

Smith Wins Medal Of Freedom

Written by Matt Bowers
Thursday, 08 August 2013 18:47

Former University of North Carolina men's basketball coach Dean Smith will receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom, President Barack Obama announced this afternoon. The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the nation's highest civilian honor. It is presented to those who have "made especially meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States, to world peace, or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors." Smith is one of 16 individuals named by President Obama today in a group that includes President Bill Clinton, Chicago Cub Hall of Famer Ernie Banks, Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee, Senators Daniel Inouye and Richard Lugar, entertainers Loretta Lynn and Oprah Winfrey and astronaut Sally Ride.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Executive Order signed by President John F. Kennedy establishing the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

President Obama says, "The Presidential Medal of Freedom goes to men and women who have dedicated their lives to enriching ours. This year's honorees have been blessed with extraordinary talent, but what sets them apart is their gift for sharing that talent with the world. It will be my honor to present them with a token of our nation's gratitude."

Smith, 82, led the Tar Heels to 879 wins and two NCAA championships in a 36-year head coaching career that spanned from 1961 to 1997. At the time of his retirement following the 1997 Final Four, Smith held the record for most coaching wins by a Division I men's basketball coach.

"This is an extraordinary honor," says Coach Smith's family. "We were touched by those who asked for the recognition and by the President's decision to give an award to Dean for his work both on and off the court. We know he would be humbled to be in the company of President Clinton, United States senators, scientists, entertainers, the great Hall of Famer Ernie Banks and the other distinguished Americans who are receiving the award. We also know he would take this as an opportunity to recognize all the young men who played for him and the assistant coaches who worked with him, as well as the University. Again, this medal is a tremendous honor."

A champion of civil rights, human rights and academic achievement in addition to being one of the premier basketball coaches in American sports history, Smith joins former UCLA coach John Wooden as the second college men's basketball coach to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

ESPN named Smith one of the seven greatest coaches of the 20th Century, Sports Illustrated named him Sportsman of the Year in 1997, he was inducted into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in 1983, the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame in 1981, was an inaugural member of the National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame in 2006 and joined the International (FIBA) Basketball Hall of Fame in 2007. James Naismith, John Wooden, Oscar Robertson and Bill Russell joined Smith in the first class of the College Basketball Hall of Fame.

Smith also has received the Arthur Ashe Award for Courage at the ESPYs, the National Good Sportsmanship Award in 2011 and became the first recipient of the Mentor Award for Lifetime Achievement, given by the University of North Carolina Committee on Teaching Awards for "a broader range of teaching beyond the classroom."

Smith's notable coaching highlights include:

Leading Carolina to the 1982 and 1993 NCAA championships and the 1971 NIT title.

Under Smith, the Tar Heels won at least 20 games for 27 straight years and 30 of his final

Smith Wins Medal Of Freedom

Written by Matt Bowers

Thursday, 08 August 2013 18:47

31. No coach in history produced that many consecutive 20-win seasons.

Carolina was ranked in the final Top 10 of both the Associated Press and coaches' polls each year from 1981-89. That nine-year run is the second-longest streak of Top 10 finishes in history, exceeded only by UCLA's 13-year string from 1967 to 1979.

Smith's teams finished the season ranked No. 1 in at least one of the two major polls four times (1982, 1984, 1993 and 1994).

Smith's teams were also the dominant force in the ACC. The Tar Heels under Smith had a record of 364-136 in ACC regular-season play, a winning percentage of .728.

The Tar Heels finished at least third in the ACC regular-season standings for 33 successive seasons. In that span, Carolina finished first 17 times, second 11 times and third five times.

Carolina won 13 ACC Tournaments under Smith.

His teams played in 11 Final Fours.

Smith's teams made 23 consecutive appearances in the NCAA Tournament.

In his last 31 years, Smith led the Tar Heels into the NCAA Tournament 27 times.

Carolina reached the Sweet 16 of NCAA play each season from 1981-93. That 13-year streak is the second longest in Tournament history to a 14-year stretch by UCLA from 1967 to 1980.

More than 95 percent of Carolina basketball lettermen earned their degree.

"Coach Smith set a standard of excellence on and off the court by which coaches and athletic departments have modeled themselves for decades," says Director of Athletics Bubba Cunningham. "The Presidential Medal of Freedom is a rich reward for someone who put teaching young people the game of life as important as the sport of basketball. On behalf of the University of North Carolina I wish to congratulate Coach Smith and his family and express our appreciation to President Obama for recognizing Coach Smith with such a prestigious award." Born February 28, 1931, in Emporia, Kan., Dean Edwards Smith grew up as the son of public school teachers. He graduated from Topeka High School in 1949 and went to the University of Kansas on an academic scholarship. He played varsity basketball and baseball and freshman football for the Jayhawks. He was a member of Jayhawk basketball teams that won the NCAA title in 1952 and finished second in 1953.

Smith was an assistant coach at Kansas to Phog Allen and Dick Harp, then served in the U.S. Air Force as a lieutenant. Smith served for three years as an assistant basketball coach under Bob Spear at the United States Air Force Academy. In 1958, Frank McGuire asked him to join his staff at Carolina as an assistant coach. Smith served as an assistant under McGuire for three years before McGuire resigned to become head coach of the NBA's Philadelphia Warriors in the summer of 1961. At that time, Carolina Chancellor William Aycock tapped the 30-year-old Smith to become UNC's head coach.

The White House will announce the date of the medal ceremony, which will be held in Washington, D.C., at a later date.

Photo Courtesy: Dean Smith, UNC Athletics