

Louis Stout

A barrier-breaking athlete sets example for others

Louis Stout became one of the Commonwealth's noted sports personalities due to his influences on and off the basketball court. As a 6-foot-4 basketball star, a Kentucky High School Athletic Association commissioner, and a media commentator, Stout has a legacy in Kentucky's sports scene exemplified by patience and progress. He began his basketball career in the waning days of segregation and became the nation's first African American to head a state's athletics program. Although he retired after 30 years at the KHSAA, Stout stays connected with the Kentucky sports scene and hasn't forgotten those who influenced him.

Stout grew up in Cynthiana and attended Banneker High, the town's small, all-black high school, where influences like coach James Way and principal Elmer David encouraged Stout to excel on and off the basketball court.

"Louis was always determined to rise above his environment," said Marilyn Wash, the principal's daughter. "When Louis was coming along, African Americans were not looked at for their intellectual ability. Maybe they could play basketball, but they weren't looked at for their brain."

This stereotype encouraged Stout, already a star athlete who made the Banneker squad as a sixth-grader, to sing in the school chorus.

Stout's athletic skills and love for the game developed when Banneker competed in the Kentucky High School



Louis Stout was a basketball star at Regis College.

Athletic League, the state's African-American counterpart to the KHSAA.

"The League was my guiding light for my early years in Cynthiana," Stout said. "It was a time to express our talents as well as our mental toughness."

Though official competition was segregated, blacks and whites occasionally scrimmaged together on outdoor courts. That is where Stout met Jerry Jenkins, his boyhood opponent and lifelong friend.

"Even back before they had Little League football, baseball, or basketball, the white kids took on the black kids,"

Jenkins said. "Nobody refereed, nobody umpired. Louis was the big man on the black team. And I kind of dominated the white team."

It wasn't long into his high school career before the Cynthiana star began to play integrated basketball. On Stout's 15th birthday, May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court declared segregated schools unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education*. By the fall of 1956, Banneker had merged with Cynthiana High School.

"From the time we enrolled, we had three black starters, at times all five," Stout said. "Seven players went from Banneker, and all seven joined the team."

Though most Cynthiana students accepted Banneker transfers, not all high schools on the road were as welcoming. When playing away games in central Kentucky, Stout and his African-American teammates weren't always welcomed, but rarely did it affect their performance.

"I'm not saying everything was smooth

and cozy, but we had a motive," Stout said. "We ignored a lot of stuff. You had to. When we went to play, [hecklers] attempted to intimidate us. We were prepared to play basketball."

This focused approach led to Stout's illustrious basketball career and a reputation on the regional, state and national levels. He and Jenkins met once again on the high school courts after Stout transferred to Cynthiana and Jenkins played at Harrison County High.

"Louis was a tough basketball player," Jenkins said. "He was pretty fluid."



Stout coached at Tates Creek High School.

He was a guy that could rebound, shoot, and handle the ball. The whole team was built around Louis. They had some other guys that could play, but Louis was the man. Quick. Sneaky quick."

Sanford T. Roach, the legendary coach at Lexington's Paul Lawrence Dunbar, agrees.

"I knew Stout when he played basketball at Cynthiana," Roach said. "He was a very good player, and a very heady player, a very professional player. Well schooled in the fundamentals of basketball."

Stout led Cynthiana in scoring and took his school to the state tournament all three years. As a senior, he averaged 31 points and 24 rebounds per game and led the state in scoring. He was selected first-team All-State, his jersey was retired, and he received national recognition as an All-American.

That caught the eye of college coaches across the country. He received 150 letters from schools like the Air Force Academy and Michigan State. But fellow Cynthianan Joe B. Hall knew Stout's ability and his persona, and took him under his wing.

Before Hall coached the Kentucky Wildcats, he also played for Cynthiana and coached at Regis College in Denver. At Hall's invitation, Stout chose a campus that would discipline and guide him.

"I needed that discipline," Stout admitted.

"The environment at Regis was very good for him, being a smaller school," Hall said. "The Jesuit priests took a special interest in the students. The school required 16 hours of philosophy. All of that helped Louis grow as a person."

Hall, too, was a strong influence on his star player. Some have likened the connection that developed between Stout and Hall to a father-son relationship.

"Louis spent a lot of time at my home," Hall said. "He babysat my kids. Being from my hometown, I guess he felt a closeness."

Stout led Regis in scoring for four years and set several rebounding records. He also worked with younger, sometimes disadvantaged, students and athletes, inspiring them with discipline and diversity. After working at the Lookout Mountain School for Boys in Golden, Colo., Stout got a call from Lexington. Joe B. Hall had returned to the University of Kentucky, and Dunbar's Roach was moving into school administration. Roach, Hall, and others conferred about the right man for the Dunbar coaching job and concluded it was Louis Stout.

Stout had watched the Dunbar tradition and was humbled and surprised to replace Roach. The veteran coach had won more than 500 games, and his team won or placed in the league's state tournament several times.

"Not being a graduate of Dunbar, I never thought I could be the head coach there," he said. "They called me. So I came back and coached two years."

His relationship with his predecessor helped him earn two district championships, and his team was twice regional runner-up.

The Dunbar players admired Stout upon his arrival in 1965.

"Here came this young, inspiring black man, who we could all trust and look up to," said Joe Hamilton, one of Stout's Bearcats. "Coach Stout was like a father, a counselor. He was also a real sharp dresser. He was cool."

His players soon realized their coach was likeable and understanding, but he also meant business. Hamilton recalled running rather early in the season, and strict curfews were enforced throughout the year.

"Some of the more important things I learned from coach Stout went beyond basketball," said Hamilton, who later played six years in the American Basketball Association. "He taught us how to get along with others."

Colleagues and players agree that an odd balance of control and flexibility marked his coaching style. Jerry Jenkins by this time coached at Harrison County and observed Stout and his team from the opposite end of the scorer's table. "Louis' coaching style ... 'controlled chaos' would probably best describe it," Jenkins said.

He gave his players a reasonable amount of autonomy.

"What I loved about coach Stout [is that] he let you play," Hamilton said. "He would let us adjust when necessary."

Stout's days at Dunbar were his "glory days," he said. "If Dunbar had remained open, I would never have left. I felt like being an African American in that position, teaching and coaching, that was the place I needed to be."

He set examples when hiring officials for Dunbar's home games against white teams.

"I'd try to bring in a black official and a white official," Stout said. "I didn't want the visiting white team to lose and think they got 'homed.'"

After Dunbar closed in 1967, Stout transferred to Tates Creek High School, where he served as assistant coach for two years before becoming the team's head coach.

While there, white players accepted Stout and look back positively on their experiences. "I enjoyed playing for him a whole lot," recalled Steve Musgrave, who later played for Transylvania. "He was more than a coach. He used tough love. And he brought a diverse group of people together after integration to play for him."

As Stout continued to break down barriers as a coach, the Kentucky High School Athletic Association came under fire for failing to support black officials. The Kentucky Civil Liberties Union and the Black Coaches Association filed a federal lawsuit. Judge Mac Swinford condemned the KHSAA, declaring "something is wrong when Negroes make up 50 percent of the players and only 1 percent of the officials." The court mandated that the KHSAA appoint at least one black administrator and take affirmative steps to train and employ more



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His vacation over, John left for Princeton—presumably not knowing that Milly had become pregnant with his child. Milly delivered a “fine sturdy boy” the following spring, “as fair in complexion as any white child in Kentucky.” He was named Alfred Francis.

After two years away at Princeton, John Todd Russell abandoned his studies and returned to Kentucky, the wealth of his family allowing him to take his place in its society. But a long life of happiness was not to be his. While returning home to Lexington from Gallatin County in October 1822, Russell became violently ill in Shelbyville.

Knowing that he was near death, Russell’s thoughts turned to his young son. Wanting to “insure the freedom and respectability of the child,” Russell “acknowledged Milly’s boy Alfred to be his son.” Then he died.

Russell’s inconsolable mother Mary desperately wanted her son’s family with her, but in slavery times, this required satisfying the claims of their “owners” besides her mother. Mary frantically tried to purchase Milly and Alfred and was unmercifully taken advantage of, eventually paying “the enormous sum” of \$1,200.

Mary brought Milly and Alfred into her home and treated them virtually as members of the family. Alfred was a

“bright, lovely, well-behaved lad.” But like the illegitimate son of a king in earlier times, Alfred would be unable to secure his inheritance, and Mary made arrangements to send him and his mother to freedom in Liberia.

But when Mary Todd Russell married Robert Wickliffe, himself one of the richest

men in the Commonwealth, all her plans unraveled. Under Kentucky law, the moment she became Wickliffe’s wife, her slaves—though not her land and other property—were conveyed to him.

Betraying his reason for marrying her in the first place, Wickliffe refused

to free Milly and Alfred unless his wife signed over her fortune to him. He “extorted from her a conveyance of all her property,” the deeds of which she signed on Sept. 12, 1827. Having given everything she had to secure her grandson’s freedom, Mary quickly sent him and his mother to Liberia. It was related that “the last reputed descendant of John Todd, if he still lives, is in poverty on the barbarous shores of Africa.”

The above quotes were the contentions of Mary Owen Todd Russell Wickliffe’s cousin, Robert Smith Todd in a lawsuit he filed against Wickliffe after her death. Todd—an attorney who had handled Mrs. Wickliffe’s finances before she signed them over to her husband—sued Wickliffe for the return of Mary’s property to the Todd family.

And when Robert S. Todd died on July 16, 1849, the Todd family was represented by the husband of his daughter Mary Ann, a lawyer and congressman. His name was Abraham Lincoln.

For his part, Wickliffe denied that his wife had given him her Todd family property for any reason other than “love and affection.” Furthermore, Wickliffe contended, Robert Todd had revived an “old and long forgotten tale” to gain a legal advantage, pushing his wife into “an untimely grave.”

Wickliffe also disputed that Alfred was impoverished. “He is now, I am informed, a respectable Methodist divine, and a perfect gentleman in his manners. When Monrovia ... was attacked,” he added, “he stood the powder and shot of the enemy and fought in her defense most bravely.”

When the Lincolns left Lexington so he could return to Congress, the court case continued in other hands. Wickliffe subsequently prevailed.

History, of course, had much in store for the Lincolns. Mary Todd Lincoln became first lady, living an excruciating existence as she watched the nation—and the Todds—torn apart by the Civil War. Enduring the assassination of her husband and the deaths of two of her sons, she became a tragic, eccentric figure, living in something of a fantasy world in her sister’s house in Springfield, Ill., until she died in 1882.

Her second cousin was sworn in as president of Liberia the following year and died in office in April 1884.

It is unlikely either one knew the entire story of their kinship.

African-American officials. The KHSAA called on Stout.

He worked at the association from 1971 through his tenure as commissioner, which began in 1994. His impact and legacy at the KHSAA are synonymous with inclusion and diversity. Many of the same principles that took Stout from Cynthiana to coaching guided him at the KHSAA. He reconstituted African-American officials and brought the so-called minor sports up a level.

As an assistant commissioner, he worked to bring all athletes into the spotlight and to support the non-revenue sports. His successor, current Commissioner Brigid DeVries, praised Stout’s commitment to the less popular sports and his involvement with Title IX compliance.

“Those non-revenue sports are just as important to the student athletes as the high-profile sports,” DeVries said. “Louis was committed to those, as well as issues around diversity and gender equity. That was a real plus under his tenure.”

Stout served as commissioner until his retirement in 2002, when he turned full-time to a project he already had begun: telling the story of the Kentucky Athletic League that gave him his start.

His seven-year research mission took Stout to the far corners of the state, into now-elderly athletes’ homes, hearts and scrapbooks.

That research has resulted in *Shadows of the Past*, the story of the league and its participants. Host Communications designed and published the book. Stout, Host’s Brad Johnson and writer Tom Wallace worked together to put the commissioner’s research into a finished form—a 135-page collection of stories and photographs.

His drive to include every school and every notable athlete made this a daunting job.

“The driving force for Louis was not to get his name out there, but to get the names of those involved in this league out there,” Johnson said.

Stout travels across the state, giving lectures on local schools for audiences large and small, and he has also connected with sponsors to place the book in every Kentucky high school.

With the historical project largely behind him, Stout is still engaged in high school sports. He hosts a Friday night, *High School Scoreboard*, on WLAP, and he appears on *Scholastic Ball* on Saturday mornings on WKYT from 11:30-noon.

—DAVID WOLFFORD

Photos courtesy of Louis Stout