

JIM HAWTHORNE

*Note: This is the **second** in a series of two feature stories on this year's inductee into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame and this year's recipient of the LABC's Mr. Louisiana Basketball award. The 2016 inductee will be former Nicholls State University coach Rickey Broussard (1990-2002). Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2016 is former LSU radio announcer Jim Hawthorne.*

HAWTHORNE'S VOICE PART OF LSU FANS' TIGER MEMORIES

By: C. Kent Lowe
Louisiana State University
Written for the LABC

BATON ROUGE – There is only one way to describe Jim Hawthorne's reaction when he was told that he would be the recipient of the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches' prestigious "Mr. Louisiana Basketball" award:

"Holy Cow!"

It is a phrase heard often over the last 36 years at basketball, football and baseball games, as Hawthorne became the voice of more than one generation of LSU Tiger fans. When he said it, nine-times-out-of-ten it meant something good was happening for the Tigers.

Hawthorne took over calling the basketball Tigers at the start of the 1979-80 season as LSU was entering one of its greatest eras under Coach Dale Brown. When he retired from LSU as the "Voice of the Tigers" at the end of the 2016 season, he was calling the games of Coach Johnny Jones, a former recruit of Brown's who played for LSU after a stellar high school career in DeRidder.

Hawthorne will receive the award, which 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 during the LABC's 42nd Annual Awards Banquet on Saturday, April 30, at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Baton Rouge. The banquet is sponsored by the Baton Rouge Orthopaedic Clinic. Hawthorne will be LSU's fifth recipient of the award since it was first presented to Joe Dean, Sr. in 1975. Bob Pettit won the award in 1976, Brown in 1988 and Collis Temple, Jr. a year ago.



The native of Anacoco, Louisiana, has made listening to the Tigers a habit, and when you think about LSU and Hawthorne that phrase about “the soundtrack of your life” suddenly becomes so true.

In his final season, applause came in from everywhere for Hawthorne. There have not been many in the last 60 years to have called all three major sports at LSU as the primary announcer – football, men’s basketball and baseball – and the number in Division I doing that today is a shrinking lot.

That’s why anyone who has ever picked up a microphone to call any sport in the last few decades knows how prestigious it was for Hawthorne to receive the Chris Schenkel Award from the National Football Foundation and the College Football Hall of Fame. There was previously the Lindsey Nelson Award, and this summer Hawthorne will be inducted into the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame when he receives the Louisiana Sports Writers Association’s Distinguished Service Award in Sports Journalism.

His broadcasting career began with the Leesville High School Wampus Cats, where according to a story in the Baton Rouge *Advocate* Hawthorne on his first broadcast “sounded like a cross between Gomer Pyle and Donald Duck.” He then in college came under the mentorship of the late Norm Fletcher at KNOC in Natchitoches.

Hawthorne would move to KWKH in Shreveport, the 50,000-watt AM station that could be heard at night over most of the country. He would do World Football League games with a guy rebounding from bad luck in Miami, Larry King, before he became a CNN superstar. Hawthorne would broadcast Centenary College basketball for a decade and called one of the school’s all-time greats, 7-foot center Robert Parish, who would go to an illustrious career with the Boston Celtics.

In moving to LSU, Hawthorne would commute from Shreveport his first two seasons, before budget issues forced LSU and Hawthorne to briefly cut ties for the 1981-82 season. But when a network change came about, Hawthorne returned to the basketball chair and shortly thereafter also began calling football and baseball for the Tiger network.

He would in time call three Final Fours in 1981, 1986 and 2006, while calling an SEC Tournament championship win in his first year and six SEC regular season championships. He introduced basketball fans to some of the best players to ever wear the LSU uniform in Shaquille O’Neal, Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf (then Chris Jackson), Rudy Macklin, Stromile Swift, Glen Davis and Brandon Bass. Hawthorne would call with ease one of the toughest games to call when Loyola Marymount’s helter-skelter style of play came to town in 1990 and LSU played right with them, winning 148-141 in OT. He called that game by himself. Hawthorne was also on the call when LSU, as an 11-seed in the NCAA Tournament, won two games in the then LSU Assembly Center against Purdue in double overtime and Memphis on a last-second shot that kept LSU alive on the way to the 1986 Final Four.

His flair was still there at the end of the 2015 season in the regular season finale when he nailed the call just like Keith Hornsby nailed the three from the corner at the buzzer that defeated 18th-ranked Arkansas. His final season featured the dunks and passes of Ben Simmons and the two 30-plus point games by Antonio Blakeney in late season wins.

When Tom Shatel of the Omaha *World Herald* wrote about Hawthorne prior to his final call at the College World Series last June, he penned: “They don’t make ‘em like this anymore: a broadcaster who does three major sports and has for more than 30 years. Amazing career. Interesting life.”

“I have no regrets,” Hawthorne said recently. “It’s been an incredible experience. I’ve had more thrills than I deserve.”

No doubt. For LSU fans, most of the thrills they have experienced all come with the voice of Jim Hawthorne as part of their memories.

In addition to honoring Hawthorne, the LABC’s awards banquet will include the induction of a 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. More information about the LABC can be obtained by visiting their website at www.labball.com.

April 25, 2016