Owens Left Canadian Tobacco Field to Return to ABAC

TIFTON—David Owens was cropping tobacco in Canada in the late summer of 1962. Returning to Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College to play basketball for his sophomore year was not on his mind.
New ABAC Coach Benny Dees had other ideas.

“I spent the whole summer talking to his daddy to make sure David was going to come back,” Dees said in a recent telephone interview. “I knew we needed him. He was one of the best players I ever had.”

The ever persuasive Dees worked his magic, and Owens did return to ABAC where he led the Stallions to a fourth place finish in the 1963 state junior college basketball tournament. The Pavo native and Central High of Thomasville graduate was named the Most Valuable Player of the tournament.

For his expertise on the basketball floor, Owens has been named as a member of the 2016 class of the ABAC Athletics Hall of Fame. He will be inducted on April 1 in the ABAC Alumni Association Homecoming Awards Dinner in Gressette Gym. Tickets to the 6 p.m. ceremony are $30 per person. The event also includes top award winners from the ABAC Alumni Association as a part of the 2016 Homecoming Week activities.

Tickets can be purchased from the ABAC College Advancement Office at (229) 391-4895. The deadline to purchase tickets is March 21. There will be no tickets sold at the event. For more information on the 2016 Homecoming Week, interested persons can visit the web site at www.abac.edu/homecoming.

“David could score, and he was quick,” Dees said. “He could dunk two basketballs at one time. He was the best player by far on that team.”

Owens chuckled as he remembered the hard charging Dees.
“He could make you feel like you could jump out of the gym,” Owens said. “He was a great coach. I was just a country boy from Pavo. I had gotten a couple of calls from Florida State and Valdosta State but I wasn’t playing basketball for the scholarship. I just loved the game.”

Owens played for ABAC Coach Lamar DuBose during his freshman year when the Stallions wound up with a losing record. He also ran on the ABAC track team and won the state title in the high hurdles. Then a whirlwind named Benny Dees took over. ABAC started winning again.

In the first round of the 1963 state tournament at the Georgia Southern gym in Statesboro, ABAC knocked off Georgia Southwestern 71-63 behind 23 points by Tommy Dial and 12 by Owens. In the second round, the Stallions thumped Young Harris 86-51. Owens led the way with 20 points. Top-rated South Georgia beat the Stallions 80-63 in the semifinal game despite 22 points by Owens. Norman College then surged past ABAC 88-73 in the third place game when Owens tossed in 19 points.

Owens said he was quite shocked when he was named the Most Valuable Player of the tournament by the Georgia Southern coaching staff.

“I had gotten tonsillitis just prior to the tournament, and I lost about 27 pounds,” Owens said. “I had to have vitamin shots so I could play. I got most of my shots off rebounds.”

Owens averaged 17.3 points and 12.1 rebounds in the four tournament games. He also captured the eye of Georgia Southern Coach J.B. Scearce who recruited him to play for the Eagles. Owens started every game at Georgia Southern and helped to lead the team to the
National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) national tournament in his junior year and to a number one national ranking in his senior season.

Owens was captain of the Georgia Southern basketball team, and his future wife, Marsha, was the captain of the cheerleaders. They have two daughters and now enjoy retirement life in Fleming Island, Fla. Owens spent his last 12 years in education as the Clay County school superintendent.

“ABAC was an awesome place to play,” Owens said. “They were hanging from the balcony in that little gym. It was a great experience for me.”

Other 2016 Athletics Hall of Fame inductees include Wayne Cooper, Paul Fitzgerald, Tom Moody, Jackie Moore, Ty Wright, and the 1984 Golden Fillies state championship basketball team.

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