

LOU HENSON

He began and ended his Basketball Coaching career in Las Cruces NM. He started as a JV Coach and retired 41 years later as a Legend. The Okay, Oklahoma native attended Connors State Junior College before attending New Mexico State in 1953 to play basketball for Presley Askew. He graduated from NMSU in 1955 with a Bachelor's degree and with a master's degree in 1956. Following graduation he landed his first coaching job at Las Cruces HS as a JV coach. He became the head coach and guided the varsity for the next four years posting a record of 145-23, and won state championship in 1959, 1960 and 1961. At the age of 30, Henson moved into the collegiate ranks as head coach at Hardin-Simmons University. In four years he compiled a record of 67-36 with a pair of 20 win seasons. Following that success he was hired as the head coach at New Mexico State University in 1966. He was the Aggie Coach for the next nine seasons. During that time he led the Aggies to six NCAA appearances, including five straight from 1966-71. The 1969-70 season was a special year for Henson and the Aggies as NMSU made their first and only Final Four appearance, tallying a 27-3 overall record. Henson recruited and coached the only five players in NMSU history to earn All-American honors. They included Charlie Chris in 1969, Jimmy Collins and Sam Lacey in 1970, John Williamson in 1972 and James Moore in 2003. In 1975, Henson left NM State to coach at the University of Illinois. Over the next 21 seasons, Henson put the Fighting Illini in the national spotlight, making 12 NCAA appearances, including his second trip to the NCAA Final Four during the 1988-89 season. His Illini team made 16 postseason appearances. He led the Illini to a Big Ten co-championship in 1984 and was named ESPN's National Coach of the Year as well as the Big Ten Coach of the year in 1993. Besides the Final Four appearance in 1989, a year in which the Illini posted a 31-5 record, he coached the Illini to nine consecutive 20 win seasons from 1982-91. He retired from his coaching duties at the University of Illinois after the 1996 season and an appearance in the NIT.

After retiring from Illinois, Henson and his wife Mary moved back home to Las Cruces. His retirement did not last very long, because NM State called and asked him to coach the Aggies again. He was named interim head coach on October 17, 1997. Henson agreed to coach the team on a pro bono basis, and later settled on salary of \$1 a month during the 1997-98 season. After leading the Aggies to an 18-12 record, Henson had the interim lifted from his title as he accepted a four-year contract. In eight seasons at NMSU the Aggies posted four 20-win seasons and made the post season twice. In nearly five decades, Henson is one of only 11 coaches to take two different schools to the NCAA Final Four. His teams have made 19 NCAA appearances and four NIT appearances. He is a member of the New Mexico State, Illinois and Hardin-Simmons Hall of Fame. In 2002, New Mexico State honored coach Henson by naming the Pan American Center's parquet floor, after him. The Legend retired on January 22, 2005, as the sixth all-time winningest coach in career wins with 779 and is the all-time winningest coach at NM State with over 289 wins. He also is the all-time winningest coach at two Division I schools (NMSU & Illinois).