

PAUL POE

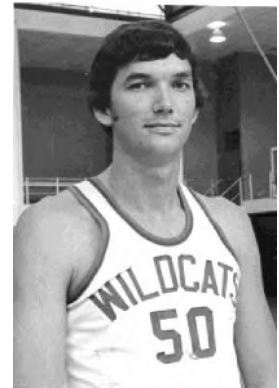
*Note: This is the **second** in a series of four articles on this year's inductees into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame and the LABC's Mr. Louisiana Basketball award recipient. The 2007 inductees will be former star players Dave Simmons of Louisiana Tech, Paul Poe of Louisiana College and Lawrence "Lanky" Wells of Louisiana Tech. Mr. Louisiana Basketball for 2007 is long-time Bidby Basketball coach and administrator Firmin Simms of New Orleans.*

TOUGH COACHING HELPED QUIET POE BECOME LOUISIANA COLLEGE BASKETBALL LEGEND

By: Bob Tompkins
Alexandria Town Talk
Written for the LABC

ALEXANDRIA, LA -- When basketball player Paul Poe arrived at Louisiana College from the small Vernon Parish town of Hicks in 1975, he didn't expect the reception he got from his head coach, ex-Marine Billy Allgood.

"Coach Allgood had that Marine, drill sergeant mentality," recalled Poe, "and he really laid into you hard. Looking back on it, it was probably one of the best things for me. I was pretty laid-back, and I probably needed to be challenged and pushed."



Poe evidently benefited from Allgood's coaching style. By the time he graduated from the Baptist college in Pineville, Poe had not only grown three inches to 6-foot-8, but he had become the school's first basketball All-American. He was a first team AP small college and third team NAIA All-American as a senior in 1979. He finished his career as the leading scorer and fourth leading rebounder in Louisiana College history, with 1,860 points for an 18.1 average, and 758 rebounds for a 7.4 average. He was also a two-time All-Louisiana and NAIA All-District selection.

"Really and truly," said Allgood, "Paul is one of the better guys to ever play at the college."

"In high school," Allgood continued, "he played for Dale Hardwick, who had played for me, and Dale was about as laid-back as they come. Paul was labeled as a little too soft, and I think that was because he was not real physical. In the four years he played at the college, he was a very quiet, very tough man. He didn't show a lot of emotion, and he was a very mild-mannered guy, but he definitely was not soft."

Gene Rushing, who was Allgood's assistant at the time and who has been the head basketball coach at LC for 21 years, said nothing illustrated Poe's toughness better than a game he had as a junior in scoring 40 points at Northwestern State in Natchitoches.

“It was a major, major battle,” Rushing said of the Dec. 21, 1977 duel between the LC Wildcats and the NSU Demons at Prather Coliseum. “Paul Poe played so hard in that game, he gave his absolute utmost. He rebounded and defended. They knocked him around all night as he constantly put up that turnaround jumper with his feather touch. They beat us by a small margin (93-88), and after it was over, he ... absolutely just fell out on the floor through sheer exhaustion. It was an unbelievable performance. I’ve been coaching here a long time, and it was as good a game as I’ve ever seen.”

Only two other players have scored more points in a game at Prather Coliseum – Mike McConathy, the current NSU men's basketball coach, scored 45 playing for Louisiana Tech against the Demons in a game in 1976, and future Louisiana Sports Hall of Famer Bo Lamar scored 42 for USL (now UL-Lafayette) against NSU in 1972.

Poe also had a memorable 41-point effort in a come-from-behind 92-77 victory at Dillard on Feb. 1, 1979.

“We were behind about 15 at the half and had to make a comeback, and I scored most of my points in the second half, and we won going away,” Poe said of a game in which he tied a school record for most field goals in a game with 18. “The first shot I took in that game was a 20-foot air ball that missed by about 10 feet; so after something like that, you think it’s going to be a terrible night, but it was one of my better nights. And it was definitely a hostile environment.”

Poe, who was a forward for the Wildcats, could shoot from the outside, and he had that luxury since teammate Les Chappell, a 7-footer, patrolled the inside. Poe hit 54.3% of his field goals during his career and made 79.9% of his free throws.

Poe averaged 18.0 points and 8.4 rebounds as a sophomore, which he increased to 22.8 points and 9.8 rebounds as a junior. In 1979, Poe led LC to a 22-6 record, including its first appearance in the NAIA Tournament in Kansas City, Mo. As a senior that season, he averaged 23.7 points and 8.5 rebounds a game.

“Paul came on strong his last year and really showed his ability in Kansas City,” said Allgood. “One of the NBA scouts up there told me they thought he could definitely play in the league.”

The Utah Jazz drafted him in the seventh round, but Poe didn’t play in the NBA.

“I went to their camp, and they wanted me to go to Europe or another minor league on the West Coast, where they paid next to nothing, and I wasn’t interested in either one.”

“Paul didn’t have a selfish bone in his body, and it may have hurt him in the NBA,” said Allgood. “He wasn’t one to keep the ball strictly to show off his skills.”

Poe and his wife, Donnis, went to talk to Allgood, seeking his advice on their future path.

“I told Donnis,” Allgood remembered, “the best thing she could do was to keep him from going overseas to play basketball. We’re talking about a guy from Hicks, Louisiana, who was a genuine nice fellow and family-oriented.”

“He told me I should stay home and get into coaching,” Poe said. “It was probably one of the best pieces of advice he gave to me. Coaching was the right decision. I don’t regret it. Don’t get me wrong, I would’ve loved to have made it to the NBA and make millions of dollars, but I’m comfortable that I gave it a shot and it didn’t work out.”

Poe went on to coach at the high school level for several schools over the next several years, with his longest stay at his alma mater, Hicks High School, before becoming assistant principal there for three years and principal for five. Poe then served as principal of the Vernon Parish Optional School for several years, and he’s nearing the end of his first full year as principal of the Lamar Salter Technical College, located about 10 miles south of Leesville.

As the father of two married daughters and the grandfather of a 3-month-old baby, Poe has been away from the sport for several years, and so he was especially surprised to hear the news recently, from Scott Landry, the executive secretary of the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches, that he had been elected with two others into this year’s class of the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame, with induction ceremonies scheduled for May 5.

“I was caught off guard, but I’m really honored when I see the people who are in this Hall of Fame,” said Poe. “Bob Pettit, who spoke at one of our games, is one of the all-time greats in there, and Pete Maravich, Willis Reed, Robert Parish, Karl Malone. The great names go on an on. I’m definitely honored to be in that company.”

“Paul Poe was the first guy I ever recruited at Louisiana College,” said Rushing, who handled much of the recruiting chores when he was Allgood’s assistant. “Little did I know then he’d turn out to be as good as he was. In college, as he got stronger, Paul Poe was as good a player as I’ve ever coached through my years as an assistant and head coach. He was a sound, sound player and a solid, solid man.”

“He was easy going, a good student, and he had a quiet, dry sense of humor,” said Allgood, who will introduce Poe at the induction ceremonies. “He was the ideal athlete, a great competitor and as tough as I’ve ever coached, but in a quiet way.”

“I was a real good coach when I had Paul Poe,” Allgood cracked. “He made me look good.”

The Hall of Fame induction ceremonies will be held in conjunction with the LABC’s 33rd Annual Awards Banquet at the Holiday Inn Select in Baton Rouge. The banquet is sponsored by SportsCare.

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 Bidy Basketball coach and administrator Firmin Simms of New Orleans.

A limited number of tickets for the banquet are available for \$20 and can be reserved by contacting the LABC at labball@gmail.com. The Holiday Inn Select is located at 4728 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.

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