

ERNIE MIDDLETON



Former Gatorade Player-Of-The-Year and Converse High School All-America is now a standout Point Guard for the University of New Orleans. (photo by Clem Barbazon)

Earnestine (Ernie) Middleton is a sophomore at the University of New Orleans and is a standout athlete in Cross Country, Basketball and Track.

As a NCAA Division I school, the University of New Orleans has 17,000 students and Joey Favaloro is in his 10th season as Head Women's Basketball Coach and Coordinator of Women's Athletics. Coach Favaloro bubbles with enthusiasm when he talks about Ernie and considers her a candidate for All-America honors from her point guard position. Coach Favaloro started his career at the University of New Orleans with a bang by guiding his Buc-ketts to a sparkling 20-8 season making it their first ever winning campaign. Success has continued with winning seasons every year and a 188-77 overall record. Being WNIT Champions and an NCAA tournament berth have been some of the highlights in the last decade.

Coach Favaloro recruited Ernie because of her all-around athletic ability, character and scholastic achievement. Ernie competed in four high school sports at Booker T. Washington High School in Florida. She was the team MVP in softball and an All-County and All-Tournament volleyball player. In track, she participated in seven events including hurdles, jumps and relay events. Ernie long jumped 18-7, set a school high jump record of 5-6 and came in second in state in the triple jump with a 38-9 effort.

Ernie really shined in basketball as she was honorable mention All-Stater in both her sophomore and junior years. Her basketball coach Ronnie Bond had guided the team to 15 district titles in a row and Ernie guided the team to 60 straight wins throughout her junior and senior years. Ernie's highlights include most 100 point games in Florida, scoring 20 points per game with 6 assists and 6 steals per game, being selected for the North-South All-Star game, being a Converse High School All-America and being the Gatorade Florida Player-Of-The-Year. All this, from a 5-5 110 pound bundle of energy.

"All my sports, activities and academics kept me out of trouble," explained Ernie. With all she did, it's a wonder she found time to sleep. Ernie was in ROTC at high school for four years. She was a commander of a unit. Said Ernie, "I liked the military. It gave me discipline."

That experience left its mark as Ernie is now majoring in Naval and Marine architectural engineering. She's planning on a career in military design. "I hope they'll see a sharp well-to-do classy person and they'll want to snap me up and give me a job," said Ernie quite sincerely.

Ernie also excelled in high school academics as she achieved an accumulative 3.998 GPA and took advanced placement classes. At the University of New Orleans, Ernie is maintaining a solid 3.0 GPA.

Continued on page 64

ERNIE MIDDLETON ALL-AROUND ATHLETE

Lifting was done twice per week during and after the season in high school but that work was done on a Universal Gym. Ernie now works a lot on free weights. "I'm really getting into free weights," stated Ernie. "When I first started, it bothered my touch but after a while some great improvement came. My range and control improved and my passes became crisper. I'd get bumped a lot bringing the ball down. Now, I can take the physical part of the game."

Ernie Benches 120 and can Squat 150 pounds for 12 reps. She can also Leg Press 530 pounds. As a freshman, Ernie led the team with 117 assists and even recorded a double-double by getting 10 points and 10 rebounds against Mississippi State. This year Ernie has upped her scoring and rebounding efforts.

Besides basketball, Ernie is competing in cross country and track. She placed 16th out of 70 in the final meet of the season and in her freshman year at UNO, she set school records in the 400 meter hurdles (6.03), triple jump (37 plus) and the long jump (18.5) while also breaking a stadium record at one meet.

Coach Favalaro reported that Ernie has put on about 10 pounds of lean, functional weight. Ernie is not concerned, "My legs are solid. Skinny is out nowadays and healthy is in. I'm getting more looks now and guys notice me more."

What contributed to Ernie's success? Without hesitation Ernie said her mother was responsible and to give God the credit. She said, "I have four brothers and sisters that are older. That's all we did as kids was to play basketball. My mom keeps me from getting a fat head. My parents divorced when I was 13 years old and it was hard. I was close to my dad. They come to all my games and sit with each other. I know they still love one another.

As far as peer pressure to do alcohol or drugs, Ernie simply says, "I didn't have time. My first date was in my senior year. Between studying, piano lessons and sports, I just didn't have time to get involved in negative things like drugs and alcohol. I also went to my Baptist church four times per week. I was approached my junior year. I'll never forget it. It was so freaky. A girl offered me some marijuana. I said, "I don't think so, I'm an athlete." It's hard enough to make success happen without trying to cope with drugs. I had a long talk with my coach the day after I had just walked away. There was one athlete who was my idol. I saw her get screwed up and lose everything her junior year. It really hurt me. I told myself that it would never happen to me. My friends and I had a lot of fun without drugs. We hung together.

"I haven't been approached on drugs at college but alcohol is rampant. I just say "no thanks." At first I was criticized but now no one offers me alcohol."

We thank Coach Favalaro and the University of New Orleans. A dozen roses to Ernie Middleton for being a great role model. She is a true Upper-Limit athlete.



*Ernie ran relays, hurdles and three jumping events in high school
(Photo by Clem Barbazon)*



*"I do some machines, I said Ernie but now
I'm really getting into free weights."
(Photo by Clem Barbazon)*