

# Stiles statue presentation at Missouri State University postponed

*(Editor's note: The following story ran in our papers prior to the scheduled reveal on Nov. 28. The Winter Sports Preview has a larger reach than our normal newspapers, so here is the story once again. According to a Nov. 22 news release from Missouri State, the dedication has been postponed due to an international shipping issue. A new date has not yet been announced.)*

By MIKE COURSON

They say hard work pays off. Jackie Stiles was the poster child of that old adage. A gym rat growing up in Claflin, Stiles became one of the best track athletes and basketball players in Kansas prep history before going on to become the all-time leading scorer in women's NCAA basketball. Missouri State, formerly Southwest Missouri State, will soon honor Stiles with a bronze statue of its former star.

"Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine being honored this way," Stiles said. "It's a true credit to all the people I've had surrounding me. I couldn't have done it without numerous people from my family to my coaches, my amazing teammates, and our loyal fans, and the administration at Missouri State. I share this honor with so many people."

The statue, currently under lock and key, will be unveiled as part of a day of festivities to honor Stiles on Monday, Nov. 28. Stiles is now an assistant coach for her alma mater.

#### Success in Claflin

Stiles was part of a historic run of girls' basketball in the state of Kansas. She holds virtually all of the individual scoring records, including a 71-point single-game performance in 1997; 1,252 points in the 1996-97 season; and

3,603 career points. At that same time, Little River was setting records with three perfect seasons from 1995-97.

Though Stiles never won a state basketball title, in thanks to those great teams from Little River, Moundridge, and Hillsboro, she won 14 state titles in track and field, a record that still stands today.

#### Becoming a Lady Bear

Missouri State had already been on the basketball map with six-straight NCAA Tournament appearances from 1991-96, including a Final Four run in 1992, and a Sweet 16 appearance in 1993. The Lady Bears exited in the first round in 1996, and failed to make the tournament in 1997.

Stiles joined the program in 1998 and helped Missouri State back to the tournament in each of the next four seasons. In 2001, Stiles' senior season, the Bears entered the bracket as the No. 5 seed. They knocked off No. 1 Duke 81-71 in the regional semi-final, then advanced to the Final Four with a 104-87 win against No. 6 Washington.

Purdue, a No. 3 seed from the Midwest regional, downed Missouri State 81-64 in the national semifinal and went on to lose to Notre Dame 68-66 in the national championship game.

#### More records fall

Stiles scored 3,393 points in 129 games, averaging 26.3 points a night in her collegiate career. That set a new Division I record, previously held by Mississippi Valley State's Patricia Hoskins, who scored 3,122 points in her 110 collegiate games.

With players getting more games now, some players have come close to Stiles' record. In 2013, Baylor's Brittney Griner closed out her career with 3,283 points in 148 games. In 2014, Florida



Jackie Stiles (center) returned to her alma mater to coach at Missouri State.

(photo courtesy of Missouri State Photographic Services)

International's finished her career with 3,107 points in 131 games. Most recently, Minnesota's Rachel Banham finished her career in 2016 with 3,056 points in 142 games.

"It's not anything I would normally pay attention to, but of course everyone updates me if someone is getting close," Stiles said. "Records are meant to be broken. I would be happy to cheer on and support anyone who is getting close or actually breaks the record. It's hard to believe I still have it."

Stiles' senior season was one for the record books. She became the first female player to score 1,000 points in a season, and remained that way until 2014. Her 1,062 points that season are yet an-

other NCAA record. Baylor's Odyssey Simms, who scored 1,054 points in 2013-14, is the only other player to top the 1,000-point mark. Simms played in 37 games that season, and Stiles played in 35 games in her record year.

Stiles ended her collegiate career as a four-time first-team selection in the Missouri Valley Conference. She was named MVC Player of the Year in each of her last three years at SMS, and that award was renamed in her honor.

#### Paid to play

Stiles wrapped up her college career at a good time. The WNBA was still in its relative infancy after being founded in 1996. The league held its first game in June 1997.

Stiles, who had earned Player of the Year honors in

her final collegiate season, was drafted by the Portland Fire. The team struggled to a 10-22 record in its first season in 2000. Stiles won the league's Rookie of the Year honor in 2001, but the Fire still struggled to an 11-21 record.

Portland went 16-16 in 2002, but the bigger news was the loss of Stiles to a serious knee injury. The team folded at the end of the 2002 season, and Stiles was picked 14th by league power Los Angeles in a subsequent dispersal draft.

Stiles never played in the WNBA again.

"I had one healthy year in the pros, then the second one was kind of on and off with injured reserve," she said. "After four years and 13 surgeries, I tried to come back in Australia in 2006. All those injuries were fine, then it was my left knee, so I said it was time to get it up."

#### Back to college

Stiles moved back to Kansas and started her own business in Wichita, but basketball eventually came calling. Stiles went west to take an assistant coach position with Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles for the 2012-13 season. A year later, she moved back to Springfield where she has served as assistant coach for her alma mater for four years.

"Basketball has blessed me with so much," she said. "I'm so grateful for everything it's given me. That's why I tell kids, whatever you're passionate about, if you work hard at it, you will be rewarded in ways you can't even imagine."

"I always tell people I've never had to get a real job. Basketball has always paid my bills. It's so great to earn a living when you absolutely love what you do. I'm so grateful for everything basketball has blessed me with."

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