

LAWRENCE "LANKY" WELLS

*Note: This is the **third** 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 Bidly Basketball coach and administrator Firmin Simms of New Orleans.*

FORMER LOUISIANA TECH STAR LAWRENCE "LANKY" WELLS TO BE INDUCTED INTO LOUISIANA BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME

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RUSTON, LA -- Probably the most memorable line ever used to sum up the demeanor in which Lanky Wells played the game of basketball was delivered by former Louisiana Tech university assistant coach Tommy Vardeman.

Asked how one of the program's best players ever could be replaced, the oft-quotable Vardeman quipped: "You had better recruit somebody with four fouls."

Yes, Wells had a knack of attracting fouls like a mouse to a block of cheese.

But it was simply because he played the game one way: all-out, hell-bent-for-leather, no holds barred.

Get out of the way. Here comes Lanky.

"It's the only way I knew how to play," recalled Wells. "That was my nature. I always loved basketball and figured if I was going to play it, I was going to do it with as much passion and enjoyment as I could find."

He did.

In three of the four years (1973-77) that he spent at Tech, Wells was a first team All-Southland Conference selection and remains as the No. 8 ranked scorer in the program's history with 1,608 points and a 16.4 average.



On May 5, he'll be among the inductees into the Louisiana Basketball Hall of Fame, along with former star players Dave Simmons of Louisiana Tech and Paul Poe of Louisiana College.

"When Scott Landry (executive secretary of the LABC) called, the first thing I said was 'tell me that I made the Hall of Fame', but I was only joking, because I figured that couldn't be the reason he was calling," laughed Wells. "Then he said, 'well, that's the reason I am calling you. You've made the Hall of Fame'. I couldn't believe it. I still can't believe it."

Anyone who watched or followed Wells' career with the Bulldogs, however, can understand why he's heading to the Hall.

One of those who should really know is Mike McConathy, the head coach at Northwestern State and a teammate of Wells while at Tech.

"I've been around a lot of players as a player and a coach, and from top to bottom, and Lanky was one of the most talented individuals I've known," said McConathy, the second all-time top scorer at Tech. "As good a player as he was, he is even a better human being. He has great people skills. You couldn't help but love him. He competed hard."

Wells, who prepped at Little Rock's Central High School, came within a blink of taking his game outside of the South as a collegian.

"Long Beach State, who had Ed Ratleff at the time, and Jacksonville University, who had Artis Gilmore then, both recruited me heavily," he remembered. "I thought about going to either one of them, but then coach Robertson came in from Tech and, well, that wrapped up where I was going to be playing for the next four years."

Scotty Robertson, then head coach at Tech, had a strong connection into the Arkansas prep ranks and had developed friendships with numerous coaches in that state.

"We would have some of the coaches work our summer camps and we'd learn about some of the players up there," recalled Robertson, who will present Wells for induction. "Lanky was well known. He had been 'Mr. Basketball' in Arkansas and I had seen him play at a state tournament. I really liked him and began to recruit him."

While there might have been an urge on Wells' part to accept that offer at either Long Beach State or Jacksonville, it was quickly squashed once Robertson came on to the scene.

"The reason I went to Tech was because of Coach Robertson," said Wells. "He convinced me and he convinced my mother that this would be the best place for me. And when I took my visit there, he took me over to the President's office and introduced me to Dr. (F. Jay) Taylor. At no other school had I met the President, so that made a huge impression and was a big deal to me, the way Dr. Taylor was so gracious and took the time to meet me."

"There hasn't been a day in my life that I regretted going to Tech. I absolutely loved it there. It's a great school with great people and I made a lot of friends there that have lasted a lifetime."

McConathy is one of those, of course.

"He remains one of my closest friends, a guy who is so selfless. Last year when Tim (Floyd, head coach at Southern California) went through the death of Ryan Francis, Lanky showed his true loyalty and compassion. Lanky drove from Little Rock, spent two days in Baton Rouge doing whatever he could to support Tim. When Coach Emmett Hendricks (who was head coach at Tech following Robertson) was fighting cancer, Lanky came down and spent two days with him. He's just that kind of person, a lifelong friend. It's sometimes not the words but more the actions, and him being there was a tremendous gift to Tim. That's who Lanky Wells is."

Wells was a model of consistency while with the Bulldogs, averaging 18.4 points during his sophomore season of 1974-75 and then producing for 18.6 the next year and then 18.0 as a senior.

On the boards, where his tenacity became a part of Tech lore, he averaged 7.1 as a sophomore and then followed up with averages of 7.4 and 7.3 over the next two seasons.

The third team All-Louisiana selection in 1977 ranks No. 4 behind all-time scoring leader Mike Green, McConathy and Jackie Moreland for the most 30-or-more point games with a total of nine.

"I guess that's the highlight for me at Tech, when I scored the 38 against ULM (Louisiana-Monroe)," he said of that 1975 road game. "That's my proudest moment. It was at Ewing Coliseum and I could have had 40 or more, but they took one of 'em away from me when I hung on the rim after a dunk."

Noted McConathy about Wells' postseason honors: "He was a three-time first team All-Southland Conference player and that doesn't happen very often."

As tenacious as he was in his style of play, Wells was as easy-going and good-natured off of it.

"He was always a jovial guy, one you never had a problem with," recalled Robertson. "I only had him for the one year, but I loved having Lanky on our team."

The physicalness with which he played and his solid frame (he got up to as much as 230 pounds) apparently caught the attention of a franchise in another sport that Wells had long ago given up.

"When my Tech career ended, the Dallas Cowboys contacted me several times about trying out as a wide receiver," said Wells, now retired from management in the United States

Postal Service in Pine Bluff, Ark. "I still can't get over that. But the last time I had played football was back in the seventh grade."

"I ruptured my appendix that year and the coach (Johnny Greenwood) at the time told me to give up football and stick with basketball. I never played football again. Basketball was the game I really loved and wanted to play, anyway."

Good thing, too.

The way he played the game, Lanky Wells made it enjoyable for everyone around him.

The Hall of Fame induction ceremonies will be held in conjunction with the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches' 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 labbal@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.labbal.com.

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