

Martin named Vols New Head Coach

Written by Mike Kelly
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It didn't take long for the University of Tennessee to find a new men's basketball coach.

Less than a week after Bruce Pearl was relieved of his duties for unethical conduct, Tennessee has named Cuonzo Martin its new head basketball coach. Martin, a blue-collar guy who had a notorious work ethic as a player, takes over a team that was 19-15 this past season. The Vols ended their season with a blowout loss against Michigan in the opening round of the NCAA tournament.

Martin, who grew up in East St. Louis, IL, comes to Tennessee from Missouri State, where he was the Missouri Valley Conference Coach of the Year this past season. He was also a finalist for two national coaching awards.

He led the Bears to 61 wins (which includes a 26-9 record, a MVC regular-season championship, and an NIT appearance this past season) during his three-year stay with the program. But success is nothing new for Martin, who won two state championships during his high-school days playing for Bennie Lewis at East St. Louis Lincoln.

He was named the Most Valuable Player as a sophomore in the state championship game when the Tigers defeated St. Francis DeSales of Chicago in the Class AA finals. He poured in a game-high 40 points in that game. LaPhonso Ellis, who went on to star at Notre Dame and later in the National Basketball Association, was a senior on that team.

Soft-spoken, but loaded with toughness on the floor, Martin led the Tigers to a third place finish during an injury-plagued senior year. And following a one-year stay at New Hampton Prep School in New Hampshire, Martin went on to play at Purdue University for Gene Keady from 1991-95.

He showed off his moxie as a freshman, when he hit the game-winning shot on national television as Purdue knocked off Bobby Knight's highly-touted Indiana Hoosiers.

Martin scored 1.666 points during his career with the Boilermakers. He averaged more than 18 points-a-game and shot nearly 44% from the floor his senior year. He had brief stints at the professional level with the Milwaukee Bucks and the Vancouver (now Memphis) Grizzlies in the NBA. But he spent most of his four-years as a professional playing in Europe and the Continental Basketball Association.

Martin also spent eight years as an assistant coach under Keady and current coach Matt Painter at Purdue. He was promoted to associate head coach at Purdue in 2007-08 before he took the head coaching job at Missouri State in 2008-09.

"He has a proven track record of success as a head coach at Missouri State and an assistant at Purdue as well as an outstanding career as a college basketball player" said Tennessee Athletics Director Mike Hamilton in a statement released by the school. "His Missouri State program improved from 11 wins to 26 in just two seasons, and they won the regular season conference championship this year."

Pearl was dismissed as head coach at Tennessee last Monday, March 21. Assistant coach and former Appalachian State coach Houston Fancher was named interim head coach following Pearl's dismissal while the university conducted its search for a new head coach.

Martin will officially be introduced at a news conference on Monday.

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