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High school basketball coaching icon Royce Youree headed to Arizona Sports Hall of Fame



Richard Obert, azcentral sports

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(Photo: Arizona Republic file photo)

Royce Youree finally made it.

After coaching his last boys basketball state championship in 1981, the coaching icon will be inducted into the Arizona Sports Hall of Fame.

Youree led Phoenix East to five big-schools state championships, before the Phoenix Union High School District closed the school in 1982, ending a meteoric and mesmerizing chapter to one of the greatest programs in Arizona high school history.

He joins a class that includes Diamondbacks 2001 World Series Co-MVP Randy Johnson, former Suns coach John McLeod, ex-Cardinals safety Adrian Wilson, car racer Bob Bondurant and former Grand Canyon State Games Executive Director Erik Widmark.

The 46th Arizona Sports Hall of Fame ceremony will be held on Oct. 27 at the Tempe Center for the Arts, starting at 5:30 p.m.

Youree was a top basketball player at Arizona State, helping the Sun Devils reach their first NCAA Tournament appearance in 1958.

He led East's basketball program from 1969 until it closed in '82, amassing a 301-56 record. The five state titles started with the 1970-71 team.

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His teams appeared in six state championship games with the only loss coming in a classic four-overtime defeat to Phoenix Alhambra, 68-66, in 1974.

Youree is part of ASU's Athletic Hall of Fame (1995 inductee), the Pac-10 Hall of Honor (2009) and the National High School Athletic Coaches Hall of Fame (2012).

There were rumblings that Youree was going into the Arizona Sports Hall of Fame before East closed more than three decades ago.

"I'm just very pleased," said Youree, who lives in Chandler. "I look back at my players, my assistants, the coaches and players I've been around, because of all of them, this happens."

Youree went on to lead Phoenix Camelback for a while. He coached the Arizona BCI team that featured Shadow Mountain point guard Mike Bibby in the mid-1990s. He was co-coach at Mesa Community College with Tom Bennett for a while. He also spent time as an NBA scout.

But a big piece of Youree's heart stayed at East.

"The funny thing is, I'd still be there (had the school not closed)," Youree said. "People always strive to get to a higher level. I always felt that was a high level."

To suggest human-interest story ideas and other news, reach Obert at richard.obert@arizonarepublic.com (<mailto:richard.obert@arizonarepublic.com>) or 602-460-1710. Follow him at twitter.com/azc_obert (http://twitter.com/azc_obert).

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