Waycross Native Named to ABAC Hall of Fame

TIFTON—Tommy Dial said the 1964 Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College basketball team he played on was “just a bunch of old country boys with a crazy coach.”
The coach was Benny Dees. And thanks to Dial and his teammates, the Stallions were the 1964 state junior college champions. For his exploits on the basketball floor for ABAC, Dial has been named to the 2015 class of the ABAC Athletics Hall of Fame.

Tickets are now available at a cost of $30 per person for the induction dinner in Gressette Gym at 6 p.m. on April 10. The event is a part of the ABAC Homecoming Week activities. Athletics Director Alan Kramer said that persons who wish to attend the dinner can contact the Office of College Advancement at (229) 391-4895 for tickets. Tickets will only be sold in advance.

The Hall of Fame event will be a part of the alumni awards ceremony. For more information on the 2015 Homecoming Week activities, interested persons can visit the ABAC web site at www.abac.edu/alumni.

Dial, a Waycross native who now lives in Cartersville, scored 28 points in a 71-65 semifinal win over Young Harris and then tossed in 27 points in a 76-58 victory over Columbus to clinch the title for an ABAC team that averaged close to 100 points per game. He was named the Most Valuable Player of the state tournament, which was held in Statesboro at Georgia Southern College.

“Tifton just fell in love with us,” Dial said in a recent interview. “Benny Dees was Bobby Knight before there was a Bobby Knight. We were just a bunch of old country boys with a crazy coach.”

Dial played at Waycross High School where he lettered three years in baseball. But his real passion was basketball, a sport he lettered in for four years. Under the leadership of Coach
J.T. Hart, the 1962 Bulldogs went undefeated with 19 straight victories in the regular season before losing in the first round of the state playoffs.

A terrific shooter, Dial was selected for All-State and All-America honors. He played in the North vs. South All-Star game and got scholarship offers from Florida State and North Carolina State. But he had a girlfriend in Waycross. Plus, who could resist the country boy charm of Benny Dees?

“Benny had a persuasive way about him,” Dial said with a laugh. “He promised me a full ride scholarship to ABAC. Well, my full ride was that I had to get up every morning at 5 o’clock and go to the lunchroom to work. That was my scholarship.

“Seven of us stayed in a garage apartment. It was so cold in the winter we had to use electric blankets. ABAC built a new dorm before my sophomore year, and I was glad to live in it.”

Nicknamed “Rail” because he stretched 150 pounds over his 6-foot-3 frame, Dial carried over his stellar high school play into the college realm. He was named All-State in his freshman and sophomore seasons at ABAC as well as claiming All-District and All-America honors during his sophomore year.

“It was quite a run,” Dial said. “The ABAC students went to the Army Surplus Store and bought a bunch of old helmets. Then they lined up like a platoon and marched in that old gym. It was crazy.

“They had metal trash cans with Coke bottles inside. You can’t imagine the noise in that place. We just won the town over. Benny was a coach that made you better than you were.”
The Stallions lost to Gulf Coast 85-82 in Tallahassee, Fla., in the first round of the 1964 national tournament. Dial said Gulf Coast hit 41 of 52 free throws while the Stallions connected on 21 of 31 free throws. Dial had 12 points in that game.

Dial went on to play for the Georgia Southern team which finished second in the nation in the 1966 NAIA national tournament. As a coach at Cartersville High School from 1967-74, Dial won region titles and garnered over 100 wins for the girls’ basketball team in a five-year stretch.

Other 2015 inductees include Monika Lalewicz, Ralph Bryant, Sonny Skinner, Dr. Larry and Debra Moorman, and the 1999 ABAC women’s tennis team.

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