Coach Norman "Red" Hill and the 1999 ABAC national championship men's tennis team. The team will be inducted into the ABAC Athletics Hall of Fame on March 2 at 1 p.m. at Gressette Gym on the ABAC campus as a part of the Celebrate ABAC Alumni Weekend.

National Title Tennis Team to Enter ABAC Hall of Fame

TIFTON – Six players from four different countries knew their coach was walking off the court into retirement. So they put forth the effort to give him the greatest retirement gift of all, a national championship.
Because of their heroic play on the last match ever for legendary head coach Norman “Red” Hill, every player on the 1999 men’s national championship tennis team at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College will be inducted into the ABAC Athletics Hall of Fame on March 2 as a part of the Celebrate ABAC Alumni Weekend.

Other members of the 2013 Hall of Fame class include Henry Will Jones from the 1936-37 baseball, basketball, and football teams; women’s basketball coach Julie Conner, baseball player Z.B. Hamilton, and tennis player Derrick Racine.

Tickets are now available at a cost of $30 per person for the induction luncheon at 1 p.m. in Gressette Gym on March 2. Tickets can be purchased from the ABAC Office of College Advancement at (229) 391-4895. Tickets will be sold only in advance. No tickets will be available on the day of the event.

Members of the team were Richard Crabtree from England, Gildardo Lobo from Venezuela, Nathan Lundy from England, Eric Von Hellens from Australia, Glenn Allsop from Australia, Rajeev Rajapakse from Sri Lanka, and Richard Evans from England.

In 1999, Hill had already announced that he was retiring after the season.

“I knew we had a chance to win it but I knew playing Tyler in Tyler, Texas was going to be hard,” Hill said. “It was just one of the most fantastic things that ever happened to me. To go out that way, the kids really played hard for the school and for me.”

Hill said the regular season leading up to the national tournament was not a smooth ride. In fact, Evans, playing at number one singles, decided to give up on the Stallions and return to England during the spring break.
“Then he called me and asked me if he could come back,” Hill said. “I told him he had to start at number seven and play his way back up the ladder. Eric played really well at number one after Richard left.”

Evans did return and in a storybook ending, captured the most valuable player trophy.

Hill remembers the volume of the Tyler crowd.

“Sarge (Newell Dorsey) and I started rubbing empty tennis cans across the chain link fence every time we got a point to try to make some noise of our own,” Hill said.

Good strategy. The Stallions won the championship, lifted Hill on their shoulders, and they all went to Outback Steakhouse to celebrate.

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