

2012 COACHES HALL OF FAME BANQUET & INDUCTION CEREMONIES

FRIDAY, JUNE 22, 2012

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2012 INDUCTEES

George Blair

A graduate of Pascagoula High School and Ole Miss, Coach George Blair spent the majority of his coaching career at Laurel High School, where his 1990 football team won the 4A State Championship. Additional wins by his Tornadoes were the 1972 Red Carpet Bowl, the 1974 Shrimp Bowl/South Big 8 champs, the Mississippi Bowl in 1975 and 1976, and the South State 4A title in 1988. Coach Blair was named the Big 8 Conference Coach of the Year in 1970 and the District 5 Coach of the Year in 1987, 1988 and 1990. His professional contributions include organizing the Fellowship of Christian Athletes at Laurel High in 1972 and organizing the "Gold Club" for ex-Tornado players, managers, coaches and other Laurel football supporters.

Willie Coats

In 1960, Coach Willie Coats' first coaching job started at Clara High School after he graduated from Stonewall High School and Mississippi Southern College. He went on to coach football for over four decades, with stops at Seminary, Lumberton, East Central Junior College (where he also coached baseball), Decatur, Quitman, Delta State (where he also was the head track coach while earning his master's degree), Hattiesburg, Pearl River Community College, Newton Academy and Choctaw Central. Coach Coats was named Apache Conference Coach of the Year in 1965 and Choctaw Conference Coach of the Year in 1978 (when his Decatur High team captured the Choctaw Conference Championship).

His Hattiesburg team won the Shrimp Bowl and South State titles; his 1992 Pearl River CC team captured the South State Championship; and his 1996 East Central CC team was the Huddle House Golden Isle Bowl Champion.

Prince Jones

A native of Walker Springs, AL, Coach Jones graduated from 33rd Avenue High School in Gulfport and then earned degrees from Mississippi Valley State and William Carey. He began his 40-year coaching career at 33rd Avenue and then spent 36 years at Gulfport High, coaching boys track and girls cross country. Coach Jones' Admirals won 19 district, 18 regional, 14 south state and 9 state championships in boys track, while his cross country girls captured district and state titles in 2000 and 2001. The MAC selected him as Boys Track Coach of the Year in 1988 and 1997, and as Girls Cross Country Coach of the Year in 2001. Coach Jones also served for 11 years as Gulfport's athletic director, secured college scholarships for over 100 high school athletes and was selected for the Athletic Hall of Fame at Mississippi Valley State University.

Bruce Merchant

After graduating from Collins High School, Jones Junior College and the University of Southern Mississippi, Coach Merchant began his football coaching career at Mize in 1973. He spent the next 4 years at Monticello, and in 1978, he arrived at Pearl High School, where he remained for the next

20 years before heading to Collins to lead the Tigers until his retirement in 2009. Coach Merchant's 1985 Pearl Pirates captured the 4A South State Championship, while his Collins Tigers captured back-to-back 3A State Championships in 2001 and 2002. The *Clarion-Ledger* named Coach Merchant the Metro Coach of the Year in 1985; the National Federation of High Schools awarded him State Coach of the Year honors in 2002 and 2003; and he was selected as the MAC Football Coach of the Year in 2003.

Lucy Young

A championship coach for slow pitch softball, fast pitch softball, boys and girls soccer, and boys and girls tennis, Coach Lucy Young spent her entire 36-year coaching career at Warren Central High School in Vicksburg. Coach Young graduated from Morton High School, East Central Junior College and Mississippi State University before starting at Warren Central in 1974. She was honored by the MAC as Boys Soccer Coach of the Year in 1984 and 1999, and by the National High School Athletic Association Region 5 in 1985 and 1992, and she was the "Winningest Coach in Mississippi" at the end of her soccer coaching career in 1999. Coach Young was also named Coach of the Year in soccer, slow pitch softball and fast pitch softball by the *Vicksburg Evening Post* on numerous occasions, and she was inducted into the East Central Community College Athletic Hall of Fame in 2005. ●