



LEONIDAS SONDRIC EPPS, JR.

1918 – 1997

ENDOWMENT SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION

## Remembering A Hall-of-Famer



**Coach Epps was inducted into the CAU Hall of Fame during the inaugural ceremony in 1989. An honor he is very proud of.**

In 1985, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution Sports writer, Furman Bisher wrote an article that describes the spirit of L. S. Epps. This article appears as written:

Leonidas Epps came along in a time when coaches at Negro colleges toiled in a void. There was no well-oiled publicity machinery on his campus: on most there was none at all. The major press wasn't paying any attention. Only an occasional scout from a pro team showed up at practice or games from the outside world.

His chief reward was what he saw there before him, for rare was the athlete who rose from such oblivion to fame in the pro leagues. (His three were Roman Turmon, Elijah Nevitt and Morris Stroud.) Leonidas Epps' products scored much higher on the political and executive levels...

Leonidas Epps was not just a coach, he was the whole athletic department. Athletics director, coach of every team there was to coach, schedule maker, trainer, physical education teacher and intramurals director, bus driver, if the floors needed sweeping, sometimes janitor, and recruiter, such as it was.

### **A sense of loyalty**

"Kids didn't ask for anything," he said, "because we didn't have anything to give."

Most of them came there poor and were poor when they left, except for the enriching association at the thumb of Coach Epps. They were safe from scandal and physical danger...

Their coach never jumped a 10-year contract, never drove off into the sunset with a new car his alumni had presented, nor was ever on probation, all these the benchmarks of the "successful" modern day bigtimer. Xavier University, his alma mater, once invited him to return as head coach, but he gently refused.

He was no holier-than-thou loser. He took to the arena to joust as best he could with what he had. His basketball teams won 424 games, a Division III record when he retired. His 1962 football team ranked seventh nationally on its level. His golf team won six SIAC championships.

Until 1977, his basketball teams never knew what a home court advantage was. (They were called "Vagabonds" for good reason.) That year Clark opened a new gymnasium, and on May 22, 1983, at the time of his retirement, named it Leonidas S. Epps Gymnasium. He has enough scrolls of honor to paper the place, and a book full of letters of commendation and coach-of-the-year awards.

### **Shedding cloak of anonymity**

For years the Clark Teams traveled in a rickety old bus the athletes called "Beetlebaum," named for the horse that always came in last in Jack Benny comedy skits. "But we never knew we were poor or that we were disadvantaged," the players said, "Coach Epps kept our minds on the positive side."

He has come a long way from the, home of a Pullman porter in East St. Louis, IL., to the modest residence on Simpson Road that has been the Epps' address for 31 years. In 1985, just after Valentine's Day, he came to another juncture and rose to another peak in his life of labor in anonymity. Leonidas Epps was among a distinguished class inducted into the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame, and not a moment too soon.

It makes official much of a career spent in the shadows of the unofficial, and largely unrewarded except for the fruits of his labor. He has come now to the state of life exactly converse to that of the famous warrior who after a thousand victories, lost one, and thus "from the book of honor was razed...and all the rest forgot for which he toiled." Not he, forever "Coach" to those whose lives he touched.

For further information: [www.lsepps.org](http://www.lsepps.org)

## Leonidas Sondric Epps, Jr.

Leonidas S. Epps, Jr., was born in Hope, Arkansas, on October 5, 1918. When he was very young, his family moved north to East St. Louis, Illinois, where he grew up. He participated in all sports but achieved proficiency in basketball and softball. He was graduated from Lincoln High School in 1938. By this time he was an orphan, and he and his sister were living with their uncle and aunt.

It was during the late thirties that many of the great southern black coaches made recruiting trips to northern cities encouraging black student athletes to attend southern colleges and universities. At that time, they certainly were not too welcome at the predominately white institutions. In 1938, Epps was recruited by the renowned coaching team of the Wright brothers – Ted and Giles – to attend Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana. Several East St. Louis athletes had been recruited before and were doing well there.

While at Xavier, Epps did very well academically and athletically. He was a member of the great Xavier University basketball team, earning his B.S. degree in Physical Education in 1942. After graduation and a stint in the United States Army, he accepted a position as teacher of health and as coach at Gilbert Academy, a very highly regarded college preparatory school in New Orleans. During that time, he became well known as an excellent basketball coach. His teams won three state championships. These championships were won before integration. The Gilbert Academy closed in 1949, and Epps came to Clark College as coach.

His presence was felt immediately in the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (S.I.A.C.) In his first year as coach, his team's record was 16-9; in the 1951-52 season, his team won 17 straight games. He taught classes in addition to coaching football, track, golf, and tennis. The most amazing thing is the fact that he produced championships in ALL of these sports. In addition to being inducted into the State of Georgia Sports Hall of Fame, he achieved many other honors which include:

- 1980 – Induction into the Clark College Hall of Fame
- 1980 – Georgia Board of Athletic Trainers
- 1983 – Dedication of the Leonidas S. Epps Gymnasium at Clark College
- 1985 – Induction into the State of Georgia Hall of Fame
- 1994 – Induction into the S.I.A.C. Hall of Fame

In the meantime, he earned his M.S. degree in Health, Physical Education and Recreation from Indiana University. He was very proud of the fact that his son “Sonny” chose to play on the Clark College team after having been awarded more than 65 full scholarships at major colleges. All these accomplishments seem impossible in light of the fact that he was forced to use borrowed courts for practices and home games, except for his final coaching season when Clark College opened its own gym. When one thinks of his limited budgets and no so-called “blue chip” athletes, there is no wonder he was referred to as the “small college miracle worker”. He produced All-American and All-S.I.A.C. stars in basketball, football, golf, tennis and track-sometimes in the same year. Although he was well known as a developer of great athletes, he was best known as a molder of men with great character and integrity. He was always a gentleman and demanded that his athletes be the same!

Coach Epps was married to the former Evelyn C. Mitchell and was the father of two children: Leondria K. Epps and Leonidas “Sonny” III. He and Evelyn also had two grandchildren: Leonidas “Kip” IV and Anthony, one daughter-in-law, Patricia. He was a devout Christian, a member of St. Paul of the Cross Catholic Church, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Knights of Columbus, and Pine Acres Town and Country Club.

In May 1983, Coach Epps retired from Clark College after 34 years as Teacher, Coach, Athletic Director, and Administrator. He entered into eternal rest on January 5, 1997.

## **Establishment of the Leonidas S. Epps, Jr. Endowed Scholarship Fund**

To continue the legacy of service, the University inaugurated the Leonidas S. Epps, Jr., Endowed Scholarship, which was initiated by Marvin Arrington so that needy students may have the opportunity to participate in Clark Atlanta University's Intercollegiate Athletic Programs. As with all undergraduate scholarships, this scholarship program will operate in accordance with the University's institutional undergraduate scholarship policies administered by the office of Undergraduate Academic Services.

Recipients are selected by the Leonidas S. Epps, Jr., Scholarship Committee. The committee is comprised of the Clark Atlanta University Athletic Director, a former male and female athlete, Clark Atlanta University Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Services or designee, and the Financial Aid Director or designee.

The following scholarship criteria is used in the awarding of scholarships to deserving students as ascertained by the Selection Committee.

- ◆ Freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior students may apply.
- ◆ First-year students must have an SAT score of 850 or an ACT score of 18 and a high school cumulative grade point average of 2.5 or higher in college board courses.
- ◆ Sophomores, juniors and seniors must have a 2.5 cumulative grade point average or higher.
- ◆ Recipients must file for financial aid and have a completed package in the office of Financial Aid.
- ◆ First-year students must apply for admission and be accepted into the university.
- ◆ Recipients must participate in their designated sport for the academic year for which the award is made.
- ◆ Award must be used to support educational needs (tuition, books, campus room and board).
- ◆ Any recipient may apply for renewal of the scholarship if he/she remains eligible.
- ◆ Each recipient will be assigned an upper-level student as a mentor and must attend weekly seminars.
- ◆ The recipient will be placed on a curriculum track that will ensure graduation in a maximum of five years.
- ◆ Applications are to be submitted on or before January 30, 2009. Applications are to be sent to:

Dr. Isabella Jenkins  
Associate Dean For Undergraduate and Academic Services  
Box 132  
Clark Atlanta University  
223 James P. Brawley Drive, SW  
Atlanta, GA 30314



List your extra curricular activities: \_\_\_\_\_

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State your leadership positions: \_\_\_\_\_

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Describe what you admire most about the legacy of Coach Leonidas S. Epps, Jr.

Why do you think that you merit the Leonidas S. Epps, Jr. Scholarship?