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Kevin Cantwell Shares his Experiences to Help Young Athletes Play College Basketball

photo of Kevin Cantwell

Kevin Cantwell became head coach of a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I basketball team in 1981 when he was 32 years old. Some might say a string of coincidences or luck landed him there, but Cantwell gives the credit to God. The New York native believes God directed his path to Gardner-Webb University in 1967, where he met players and coaches who would later help him get the job.

“I had never been out of New York City,” shared Cantwell, a 1969 graduate. “I was a good player and had scholarship offers, but my SAT scores weren’t good enough. An older man was helping me and he told me I was going to Gardner-Webb. I have nine brothers and sisters and I was the first one to go to college, and I was going to a very, very good basketball school.”



Kevin Cantwell, left, played for Gardner-Webb
from 1967 to 1969.

At the time, GWU was the top junior college team in the country. From 1964 to 1978, Coach Eddie Holbrook led GWU to more than 300 wins and four appearances in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) national tournament. Five athletes went on to play in the National Basketball Association (NBA). “I’ve been through the whole business now and I know how hard and how good coaches are—like Dean Smith, Bobby Knight and Mike Krzyzewski—Coach Holbrook could stand up to any of those guys,” Cantwell praised. “We practiced and it was so hard. It was tough love, but I didn’t see any love at the time. I wouldn’t have been the person I am, because he made me tough, not just basketball-wise, just tough, a competitor.”

While God landed him in the right place, Cantwell’s responsibility was to work hard and improve his skills. One opportunity led to another and he spent 28 years coaching and recruiting on the college basketball level. When he retired, Cantwell turned his attention to youth basketball. He became co-owner of the Suwannee Sports Academy in Metro Atlanta, Ga., and began advising parents on how to navigate their child’s path to college basketball. To give parents more information about the college recruitment process, Cantwell recently wrote a book, “Parent’s Guide to Youth Basketball and Beyond.” He uses examples from players he has helped, and shares his own experience, which includes sitting on the bench for most of his freshman year at Gardner-Webb.

Despite his disappointing first year at GWU, Cantwell was invited to help coach a basketball camp at Davidson (N.C.) College. There he met Pete Maravich, a future NBA star, and Bobby Cremins, a legendary Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) coach. “Pete Maravich was the No. 1 player in the

country and I watched him do drills every day,” Cantwell disclosed. “I took those drills and worked on them.”

The extra work along with Holbrook’s practice routines helped Cantwell improve, and he started for GWU the next year. After completing his studies at GWU, Cantwell was offered a scholarship to play for UNC Asheville and finish his bachelor’s degree. When he graduated, he applied for high school coaching jobs but was told he needed a master’s degree. He read in the paper that his old friend, Cremins, had been hired as head coach at Appalachian State University (ASU) in Boone, N.C. Cantwell wrote to Cremins asking if he could be a graduate assistant at ASU. Cremins accepted him and when Cantwell finished his degree, he was made a full-time assistant coach.

For more information
about the book, visit
Cantwell’s website,
www.kevincantwellbasketball.com
Books may be
purchased via
Amazon.com.

When Cremins left to take a job at Georgia Tech in Atlanta, Cantwell was named head coach at ASU. Five years later, Cremins invited him to be his assistant at Georgia Tech, and Cantwell made the move. In his fourth season at Tech, Cantwell was promoted to associate head coach. In 14 years, Cremins and Cantwell led Tech to two ACC title wins, 10 NCAA tournament appearances and one trip to the Final Four. Cantwell recruited and coached 22 players who went on to play in the NBA. “I spent 21 years of my college career sitting next to Bobby and being with him,” Cantwell said. “It was a great time, fun and amazing.”

*For more information about the book, visit Cantwell’s website,
www.kevincantwellbasketball.com. Books may be purchased via Amazon.com.*

[Click here to listen to the WGWG.org interview with Kevin Cantwell.](#)