

DePaul Basketball Coaches History



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DePaul University, located in Chicago, Illinois, has a storied basketball history that dates back to the early 20th century. The DePaul Blue Demons men's basketball team has seen a variety of coaches who have shaped the program's identity and success over the years. This article will delve into the history of DePaul basketball coaches, highlighting their contributions, achievements, and the overall impact they have had on the program.

Early Years and Formation of the Program

The DePaul basketball program began in 1907, and the first head coach was Joseph Z. O'Brien, guiding the team during its initial years. The sport was new, and the coaching strategies were still being developed.

- 1910s: The program experienced growth, but it wasn't until the 1920s that organized play began to take shape.
- 1930s: Under coach Ray Meyer, who took over in 1934, the program started to gain prominence. Meyer would become a legend at DePaul and would coach for 42 seasons, amassing over 700 wins.

Ray Meyer Era (1934-1997)

Ray Meyer is undoubtedly one of the most influential figures in DePaul basketball history. His tenure is marked by:

- **Winning Culture:** Meyer established a winning tradition at DePaul, leading the team to 20 NCAA tournament appearances and 7 NIT appearances.
- **Player Development:** He was known for developing players who would go on to have successful careers both in college and the NBA, including stars like Mark Aguirre and Terry Cummings.
- **Innovative Coaching:** Meyer was innovative in his coaching methods, adapting to the evolving game while maintaining a strong emphasis on team play.

Meyer retired in 1997, leaving behind a legacy that would influence future coaches and players.

Transition Period (1997-2002)

After the departure of Ray Meyer, DePaul entered a transitional period where the program struggled to maintain its previous success.

- **Joey Meyer (1997-2003):** Ray Meyer's son, Joey Meyer, took over as head coach. He faced the tough task of continuing his father's legacy and had mixed success, with a few NCAA tournament appearances but ultimately a lack of consistent performance.
- **Dave Leitao (2002-2005):** Following Joey Meyer, Dave Leitao was hired. He revitalized the program briefly, leading the Blue Demons to the NCAA tournament in 2004, marking a return to prominence.

The Rebuilding Phase (2005-2015)

The mid-2000s to early 2010s were tumultuous for DePaul basketball. Several coaching changes occurred, and the program struggled to find its footing.

- **Mike McKinney (2005):** Taking over after Leitao, McKinney had a brief tenure marked by difficulties in recruiting and performance, leading to his departure after just one season.
- **Jerry Wainwright (2005-2008):** Wainwright's coaching style aimed to stabilize the program. He managed to bring in some talented recruits but struggled to translate that into consistent wins.
- **Oliver Purnell (2010-2013):** A well-respected coach, Purnell was known for his defensive strategies. However, his time at DePaul was marked by challenges, and he ultimately left without significant success.

Recent Developments (2015-Present)

In recent years, DePaul has made strides to rebuild and return to competitiveness in college basketball.

- Dave Leitao (2015-2018): Leitao returned for a second stint, emphasizing player development and a return to fundamentals. His second tenure saw gradual improvements in the program, culminating in a more competitive team.
- Tony Stubblefield (2021-Present): Hired in 2021, Stubblefield is the current head coach. He previously served as an assistant coach at Oregon and has focused on revitalizing the Blue Demons through recruiting and modern coaching techniques.

Coaching Philosophy and Style

Each coach at DePaul has brought their unique approach to the game, influencing the team's identity and performance. Here are some notable coaching philosophies:

1. Ray Meyer's Emphasis on Team Play: Meyer valued teamwork above all, believing that a cohesive unit could outperform a collection of individual talents.
2. Dave Leitao's Defensive Focus: Leitao prioritized strong defensive schemes, aiming to create a tough, hard-nosed basketball culture.
3. Tony Stubblefield's Modern Approach: Stubblefield has embraced analytics and modern training methods, focusing on skill development and a fast-paced style of play.

Impact on Players and Community

The influence of DePaul basketball coaches extends beyond the court. They have shaped the lives of countless players and contributed to the Chicago community.

- Player Development: Coaches have consistently focused on developing not just athletes but well-rounded individuals. Many former players credit their success to the mentorship received during their time at DePaul.
- Community Engagement: DePaul coaches have often emphasized the importance of community service, encouraging players to engage with local initiatives and represent the university positively.

Legacy and Recognition

The legacy of DePaul basketball coaches is significant and continues to influence the program today.

- Hall of Fame Inductions: Ray Meyer was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 1979, solidifying his status as a coaching legend.

- Notable Players: The players developed under these coaches have left an indelible mark on the NBA and international basketball, showcasing the effectiveness of the coaching staff.

Conclusion

The history of DePaul basketball coaches is rich and varied, reflecting the evolution of college basketball itself. From the legendary Ray Meyer to the current leadership of Tony Stubblefield, each coach has contributed to the program's identity. As DePaul continues to navigate the challenges of modern college basketball, the foundation laid by past coaches will undoubtedly influence its future success. The commitment to player development, community engagement, and a winning culture will remain central to the Blue Demons' aspirations. As the program looks forward to new challenges, the legacy of its coaches will continue to inspire both players and fans alike.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who was the first head coach of DePaul basketball?

The first head coach of DePaul basketball was John B. McLendon, who led the team in the 1923-1924 season.

What significant achievements did Ray Meyer have during his tenure at DePaul?

Ray Meyer coached DePaul from 1942 to 1984, leading the team to 20 NCAA tournament appearances, including a run to the Final Four in 1979.

How did Pat Kennedy influence DePaul basketball?

Pat Kennedy served as the head coach from 1986 to 1991 and was known for revitalizing the program, leading the team to the NCAA tournament in 1987 and achieving notable success in the 1990s.

Who is the current head coach of DePaul basketball as of 2023?

As of 2023, the current head coach of DePaul basketball is Tony Stubblefield, who was appointed in 2021.

What impact did Jim Molinari have on the DePaul basketball program?

Jim Molinari served as head coach from 1991 to 1997 and is credited with maintaining competitiveness in the conference and developing several future

professional players.

What are some challenges faced by DePaul basketball coaches historically?

Historically, DePaul basketball coaches have faced challenges such as recruiting against larger programs, maintaining consistent on-court success, and navigating changes in conference alignment.

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