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Three Rivers College Inducts First Members in Athletic Hall of Fame

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Gene Bess, J.P. McLane, Paula Corder King, Matt Palmer, and the 1979 National Championship Raiders Basketball Team were the first inductees in Three Rivers College's new Athletic Hall of Fame. A banquet was held in their honor on January 31 at the Holiday Inn in Poplar Bluff.

Located in the Libla Family Sports Complex, the Hall of Fame is now open for viewing during every event in the arena.

"Three Rivers College has a long and storied history of excellence in intercollegiate athletics. The athletic programs provide opportunities for our student athletes and fans of all ages to share and support a common goal," said Dr. Wesley Payne, President of Three Rivers College. "We are proud to honor these individuals and their achievements as Raiders and in their lives."

The inaugural inductees are:

Gene Bess

Gene Bess began his career at Three Rivers in 1969 as assistant basketball coach and was named head coach in 1970. His career record entering the 2019-2020 season is 1,281-404, making him the all-time most winning basketball coach in the nation.

Bess has won two national junior college championships, in 1979 and 1992. He has led the Raiders to 17 NJCAA tournament appearances and reached the final four nine times. He has been recognized as NJCAA Coach of the Year twice, Regional Coach of the Year 23 times, and MCCAC Conference Coach of the Year 19 times. In 2016, he received the highest award the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame gives when he achieved legend status. He also is a member of the Poplar Bluff Sports Hall of Fame and the NJCAA Hall of Fame.

J.P. McLane, Contributor

McLane has been involved with the Three Rivers Booster Club for more than 40 years. He has been generous with both his time and money, including giving a large donation to the Tinnin Fine Arts Center. In addition to serving on the Booster Club, he has been a fixture at Raiders games for decades and has worked continually to benefit Raiders athletics and Three Rivers College.

Paula Corder King

The first Lady Raiders basketball player to have her number retired, Paula Corder King had a storied career at Three Rivers during the 1996-97 and 1997-98 seasons. She was a two-time NJCAA All American, named 2nd Team All American her freshman year and 1st Team All American as a sophomore. Corder King was also named All Region 16 and All MCCAC Conference both of her seasons at TRC. She is the All Time Leading Scorer for the Three Rivers Lady Raiders basketball team and best Free Throw Shooter in Lady Raiders basketball history.

Matt Palmer

While at Three Rivers, Matt Palmer established himself as a fierce and durable pitcher. In 2000, he was voted by Region 16 coaches as the region's Top Player. He was selected in the Major League Baseball draft twice, first in 2001 by the Colorado Rockies and in 2002 with the San Francisco Giants, who he signed with. His 13-year professional career, 2002 – 2014, was highlighted by an amazing 2009 season with the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim where he compiled an 11-2 win/loss record and a 3.93 ERA.

1979 National Championship Raiders Basketball Team

The 1979 Championship Team includes: Players Don Brown, Mark Guethle, Sylvester James, Chuck Johnson, Robert Kirby, Marvin "Moon" McCrary, Wesley Murray, Pat Niemczyk, Dale Purnell, Dwayne Walker, Thurlon "Sam" Weaver, and Milton "Pike" Woodley; Head Coach Gene Bess; Assistant Coach Roger Pattillo; Manager Rick Alsup; and Radio Announcer Mark Parris.

In 1979, basketball was still a relatively new sport at a relatively new Three Rivers Junior College. The Raiders didn't have a gym of their own. The team played their home games at the Poplar Bluff High School Peters Gym and held practices at Sears Youth Center. They ran at Bacon Park and lived in a dorm in downtown Poplar Bluff.

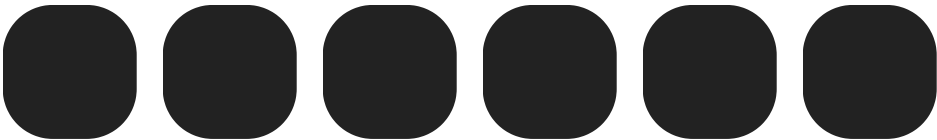
Despite the lack of facilities, the team lost only three games that season. The first three games of the National tournament saw the Raiders beat No. 1 Westchester 68 to 64, the Coffeyville Red Ravens 110 to 81, and Western Texas 109 to 103. The Raiders won the Championship game against Mercer County 60 to 59 in overtime.

Members of the inaugural Three Rivers Athletic Hall of Fame class stand for a photo at the Holiday Inn in Poplar Bluff. Members include Three Rivers Raiders basketball coach Gene Bess, Paula Corder King, J.P. McLane, Matt Palmer, and the 1979 Three Rivers men's basketball National Championship team, which includes Don Brown, Mark Guethle, Sylvester James, Chuck Johnson, Robert Kirby, Marvin "Moon" McCrary, Wesley Murray, Pat Niemczyk, Dale Purnell, Dwayne Walker, Thurlon "Sam" Weaver, and Milton "Pike" Woodley; head coach Gene Bess; assistant coach Roger Pattillo; manager Rick Alsup; and radio announcer Mark Parris.

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