

Johnny Dawkins looks to establish new identity for UCF basketball

Johnny Dawkins officially becomes the seventh UCF head coach after a press conference on Thursday morning.

By **Timothy Briggs** - March 24, 2016



Johnny Dawkins is introduced as UCF men's basketball coach alongside athletic director Danny White and UCF president Dr. John C. Hitt. Photo by Tim Briggs.

It took just 13 days for UCF athletic director Danny White to select Johnny Dawkins as the successor to the UCF's men's basketball program.

And the excitement was palpable pretty quickly about the decision.

"I'm pretty jacked up, I hope that comes across," White said. "UCF basketball is going to be a lot of fun."

With Johnny Dawkins on board, UCF has hired a big name in the basketball world as its new coach. Dawkins is credited as having helped jumpstart the Duke basketball standard, winning

the national player of the year in 1986 for the Blue Devils as they reached the national championship game for the first time under coach Mike Krzyzewski.

Dawkins' identity within the sport of basketball as a player, coach and ambassador is second to none. Former Duke players Jay Bilas, Grant Hill and Christian Laettner all spoke well of Dawkins this week after his hiring.

However, Stanford was a topsy turvy road for Dawkins as he led the Cardinal to the postseason five times in eight seasons, with only one of those trips to the NCAA Tournament in 2014. Stanford did advance to the Sweet 16 that season and Dawkins also engineered the Cardinal to the NIT title in 2012 and 2015.

With UCF, Dawkins sees an opportunity that allows him to establish the identity that he envisions.

"I've been very fortunate in this game and this is another example of an amazing chance to do something special," Dawkins said. "I've always been a part of trying to achieve something great wherever I've been, and this is a great program that has unlimited potential."

Present at the press conference alongside White and Dawkins was UCF president Dr. John C. Hitt, who was also incredibly excited for what Dawkins could bring to the program.

Like with football, the Knights have made a hire that could potentially change the program's direction, creating tons of enthusiasm.

"We've hired Johnny Dawkins to redefine our basketball program," Hitt said.

The redefinition of that program starts above all with an identity shift.

Under former head coach Donnie Jones last season, it appeared at times UCF was going through an identity crisis, unable to discover what meshed well enough to create positive results and garner victories.

Dawkins knows the importance of that and he plans on establishing an identity from day one.

"You have to have an identity," Dawkins said. "No. 1, you can't win anything if you don't have a sound defensive team. Offensively, our schemes will be built on personnel, but we like the ball

to move and to flow. We want to make sure that we utilize our strengths, Tacko's [Fall] 7'6, he should be a force around the basket, so we have to balance our offense out."

With injections in the UCF athletics program through new faces on the gridiron and the blacktop, the Knights are planning to create a winning environment. One that coalesces with fans and alumni, as well as reach out to new fans that want to be a part of it.

The two coaches have certainly injected that opportunity for the programs to grow and some excitement for something new after two difficult seasons for the school's major sports teams.

Bringing in a coach with Dawkins' pedigree is a no brainer.

"If you have an opportunity to bring Johnny Dawkins in, that's a no-brainer," White said. "We're going to make it fun. We're putting a lot of marketing into making it an exciting, vibrant experience in the arena. I want this building to be rocking, and that only happens with the students."

Speaking of those students and fans, the UCF student section found itself dwindling at times late in last season's campaign due to a slew of home losses down the stretch. But with the Dawkins' hire, White and his administration plan to get fans more involved with more marketing and an increased focus and commitment to different athletic programs, basketball in particular.

Like with bringing in the fans, the main identity and concept for the team is just that: The Team. The Knights will not accomplish their goals without each other.

"We have to do this together," Dawkins said. "What gets this done is all of us working together to achieve great things. I'm excited for everyone in here to build on that and let's make it happen."

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