, if not the greatest coach in the history of high school basketball in Louisiana," Johnson said. "You can look at his players and tell what a great relationship he has with them. They want to play for him."

The LABC's annual awards banquet, sponsored by SportsCare, will be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge on Saturday, May 7, 2005 at 7:00 p.m.

In addition to the presentation of the Mr. Louisiana Basketball award, the banquet will include the induction of three 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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