

WAS - Gymnastics Legend

Dr. Hartley Price

2001 Honoree



1951 FSU's Men's Gymnastics Team Coach

Most sport buffs from Florida take pride in the Sunshine State's current unofficial ranking nationally in regards to the number of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Championships won especially in the major sports. Most Cane, Gator and Seminole fans alike want bragging rights as to which State University won the first and amassed the most NCAA titles.

So, in what sport and year did a Florida University win its first NCAA Championship? The answer is **the Florida State University men's gymnastics team in 1951**. Keep in mind that Florida State was an all women's institution until 1948. Senator Leroy Collins introduced the Buckman Act to the Florida legislature making FSU co-ed to provide college educations for GI's returning from World War II. FSU football was in it's infancy in 1949. At about this same time a successful Australian physical educator by the name of Dr. Hartley Price left the University of Illinois where he

had successfully coached the Illini gymnastics team to four NCAA and two National Amateur Athletic Union (NAAU) Championships. He began recruiting gymnasts for his new gymnastics team at FSU.

Hartley was known as a recruiter, promoter and organizer rather than a "hands on" coach. He believed that American gymnasts should pursue activities like trampoline, tumbling and rope climb and not emulate the European style of gymnastics that emphasized the Olympic all-around events. Hartley, in addition to gymnastics, established the Gymkana show program and the Tallahassee Tumbling Tots children's program. Gymkana was a combination of gymnastics and showmanship exhibitions. A yearly Gymkana show was produced through the physical education department. Gymkana featured gymnastics, circus, pageantry, dancing and singing. The Tallahassee Tumbling Tots was a recreation program for area youth. It produced Olympians like Carrie Englert Zimmerman, Ron Galimore and Brandie Johnson.

The college gymnastics teams of the fifties considered the NAAU title as more important than the NCAA Championships. It didn't matter as Hartley's team took care of both. They won NCAA titles in 1951 and 52; and, NAAU titles in 1951, 53 and 55.

An all important Seminole football tradition was conceived during this time. The first football coach, Don Zellers, was not amenable to all the attention the gymnastics team was getting winning five national titles. However, Tom Nugent, the next coach thought the gymnastics team could help promote the football team. Nugent asked Dick Gutting, two time national trampoline champion, to don an Indian costume and tumble onto the football field leading the team out of the tunnel. He even considered using Dick in actual football plays until it was deemed illegal. After Dick left FSU, Chic Cicio, a New Yorker and 1956 NAAU Floor Exercise Champion, took over. He was called Sammie Seminole by the press. Chic recalls that two marching band numbers had originally been called "Sammie Seminoles". After Chic, gymnasts Jack Ryder, Joe Greene, Rick Miller, Bob Gramling and Barry Rowars continued the tradition. Because of Nugent, gymnasts were on the football sideline building human pyramids, doing flip flops and performing halftime shows.

Unfortunately, FSU dropped its varsity gymnastics team status in 1961. 1960 Olympian Gail Sontgerath, an FSU physical education faculty member, initiated a women's gymnastics team with Price's help. It was disbanded in 1972 in spite of pending Title IX legislation being right around the corner. In today's world, the University of Florida Lady Gators is the only collegiate gymnastics team for men or women in the State. This is unbelievable when you consider that Florida's USA Gymnastics age group Junior Olympic program is one of the best in the nation. Shame on Florida's education program! Additionally, FSU's Alumni Association has attempted to write gymnastics out its history which is sad and regrettable considering the many contributions that gymnastics made to the Tallahassee community and the University! Everyone involved wants to know what happened to the trophies that must have been discarded as trash!

Many of the talented gymnastics team members who made FSU a national and international gymnastics competition powerhouse, have gone on to make important contributions in gymnastics and other fields both in Florida and throughout the Nation. To learn more about Dr. Hartley Price and FSU gymnastics visit www.fsugymnastics.org.



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