



Driesell takes his place among basketball immortals

Former JMU men's coach enshrined into Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame

BY KHALIL GARRIOTT ('04)

A James Madison University living legend earned his rightful place among the immortals in his industry Sept. 7, as Charles “Lefty” Driesell was enshrined into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts. The first NCAA coach with 100 wins at four different schools, Driesell coached the Dukes from 1988 to 1997. His coaching résumé lacks little—arguably just an appearance in the Final Four—and among the top bullet points is making the NCAA Tournament at all four schools he coached.

His mood was poignant and reflective at the birthplace of basketball as he looked back on his remarkable career.

“Anybody who’s ever coached basketball has a dream of being up here,” he said. “I had some great players, and they’re the ones who put me here. I love them all like brothers and sons of mine.”

At a Sept. 6 press conference, the longtime coach emphasized the impact his players had on him. He credited them for shaping his career. Though he never coached fellow 2018 enshrinee Grant Hill, Hill said he was drawn to Driesell’s personality and grew up admiring the larger-than-life coach.

“He was fun. He always had a great quote and a presence about him, and his teams were fun to watch,” Hill told *Madison*. “I remember watching him and watching his teams. As a little kid ... I always thought the world of Lefty. I’m just happy for him; it’s long overdue. I’m proud that I get a chance to be in *his* class here in 2018.”

One of 13 Hall of Fame enshrinees this year, Driesell also lays claim to being the only coach in NCAA history to win conference Coach of the Year in four different conferences. A gym rat since age 10, he cited hard work and loving the game as keys to his longevity and success.

“My philosophy is the harder you work, the luckier you get,” Driesell said. “I enjoyed coaching but I worked my players hard. One thing about coaching I always liked was, you know if you’re doing any good. You play the game, and if you win, you feel good. If you lose, what can we correct so we don’t lose anymore? You can’t always do that with other jobs.”



(Above): Charles “Lefty” Driesell autographs a basketball. (Below): Driesell with the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame Class of 2018.



The Norfolk, Virginia, native said he regrets his teams did not always fill the stands at the JMU Convocation Center.

“I think we didn’t do enough advertising and promotion to get more students to the games,” Driesell said of his days at Madison. “We had really good teams. We won the league five straight years.”



"Lefty" Driesell takes the crowd down memory lane during his Hall of Fame acceptance speech.

'Anybody who's ever coached basketball has a dream of being up here.'

—CHARLES "LEFTY" DRIESELL,
former men's basketball head coach

The college basketball world owes the "Midnight Madness" phenomenon to Driesell. It is attributed as his creation, and nowadays takes the form of a fun tradition all the top programs use to tip off the new season. Its popularity is a testament to the coach's vision and creativity.

"I didn't have it for the old people," he said of Midnight Madness. "I had it for the students. The students, at midnight, are out partying or drinking beer or whatever they're doing. That's the reason I had it. So we used to fill [the arena] up."

Over 40-plus years, the 86-year-old Driesell coached 1,180 games and won two-thirds of them. That consistency and success rate is far from the norm in today's college hoops landscape.

"If we hadn't won, I would've probably quit," said Driesell, known for his unconventional motivating techniques. "Winning is fun."

You couldn't blame Driesell, who had four teams end the season ranked in the AP Top 10, if he got tired of waiting around for his

chance to enter the hall. Eleven years passed between his induction into the College Basketball Hall of Fame and his induction into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, which is hoops heaven for fans of the sport. He was a three-time finalist before being elected earlier this year.

Despite the long wait, he said it is water under the bridge now that he has his "Naismith Orange" blazer.

"I was disappointed I didn't get in, but now that I'm in, I think it was God's will," he told *Madison*. "That's the way I looked at it."

At JMU, Driesell is credited with building a winning program and taking it to the next level. His Dukes won five CAA regular-season titles and the conference tournament championship in 1994. Twice he was named CAA Coach of the Year, and he posted a 159-111 overall record at Madison.

Work ethic was one of his calling cards. Driesell was a tireless worker, an attribute that rubbed off on—among others—his son,

Chuck, who was an assistant coach on his staff at JMU.

"Anybody who is successful works hard," Driesell said. "And that's what I've tried to impart on all my players. If you work hard, you're going to be successful in whatever it is. I hope that the players who played for me took that away from me—because they knew I worked hard."

Driesell said he's ecstatic to be officially considered among the game's all-time greats. "I'm overjoyed to be in the Hall of Fame," he said.

Driesell chose Hall of Famers Mike Krzyzewski, John Thompson and George Raveling as his presenters. Driesell ranks 12th among Division I coaches in all-time wins with an overall coaching record of 786-394 (.666). His teams appeared in 21 postseason tournaments (13 NCAA, 8 NIT). 

 For more on the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame enshrinement, visit HoopHall.com and NBA.com/halloffame.