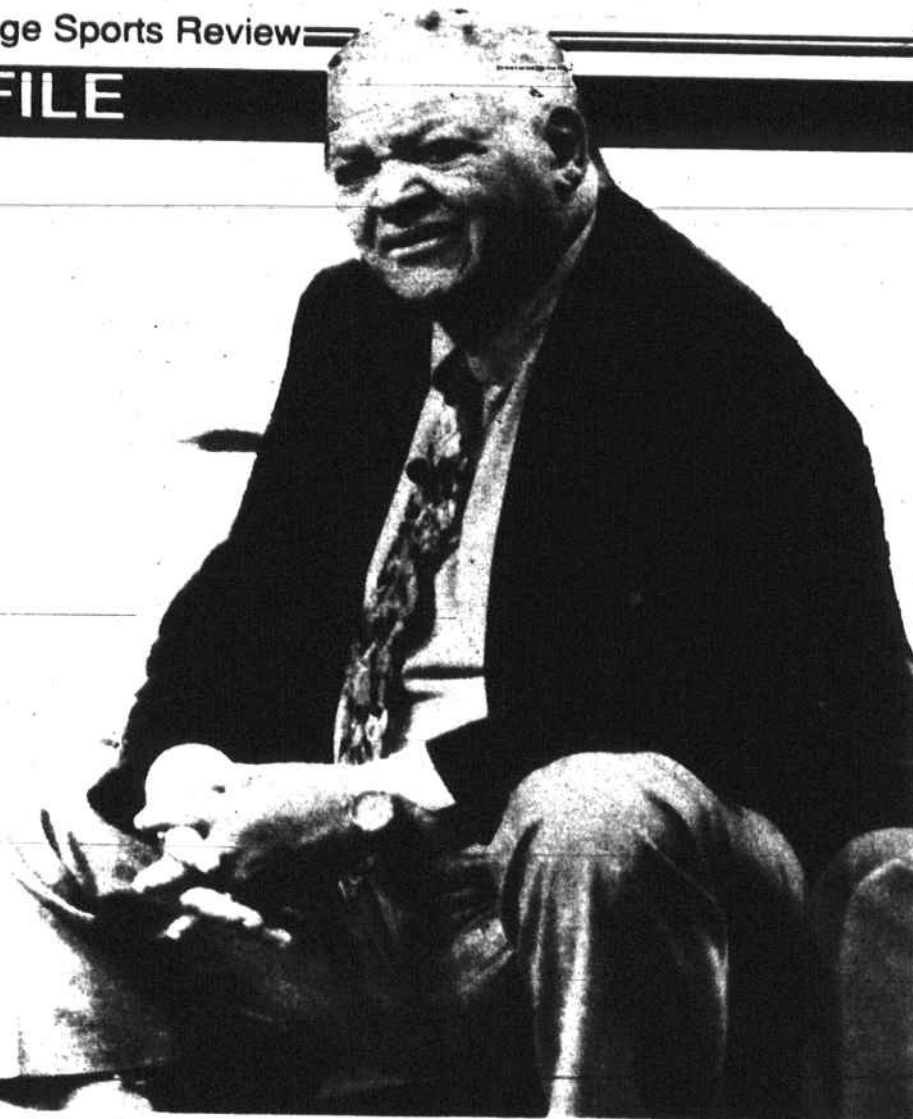


PROFILE



A sour moment for Legendary Coach Bighouse Gaines. His team lost in the first round.



Bighouse extols his rams during the CIAA Tournament. This was the last tourney for the 'House'.

The 'House' ...at 69...It's Over

▲ 47 Years In the CIAA, 828 Career Victories

RICHMOND – He entered the Richmond Coliseum proudly, like he always did, with a blue sportcoat, grey slacks and a red tie. He walked among the people, he was always an accessible legend, as legends go, and he shook the hands of folks he'd never seen before in life, took them under his big arm, and said hello.

And everyone he talked to offered him advice. "Hey it'll be OK." "Hey, don't worry about it." "Hey, House, what they did to you, it wasn't right." Some told him to fight. Some just wished him luck. How he wanted all of them to really be quiet. Bighouse Gaines was at peace with himself.

He was leaving basketball now, at age 69, not because he wanted to but because his school, Winston-Salem State, had made him. He would be turning 70 on May 21, and 70 was the mandatory age for retirement for professors at N.C. public colleges. House asked for an extension, met opposition from many members of the Winston-Salem faculty. "You turn 70, you're out of there boy, House told the Winston-Salem *Chronicle*. "Hell, I can That was it as far as I was concerned."

But entering the Richmond Coliseum for his 47th CIAA Tournament, his last CIAA Tournament, House was finally OK with the school's decision. He would step down after 47 years of coaching, after 828 wins – which made him the second winningest college basketball coach of all-

time, behind Kentucky's Adolph Rupp who finished with 875 – and a 1967 national championship.

He'd arrived at Winston-Salem in 1946. He was just going to work there for a year, to save up enough money to go to dental school. At 6-3, his friends said then that he was big as a house. He was the No. 2 man behind Brutus Wilson in a two-man athletic department at a teachers college that was predominately female.

In 1947, Wilson left Winston-Salem, House took his jobs. And House never left. He turned the Rams basketball program into one of the nation's finest. In 18 seasons, he won at least 20 games. He had at least one player named to the CIAA all-conference team for 27 straight years.

Back in the old days, House's teams played in a converted boiler room with a 70-foot ceiling. The place sat 500 people. When the Rams went on the road, House drove the bus, which he called "Brown Sugar," and drove throughout the South, past restaurants where the owners wouldn't serve House or his team.

"And the roads weren't worth a nickel," said Gaines, whose team now plays in a modern 4,000-seat facility that bears his name. "I've had breakdowns on every major road in North Carolina and Virginia."

The road to House's final game at the CIAA Tournament was a tough one, too. His Rams were a decided underdog

against Elizabeth City State. Winston-Salem had a 6-18 record.

House watched the game with little emotion. This wasn't like House.

Normally, his 300-pound body would be moving up and down the sidelines. But today, House sat down, his right leg crossed over his left knee. He didn't even sweat.

This was it, Winston-Salem would not win this game and House seemed to know it from the start.

This was how a legend would leave the game. Somehow you got the feeling that this wasn't quite right.

"House has meant so much to the people he's taught at Winston-Salem State," said North Carolina coach Dean Smith. "If you talk to anyone in his program, they think it's one of the greatest experiences of their young lives. He's such an astute basketball coach.

Unfortunately, because of the climate of racial injustice in his time, he didn't get the attention he deserved."

Earl "The Pearl" Monroe, now an NBA Hall of Famer, played for House in the late 60s and helped Winston-Salem to the 1967 small schools national championship as a senior. But it was after his freshman year that Monroe felt he wasn't playing enough and went to talk to House about it.

House asked Monroe why he was at Winston-Salem State.

"I told him I was down here to play ball," Monroe told The Charlotte Observer. "He said, 'If you're just here to play basketball, you might as well go back to Philadelphia right now – you're here to learn.' He put me on the right course that day, headed towards the Dean's List. One of the things that I'm proud of is that I graduated and I graduated on time."

Elizabeth City was now beating Winston-Salem. Badly. The lead grew and grew. With 16:45 left to play, Elizabeth City leads 46-30.

House stands up and fills both of his cheeks with air. House sighs and looks a little like Dizzy Gillespie when Gillespie blows his trumpet.

On the sidelines, House looks like your favorite grandfather. He's big, robust, always with a look of wonder on his face. He draws you to him, this Bighouse Gaines. He makes you ask him, "Who are you?"

House has changed a little over the years. While most of his younger opposing coaches bend over in their teams huddles during time outs, House must stand up.

With 10:16 left and Winston-Salem down 59-41, House clasps his hands together in front of his face, his fingers interlocking.

"I mean, it comes to an end for all of us," former Elizabeth City coach Bobby Vaughn told the Richmond Times.