

Saying Goodbye to Minnesota Legends

Flip Saunders & Jerry Kill

By Adam Svien

To say that Flip Saunders was a major influence on Minnesota basketball would be a vast understatement. Towards the end of October, Flip Saunders passed away after a short battle with Hodgkin Lymphoma at 60 years old. All around the NBA and NCAA people poured out condolences showing just how much of an impact Flip had on them. NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said "Flip's untimely passing has left a gaping hole in the fabric of our league."

Phil "Flip" Saunders was born in Ohio on February 23, 1955, but came to the University of Minnesota to play point guard for the Golden Gophers in 1973, despite being told he was too small to play the sport he loved. While in college he met his wife Debbie, and together they had four children. Between 1977-1995 Flip bounced around the CBA and NCAA, coaching. In 1995, Flip accepted the head coach's position of the Minnesota Timberwolves. Known for having a specialty for coaching point guards, after taking over the Minnesota Timberwolves, he brought in a young man straight out of High School, Kevin Garnett. In his first full season, he helped lead the Wolves to their first ever playoff berth, and the next year their first ever winning season. Flip Saunders essentially made professional basketball in Minnesota relevant. Flip, after being fired in 2005, went on to coach Detroit Pistons & Washington Wizards. However, no matter where Flip was coaching, he still lived in Minnesota. On June 6, 2014, Flip came back to the Timberwolves as co-owner and president of basketball operations, and eventually stepped in as head coach.

Flip was key in the Kevin Love trade that brought Andrew Wiggins

to Minnesota and also brought back his guy Kevin Garnett from the Brooklyn Nets to help him mentor the young team. Flip was also seen joyously celebrating at last year's draft lottery because for the first time Minnesota got the number one overall pick, bringing in Karl Anthony-Towns.

After Flips passing, Kevin Garnett tweeted a photo of himself sitting in the Timberwolves parking lot, staring at Flip's empty space with the quote "Forever in my heart." In a Star Tribune interview, Governor Mark Dayton commented, "The Timberwolves have lost a brilliant leader and Minnesota has lost an outstanding citizen." Flip's passing has drawn a lot of attention from the league. Flip coached 18 seasons in the NBA, coaching Minnesota, Detroit, Washington, his overall career was 654-594 with 11 playoff appearances.

Coach Jerry Kill also recently retired as University of Minnesota's Football head coach, due to health reasons. Coach Kill, who suffers from epilepsy and is a survivor of kidney cancer, was brought on as a coach in 2010 and in his first two seasons has had five documented seizures, including one very public one on the sidelines that ended up on ESPN. Jerry Kill tried a new treatment, and went seizure free for 18 months, then started to regress and his doctor expressed that he should retire. Jerry Kill was 29-29 as the Gophers head coach and 156-102 in his career coaching at Emporia State, Southern Illinois, Northern Illinois, and The U of M. Coach Kill is up for the 2015 Capital One Orange Bowl-FWAA Courage Award.

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