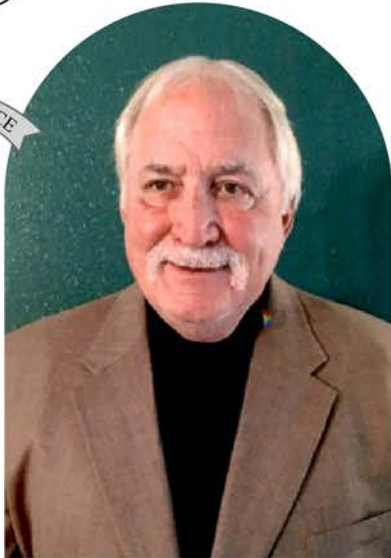




Hall of Fame INDUCTEE 2023



RAY "SMOKE" LAVAL

• CLASS OF 1973 •

Athletics

A three-sport athlete in high school, Ray lettered all four years in baseball as a catcher and was a three-year letterman in both football and basketball. For football, Ray was recognized as All-Conference and All-WPIAL in 1973. As a basketball player, he set a school record with 59 points in one game and was named All-Section in 1972 and 1973. During his senior year, he served as president of the Student Council as well as of the Letterman's Club.

After high school, Ray played baseball for two seasons at Gulf Coast Community College, lettering as a catcher. He continued his education at Jacksonville University earning a Bachelor's of Science in physical education and leading the Dolphins in hitting at the 1976 NCAA South Regional. He then went on to achieve a Master's of Science in Administration at Louisiana State University where he was a graduate assistant baseball coach.

In 1978, Ray's professional coaching career began at Wolfson High School in Jacksonville for both the baseball and football teams. After graduation from LSU in 1979, he spent a year as an assistant coach with Gulf Coast Community College followed by a year with the University of Florida. He then returned to LSU as an assistant coach from 1984 - 1993, and the LSU program won NCAA championships in 1991 and 1993, as well as five SEC championships and made six College World Series appearances. His success at LSU led to the head coaching position at University of Louisiana - Monroe where he stayed until 2000. Under Ray's direction, the ULM team became Southland Conference champions in 1995, 1996, 1999, and 2000. Once again, he returned to LSU to spend a year as an administrative assistant before taking on the head coaching title from 2002 to 2006. The LSU team was NCAA Regional champions in 2002, SEC champions in 2003, and participated in the College World Series in 2003 and 2004.

In 2003, Ray also worked as an evaluator for USA Baseball, helping to select the team members for the 2003 U.S. Pan-American Games. During 2007 - 2009, he served as the National Cross Checker for the Toronto Blue Jays and then returned to coaching in 2010 as the head coach at the University of North Florida until 2017. Going back to MLB, Ray served as Ambassador of Amateur Scouting for the Atlanta Braves between 2018 and 2020.

As a coach, Ray has received numerous recognitions including Louisiana Sportswriters Association Coach of the Year in 1995, 2002, 2003, and 2004, as well as 1999 Southland Conference Coach of the Year and 2003 SEC Coach of the Year. In 2015, he was named Atlantic Sun Coach of the Year. Ray was inducted into the ULM Baseball Hall of Fame in 2020 and the Louisiana Baseball Hall of Fame earlier this year.