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Greg Smith inducted into Kentucky High School Hall of Fame

By Chip Hutcheson
Aug 16, 2023

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Pictured are (from left) Sheila Smith-Anderson, Greg Smith and Tony Smith following Greg's Kentucky Basketball Hall of Fame induction Saturday.

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Greg Smith was inducted into the Kentucky High School Basketball Hall of Fame on Saturday — joining his late brother, Dwight, in the prestigious group of the state's greatest players.

He is a member of the 11th class of inductees at the historic State Theatre in downtown Elizabethtown. The honor comes over six months after Dwight had his jersey retired at Western Kentucky University, and seven years after Dwight was inducted into the Hall of Fame.

"It's come full circle," Greg said. "I'm very blessed to be able to say that I am continuing to follow in the footsteps of my brother and father." He said he was honored to follow "right behind my brother and guys I played with and played against."

Smith, who played for Princeton Dotson from 1960-63 and for Caldwell County in 1964, lives in Portland, Ore., where he is close to family members that include 15 grandchildren. "We have two sets of twins, and the boys outnumber the girls by one."

Greg and Dwight both started on the Dotson 1963 team that won the 2nd Region title and competed in the state tournament. The next year consolidation closed Dotson – Dwight went to Western Kentucky University to play his freshman season, and Greg went to Caldwell for his senior year, where he played football and led Caldwell to the 2nd Region crown and a berth in the state tournament. The Tigers won their opening game, but then lost to Breckinridge County. Caldwell had tied that game at 58-58 with 3:23 left in the game. Breckinridge froze the ball until the final seconds and Butch Beard made a 5-foot baseline jumper and was fouled on the play with one second left. Smith was sidelined much of that game after picking up his fourth foul in the second quarter and sitting out much of the second half.

“I talk to Butch about once a month,” Smith said Saturday. “He had planned on attending tonight, but had surgery and couldn’t make it. We laugh and talk about a lot of things.”

Smith’s senior year at Caldwell saw him average 16.1 points and 13.6 rebounds a game. He is the only Caldwell player to have his jersey retired by the school, and he still holds the record for most rebounds in a game – 36 against Madisonville Rosenwald.

He followed Dwight to WKU, where the Toppers won two OVC titles and NCAA berths.

Greg was drafted by the Milwaukee Bucks, and was a starter on the 1971 team that won the NBA championship, playing alongside Hall of Famers Lew Alcindor (who later changed his name to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar) and Oscar Robertson. Smith ended his NBA career with the Portland Trailblazers. “I am very blessed to be able to say that I continue to follow in the footsteps of my brother and father,” he said, noting they would all be happy for everything except him living in Oregon.

“Once a year we get back to Princeton, and go to Paducah to visit Sheila (Smith-Anderson, his sister). Princeton is a good little city.” The Hall of Fame ceremony gave him time to reflect on his late parents, Pearl and Henry Smith.

“It’s been a great ride having them as parents. They really sacrificed on behalf of all five of us (Dwight, the late Kay Smith, Sheila Smith-Anderson and brother Tony, who resides in Chicago).”

Smith is retired from the Salem Broadcasting Network, and is battling Parkinson’s Disease. “I kept it to myself a lot of years, but there’s no hiding it now. It has different stages, and it’s not a picnic.”

Smith said his strengths were his rebounding and defense. He offered this advice to aspiring athletes, regardless of their sport of choice. “You have to be dedicated and work hard — put the time in, time means everything. Find something you can do better than anybody else and hone in on it. Find something you can do that nobody can stop. Everybody has something.”

Speaking to a packed house Saturday night, co-emcee Dave Baker said, “This game means a lot to the fabric of Kentucky — it’s part of us, it’s who we are.” He noted that this 11th class of inductees included two players who won high school as well as college championships, four went on to play professionally and four were successful veteran coaches.

