

1994 Hall of Fame Inductee Jim Darden – Denver

Jim Darden has established his reputation as a basketball player with the original Denver Nuggets and as a college basketball coach at Colorado School of Mines.

“When I was 17, we’d just won the Wyoming (high school) state baseball championship. I was selected as third baseman on the All-District team and had a chance to sign with the Cleveland Indians. My folks wouldn’t hear of it. They said no, I was too young and I was going to college.”

To the University of Wyoming in particular, where he was a member of the 1943 NCAA championship basketball team. For the better part of that season, Darden was a starting guard, playing in the shadow of All-American running mate Kenny Sailors. However, he did not play in the tournament itself. Those were World War II years and Darden was inducted into the Army infantry before season’s end.

Discharged in 1946, he joined the Denver Nuggets, who played in the then powerful Amateur Athletic Union circuit. “In 1946, the two best basketball teams in the country were the Phillips 66ers and the Denver Nuggets,” Darden says flat out.

When professional basketball in the form of the National Basketball League, came to Denver in 1949, Darden signed on. “But to tell you the truth, I made more money playing AAU ball,” he says. As a high scoring Nugget guard, Darden was runner-up as Rookie of the Year to Dolph Schayes.

You know, of all the things I’m most proud of,” says Darden, “the thing that I think is my real claim to fame, is that I played (competitive) softball until I was 50.” Darden also reflected on the start of his 35 years of basketball and baseball coaching at Mines that began in 1954. He became a fixture at the Golden, Colorado school. Starting the 1988-89 season, Darden had won 367 basketball games, 19th on the all-time NAIA career chart. He has been selected as the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference Coach of the Year five times and NAIA District 7 Coach of the Year three times.

While Darden’s accomplishments as a player and a coach speak for themselves, it is fitting that he is induction in the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame as a man who embodies the best of sport—fierce, competitive fire, but always a gentleman.