

Winning Ways

Cajuns recruit accomplished head basketball coach

BOB MARLIN, UL LAFAYETTE'S NEW head basketball coach, is focused on success in the classroom as well as on the court.

He spent the past 12 years as head coach at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. During his tenure, the Bearkats compiled a 225-131 record, earned three conference championships and made two appearances in the NCAA tournament.

"We won the most games over a 12-year period in the Southland Conference but we also had the most student-athletes on the academic all-conference team. We also finished among the top three teams in our league seven out of eight years. So, we were very consistent," Marlin said in a recent interview.

That's the kind of program he intends to build at UL Lafayette.

"As a coach, I have three goals for my players. I want them to be the best students they can be, the best people they can be and the best basketball players they can be," he said.

In March, the National Association of Basketball Coaches named Marlin Coach of the Year in his division.

In April, he received the 2010 Skip Prosser Man of the Year Award. That award was established in 2008 to honor successful basketball coaches who are known for their moral integrity – on and off the court. Prosser was head coach at Wake Forest University when he died in 2007. He was the only coach in NCAA history to lead three schools to the NCAA Tournament in his first year of coaching their teams.

Before accepting UL Lafayette's offer, Marlin was considered for the top coach-

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ing spot at three other schools: Auburn University, the University of Houston and the University of Texas at El Paso.

UL Lafayette hired a consulting firm to assist with a search to replace Robert Lee, its head basketball coach for the past six years. Lee's employment contract was not extended this year. An advisory committee helped evaluate candidates for the position.

"When we had the opportunity to meet Coach Marlin, we were convinced he was the coach to lead our program," said David Walker, UL Lafayette's athletic director. "But Bob Marlin was no longer the best-kept secret in college basketball. Several universities saw the same qualities in him that we saw and the fact that he chose to be at UL makes this even more special."

A native of Tupelo, Miss., Marlin earned a bachelor's degree in physical education from Mississippi State University in 1981. He holds a master's degree in health and physical education, with a minor in guidance and counseling, which he earned at the University of Louisiana at Monroe in 1983.

Marlin was a graduate assistant coach at ULM before moving to Houston Baptist University, where he spent six seasons as an assistant from 1983-89. After a year at Marshall University in Huntington, W. Va., he accepted his first position as a



Bob Marlin was named UL Lafayette's 13th head basketball coach in late March.

head coach at Pensacola Junior College.

Marlin's accomplishments there, including a national championship, helped him move to the Southeastern Conference. He was an assistant coach at the University of Alabama from 1995 until 1998, when he became head coach at Sam Houston State.

Marlin is the 13th head basketball coach in UL Lafayette's history.

When he took the reins of the Ragin' Cajun program March 24, his first priority was assembling his coaching staff. Marlin chose Neil Hardin, Darby Rich and Nikita Johnson as assistant coaches. Hardin and Rich worked with Marlin at Sam Houston State University. Johnson comes to UL Lafayette from Louisiana Tech.

Marlin said the assistant coaches immediately began to evaluate team members, including three new recruits. "We've got a good nucleus but it's still a bit of a puzzle. If we plug in the right guys, I feel like we could have a strong team in the coming season. We're trying to build a solid foundation, so we don't want to just have a great season this year, then drop off the radar. We want to build a strong program and be consistent," he said.

UL Lafayette's sports facilities are a plus in recruiting. "We have outstanding facilities. The Cajundome is a great arena and the indoor practice facility gives us the opportunity to practice day or night," Marlin observed.

He described the Southland and Sunbelt conferences as "comparable leagues," with one notable exception.

"The Southland Conference is a Texas-Louisiana league, while the Sunbelt encompasses teams all the way from Denver to Miami, so the travel's a lot more extensive."

As he prepares for his first season as a Ragin' Cajun head coach, Marlin said he'll stay focused on the approach he's developed during his career.

"At the end of the day, a coach is an educator. We help the student-athletes in the classroom and on the court. We help them to be better people. The reason I coach is because of the relationships you develop with people. And certainly, some of the most important people are your players.

"We have a core philosophy that never changes and that's fundamental basketball, teamwork, playing hard defensively and sharing the basketball. Sticking to the fundamentals will give us the best chance to be successful." ■

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

2010 Skip Prosser Man of the Year Award
2010 District 23 National Association of Basketball Coaches' Coach of the Year
1993 Kodak/NABC National Coach of the Year
1993 *Basketball Times* Coach of the Year
Coached three Academic All-Americans
Coached 31 Academic All-Conference players

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AT SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Three Southland Conference championships (2000, 2003, 2010)
Two NCAA Division I national tournament appearances (2003, 2010)
Most NCAA Division I victories in one season – 25 (2009-2010)
Most NCAA Division I road victories in one season – 17 (2009-2010)
Best NCAA Division I non-league record – 12-1 (2007-2008)
Longest SHSU NCAA Division I winning streak - 11 games (2010)
SHSU teams have broken 41 NCAA Division I school records
SHSU players have broken 27 school records

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING:

"Bob Marlin is a program builder. The job he did at Sam Houston State was remarkable and a big reason why all of his coaching peers admire him. He is a great fit for the passionate Ragin' Cajuns fan base. They will admire how his teams play."

FRAN FRASCHILLA
ESPN basketball analyst

"Bob Marlin is one of the best coaches in America that not many people may know."

JAY BILAS
CBS/ESPN College Basketball Analyst

"Bob Marlin is a hard worker who is very organized. He communicates well with players. He has a real knack for recruiting quality players and then getting them to do what he wants them to do. He's done a tremendous job at Sam Houston State. Not only has his program been successful on the court, he has created excitement for college basketball in the community. Bob is not a 'rah! rah!' guy. He is a thorough, methodical coach who dots the Is and crosses the Ts and does a great job."

DAVE HOBBS
Former head coach, University of Alabama

"Marlin has won everywhere he has been. He recruits quality people. His teams are always well-coached. When you play Bob's team, you better be ready. You have to beat them. They are not going to beat themselves."

BILL SELF
Head coach, University of Kansas