

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

Statement on the Death of Dean E. Smith

February 8, 2015

Last night America lost not just a coaching legend, but a gentleman and a citizen. When he retired, Dean Smith had won more games than any other college basketball coach in history. He went to 11 Final Fours, won 2 national titles, and reared a generation of players who went on to even better things elsewhere, including a young man named Michael Jordan—and all of us from Chicago are thankful for that.

But more importantly, Coach Smith showed us something that I've seen again and again on the court: that basketball can tell us a lot more about who you are than a jump shot alone ever could. He graduated more than 96 percent of his players and taught his teams to point to the teammate who passed them the ball after a basket. He pushed forward the civil rights movement, recruiting the first Black scholarship athlete to North Carolina and helping to integrate a restaurant and a neighborhood in Chapel Hill. And in his final years, Coach Smith showed us how to fight an illness with courage and dignity. For all of that, I couldn't have been prouder to honor Coach Smith with Medal of Freedom in 2013.

Michelle and I send our thoughts and prayers to his wife Linnea, to his family, and to his fans all across North Carolina and the country.

NOTE: The statement referred to Michael Jordan, former guard, National Basketball Association's Chicago Bulls; and Charles J. Scott, former guard, NBA's Phoenix Suns.

Categories: Statements by the President : Deaths :: Smith, Dean E.

Names: Jordan, Michael; Obama, Michelle; Scott, Charles J.; Smith, Dean E.; Smith, Linnea W.

Subjects: Civil rights : Civil rights movement; Deaths : Smith, Dean E.; Sports : Basketball.

DCPD Number: DCPD201500088.