

10/2/2017

ESPN.com - Dean Smith dies at age of 83

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**ESPN.com: Men's College Basketball** [Print without images]

Sunday, February 8, 2015

Updated: February 12, 8:14 AM ET

Dean Smith dies at age of 83

ESPN.com news services

Dean Smith, the coaching innovator who won two national championships at North Carolina, an Olympic gold medal in 1976 and induction into basketball's Hall of Fame more than a decade before he left the bench, has died. He was 83.

The retired coach died "peacefully" at his North Carolina home Saturday night, the school said in a statement Sunday from Smith's family. He was with his wife and five children.

Smith had health issues in recent years, with the family saying in 2010 that he had a condition that was causing him to lose memory. He had kept a lower profile during that time. His wife, Linnea, accepted the Presidential Medal of Freedom on his behalf from President Barack Obama in November 2013.

Roy Williams, the current North Carolina coach who spent 10 years as Smith's assistant, said Smith "was the greatest there ever was on the court but far, far better off the court with people."

"I'd like to say on behalf of all our players and coaches, past and present, that Dean Smith was the perfect picture of what a college basketball coach should have been," Williams said in a statement. "We love him, and we will miss him."

In a career that spanned more than 40 years, Smith coached the likes of Michael Jordan and James Worthy and influenced the game and how it is played in ways that are unrivaled.

"Other than my parents, no one had a bigger influence on my life than Coach Smith," Jordan said in a statement. "He was more than a coach -- he was my mentor, my teacher, my second father. Coach was always there for me whenever I needed him and I loved him for it. In teaching me the game of basketball, he taught me about life. My heart goes out to Linnea and their kids. We've lost a great man who had an incredible impact on his players, his staff and the entire UNC family."

Smith's Four Corners time-melting offense led to the creation of the shot clock to counter it. He was the first coach at North Carolina, and among the first in the segregated South, to offer a scholarship to a black athlete. The now-common "point to the passer," in which a scorer acknowledges a teammate's assist, started in Chapel Hill and became a hallmark of Smith's always humble "Carolina Way."

He was a direct coaching descendant of basketball's father, James Naismith, playing and later coaching at Kansas for the inventor of the game's most famous student, Jayhawks coach Phog Allen.

Smith would pass lessons learned in Kansas along at North Carolina, adding more than a few of his own. He tutored perhaps the game's greatest player, Jordan, who burst onto the national stage as a freshman on Smith's 1982 national title team, and two of basketball's most successful coaches, fellow Hall of Famers Larry Brown and Williams.

Dean Smith Coaching Facts



- 36 seasons as coach of North Carolina (1961-62 to 1996-97)

- 879-254 (.776 win pct.)
- Retired with more wins than any coach in men's Division I history
- 11 Final Four appearances
- 2 national championships (1982 and 1993)
- 17 ACC regular-season titles, 13 ACC tournament titles
- 364-136 all-time in ACC regular-season play (.728 win pct.)
- 8-time ACC Coach of the Year (1967, '68, '71, '76, '77, '79, '88, '93)
- UNC finished in top 3 in ACC regular-season standings in each of Smith's final 33 seasons as head coach
- One losing season in 36 years as UNC head coach (8-9 in 1961-62, his first season)
- Head coach of gold-medal winning USA men's Olympic Team in 1976 (Montreal)

-- *ESPN Stats & Information*

The numerical record of Smith's accomplishments is staggering. His only losing season came in his first, and he left the game having surpassed Kentucky's Adolph Rupp as the winningest men's basketball coach in Division I history.

He led the Tar Heels to 13 ACC tournament championships, appearances in 11 Final Fours, five national title games and NCAA championships in 1982 and 1993. North Carolina won at least 20 games in each of his final 27 seasons and made 23 consecutive appearances in the NCAA tournament.

"We have lost a man who cannot be replaced," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "He was one of a kind, and the sport of basketball lost one of its true pillars. Dean possessed one of the greatest basketball minds and was a magnificent teacher and tactician. While building an elite program at North Carolina, he was clearly ahead of his time in dealing with social issues.

"However, his greatest gift was his unique ability to teach what it takes to become a good man. That was easy for him to do because he was a great man himself. All of his players benefited greatly from his basketball teachings, but even more from his ability to help mold men of integrity, honor and purpose. Those teachings, specifically, will live forever in those he touched."

Along the way, more than 95 percent of Smith's lettermen graduated from one of the nation's premier public universities.

His devotion to a humble, team-first philosophy -- the famed "Carolina Way" -- bred a fierce loyalty among the Tar Heels. Williams was an enormous success at Kansas, able to resist returning to his alma mater in 2000. He could not do so three years later when Smith called, and Williams tearfully left the Jayhawks behind after 15 seasons and returned to Chapel Hill.

"His concern for people will be the legacy I will remember most," Williams said in his statement. "He was a mentor to so many people; he was my mentor. He gave me a chance but, more importantly, he shared with me his knowledge, which is the greatest gift you can give someone.

"I'm 64 years old and everything I do with our basketball program and the way I deal with the University is driven by my desire to make Coach Smith proud. When I came back to Carolina, the driving force was to make him proud and I still think that today."

When North Carolina held a reunion for school's 1957 and 1982 championship teams in 2007, Smith drew the largest applause from the crowd, even as he stood alongside Jordan and fellow Tar Heel greats Worthy and Phil Ford. During the ceremony, Jordan put his arm around Smith and kissed him on the head.

Smith remained in the background after his retirement, keeping an office at the Dean E. Smith Center -- the arena that opened while he was still coaching in 1986. He often consulted North Carolina players as they considered whether to leave school early for the NBA and would occasionally watch Williams direct practice and take notes. He was hesitant to give them to his former assistant, fearful of suggesting something that might not work.

Though he never ran for office, Smith helped shape political and social views in North Carolina as coach of the state's beloved Tar Heels. At the urging of his pastor, he recruited blacks to his team and in 1967 made Charlie Scott the first black scholarship athlete at North Carolina and one of the first in the South.

Smith was active in politics, often supporting Democrats and liberal candidates. He donated money to the presidential campaigns of Howard Dean and Bill Bradley and supported former North Carolina Sen. John Edwards -- a North Carolina alumnus -- in his two presidential bids before later endorsing Obama.

"Last night, America lost not just a coaching legend but a gentleman and a citizen," Obama said in a statement released later Sunday. "When he retired, Dean Smith had won more games than any other college basketball coach in history. He went to 11 Final Fours, won two national titles, and reared a generation of players who went on to even better things elsewhere, including a young man named Michael Jordan -- and all of us from Chicago are thankful for that.

"But more importantly, Coach Smith showed us something that I've seen again and again on the court -- that basketball can tell us a lot more about who you are than a jumpshot alone ever could. He graduated more than 96 percent of his players and taught his teams to point to the teammate who passed them the ball after a basket. He pushed forward the Civil Rights movement, recruiting the first black scholarship athlete to North Carolina and helping to integrate a restaurant and a neighborhood in Chapel Hill. And in his final years, Coach Smith showed us how to fight an illness with courage and dignity. For all of that, I couldn't have been prouder to honor Coach Smith with Medal of Freedom in 2013."

Hall of Fame UConn coach Jim Calhoun also issued a statement on Smith's death.

"Like the rest of the college basketball world, I was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Dean Smith, who was not only one of the greatest coaches of all-time, but a true innovator of the game," the statement reads. "Dean was a father figure to many, many young coaches and taught a lot of us what it means to build a program, not just a team. ... Dean's influence, however, went far beyond basketball coaching. His work with desegregation and women's rights showed what an equally incredible person he was. What he means to the people of North Carolina is immeasurable."

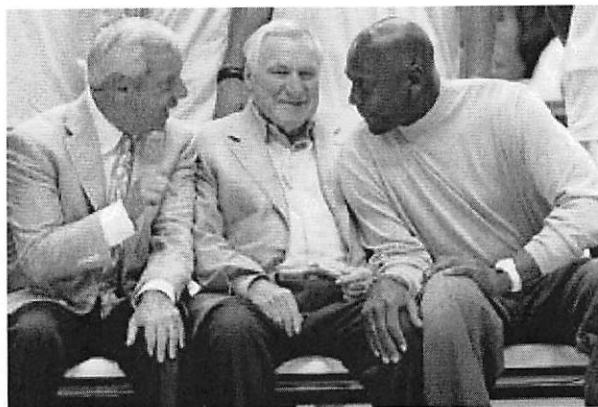
Later on Sunday, more than a hundred students assembled in front of the Dean Smith Center, sang the fight song once, and silently walked around the circle monument where people left flowers, lit about 25 candles and left signs like the motto of the Carolina way: "play hard, play smart, play together" before dispersing.

Smith's church served as a base for his advocacy. He joined the Baptist congregation soon after arriving in Chapel Hill, helping build it from a 60-person gathering on campus to a full church with 600 parishioners. It was booted from the Southern Baptist Convention and the North Carolina Baptist State Convention in 1992 for licensing a gay man to minister.

"He was willing to take controversial stands on a number of things as a member of our church -- being against the death penalty, affirming gays and lesbians, protesting nuclear proliferation," said Robert Seymour, the former pastor at Binkley Baptist Church. "He was one who has been willing to speak out on issues that many might hesitate to take a stand on."

Born Feb. 28, 1931, in Emporia, Kansas, the son of public school teachers, Dean Edwards Smith graduated from the University of Kansas with a communications degree in 1953. He played for the Jayhawks teams that won the NCAA title in 1952 and finished second the next year.

He served as an assistant coach at Kansas to Allen and Dick Harp before joining the Air Force. He was an assistant basketball coach at the Air Force Academy, and also the baseball and golf coach for a year, before leaving in 1958 to join Frank McGuire's staff at North Carolina. When McGuire left to coach in the NBA in the summer of 1961, the university tapped the 30-year-old Smith to take over.



Dean Smith, center, coached Hall of Fame players like Michael Jordan and mentored future coaches like Roy Williams in his 36 years at North Carolina.

Smith went 8-9 in his first season. In January 1965, in his fourth season, the Tar Heels returned to campus from a loss at Wake Forest to find an effigy of Smith hanging from a tree outside Woollen Gymnasium.

But Smith never had a losing season after his first. His breakthrough came in the 1966-67 season, when he led the Tar Heels to a 26-6 record. The season ended with the first of three straight ACC tournament titles and Final Four trips. His 1968 team lost in the final to Lew Alcindor and UCLA.

The Tar Heels lost in the title game twice more, in 1977 against Marquette and in 1981 against Bob Knight's Isiah Thomas-led Indiana, before Smith won his first NCAA championship in 1982. In one of the tournament's most enduring highlights, Jordan knocked down a 16-foot jumper in the final seconds to give the Tar Heels a 63-62 win against Patrick Ewing and Georgetown in New Orleans.

"A great writer in Charlotte once said that it was our system that kept us from winning the national championship," Smith said after the game. "It's the most ridiculous comment ever made, and I always wanted to say that. We don't have a system. We try to use our talent."

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Other than my parents, no one had a bigger influence on my life than Coach Smith. He was more than a coach -- he was my mentor, my teacher, my second father. Coach was always there for me whenever I needed him and I loved him for it. In teaching me the game of basketball, he taught me about life.

”- *Michael Jordan*

Smith won his final championship in 1993 with a balanced team that won 34 games. Once in the Final Four, the Tar Heels beat Williams' Jayhawks and Michigan's "Fab Five" to claim another title in the Big Easy.

Smith retired in October 1997 with a career record of 879-254, having surpassed Rupp's record of 876 victories during the NCAA tournament that March. When he left the game, he did so with more wins in the NCAA tournament than any other coach, though both records were surpassed in recent seasons.

Knight overtook Smith's win total in 2007 while at Texas Tech, and the combustible coach summoned an Associated Press writer afterward, upset that he had forgotten to publicly thank Smith after the game. Krzyzewski -- Smith's Tobacco Road rival at Duke -- later surpassed Knight and recently earned his 1,000th victory.

Smith seemed uncomfortable with the attention that came with breaking Rupp's record. When Knight was on the verge over taking it over, Smith noted with a sarcastic smile, "I'm going to cry about that."

"But still, it's something that, we do it for the team," Smith said. "When they're excited, that's why we're in this field. I'm sure it's that way with Bob Knight. It's never one of his goals and certainly was never one of mine."

More than 50 of Smith's players went on to play professionally in the NBA or the ABA, and more played overseas. Among them: Charlie Scott, Walter Davis, Sam Perkins, Brad Daugherty, J.R. Reid, Jerry Stackhouse, Rasheed Wallace, Vince Carter and Antawn Jamison. Along with Williams and Brown, the only coach to win both an NCAA and NBA title, former Tar Heels with successful coaching careers include George Karl and Eddie Fogler.

In addition to wife Linnea, Smith is survived by daughters Sandy, Sharon, Kristen and Kelly; son Scott; seven grandchildren and one great-granddaughter.

North Carolina will hold a public memorial service for Smith on Feb. 22.

The school says the service will take place in the campus arena bearing the name of the Hall of Fame coach.

The family has scheduled a private church service for Thursday for family, close friends, former players, coaches and team managers -- who are asked to RSVP if they want to attend.

In a statement released by the school Monday, Smith's family said it is "comforted by the countless gestures and words" from well-wishers.

The family also asked people to donate to the Chapel Hill-based Inter-Faith Council for Social Service, the Dean E. Smith Opening Doors Fund or a charity of their choice in lieu of flowers.

ESPN.com's C.L. Brown and The Associated Press contributed to this report.
