

# LIVING THE DREAM Q&A WITH K-STATE GREAT STEVE HENSON

## Q&A with K-State great Steve Henson

- Jeff Chapman Contributing writer Jul 8, 2018

Texas-San Antonio head men's basketball coach Steve Henson claps for his team after beating Lamar University 76-69 in the first round of the CIT [CollegeInsiders.com](http://CollegeInsiders.com) Postseason Tournament in San Antonio on March 14. Henson, a Kansas State great in both basketball and track and field, is entering his third season as the Roadrunners' head coach.

- Courtesy UTSA Athletics
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Henson was hired as Texas-San Antonio's head coach in April 2016. He was hired by another former K-State great, Lynn Hickey, who was then the Roadrunners' athletics director.

*Editor's note: This article has been edited for length and clarity.*

Steve Henson needs no introduction.

One of the greatest athletes in Kansas State history, Henson excelled as both a track and field athlete and a basketball star.

As a decathlete, he finished third at the Big Eight Championships as both a sophomore and junior.

And he was every bit as good on the hardwood, setting 11 Big Eight and 21 K-State records during his career from 1986 to 1990. At the time of his graduation, his 1,655 points ranked fourth in the Wildcats' annals. A two-time All-America selection and a first-team Big Eight pick as a junior, Henson went on to play seven seasons in the NBA.

He now enters his third season as the men's basketball head coach at Texas-San Antonio.

*Q: How did you end up going to K-State to play basketball?*

A: "It's funny. I liked K-State, but I was just looking for my best option. I did want to run track, and Steve Miller was the track coach and AD and said I could do both at K-State."

*Q: With your father being a high school coaching legend, did he and then-K-State head men's basketball coach Lon Kruger have a prior relationship through recruiting?*

A: "I'll tell you what got my attention: When K-State hired Dana Altman back as the assistant, and (the Wildcats) were going to sign Mitch Richmond and Charles Bledsoe. I wanted a chance to play with them. Kruger was turning around a program that had slid a little, and I wanted to be a part of it."

*Q: So who called who? Did you sign up for track and field or basketball first?*

A: "It was always about basketball first, but I thought since Coach Kruger played two sports (baseball and basketball) that he would help make that happen and would understand fully the time it would take to do both."

*Q: What was your track and field experience as a part-time decathlete?*

A: "My original plan was to do both sports full-time and redshirt in one sport one year to have a fifth year of eligibility to concentrate, first on basketball and then track and field, so that last year I could train for the 1996 Olympics. After a couple of years in competition, though, it was apparent that I was leveling off in track, and basketball was where I was thriving."

*Q: How did you do so well in both sports simultaneously?*

A: "I would leave practice for one and train for the other. I had a lot of long days. I would go out in between classes and throw the discus or shotput. And immediately after the last basketball game, I would enter in the Drake Relays decathlon to get ready for the Big Eight. I managed to get third in the conference my sophomore and junior years, but it was Steve Fritz who came along and lived out my dream to play both sports and compete in the 1996 Olympics."

*Q: How did you end up with jersey No. 12? Were you surprised it was available?*

A: "I was surprised since so many great players had it before me, but it was (available), so I quickly took it."

*Q: What was the atmosphere like in practice when you were competing for a starting role as a freshman?*

A: "It was humbling, very humbling, but I went up the summer before and played and trained with the guys. I was getting beat up pretty good, but started to learn my way and slowly earned some respect. I didn't start until about seven or eight games into the season, but Lynn Smith was a great mentor and competitor. Lynn was a senior and took it pretty well when I earned my spot. I always respected that. He and I are still close."

*Q: Where has your life taken you since graduating from K-State?*

A: “(Laughs). Well it’s a long one, my journey. I can’t even remember all the places. You can probably read that somewhere, but the short story is I had nine years of single-season (professional) contracts. I played in Milwaukee and Atlanta and five others in the NBA, but in between I played in the CBA for La Crosse and some other short stints overseas. I went to Italy a couple of times and that’s really where I had the most fun and got to play the most. I was really counted on to score. Regarding my places of residence, we got smart and just stayed in one place while I traveled to play.”

*Q: Thinking back on your NBA experiences, what was it like being a superstar in high school and college and then having to ride the bench in the pros?*

A: “The level of talent and competition is so unbelievably high and in my case I was fighting for a job every day, so whether I was on the floor or on the bench, it was just good to be there. But it does take an adjustment mentally to not be out (on the court).”

*Q: When did you know your professional basketball career was over?*

A: “When my son was born and the contracts were getting more difficult to obtain, I decided to get into coaching. It’s pretty nerve-wracking having to wonder if you have a job all the time. My wife was super understanding through it all.”

*Q: Was coaching your only post-playing career option?*

A: “I never really considered anything else. In fact. I always lived in a college town when playing professionally so I could train with guys in the summer time, which was good for both me and them. We lived in Gainesville, Florida, when Coach Kruger was there. I worked those camps and trained with his team, and did the same in Champaign, Illinois, later when he was at Illinois. I was actually in Italy playing my last season when my best friend and one of Kruger’s Illini assistants called to say he was leaving to coach elsewhere. That’s when I jumped on the opening, and Coach Kruger gave me a chance.”

*Q: What was it like coaching for the Illini?*

A: "The fan base in Illinois is really great and were good to coach Kruger and us. We liked it there."

*Q: And how about UNLV?*

A: "UNLV is a very different town. All the recruits want to come there, but most of them just want to check out Vegas. There was a lot of pressure there to win. We went to the tournament several times."

*Q: You've been asked before, but when you were coaching for Oklahoma against K-State, that must have been pretty weird, at least at first, right?*

A: "It is, but then once the ball goes up, you are fighting with your team to win."

*Q: Let's slip back to your college days. Billy Tubbs' Oklahoma program was one of K-State's biggest rivals during the Kruger/Altman era. After a certain victory in Norman, what was it that Tubbs said to you?*

A: "Let's just say he called me 'ornery.'"

*Q: Do you and Tubbs keep in contact?*

A: "He is beloved in Oklahoma, so when he would attend games in Norman, I would chat with him a little. He is very nice and very supportive of the Sooners still. We did have a game once when we scored about 90 on a weaker team, and as I was leaving the tunnel, he pulled me aside and said, 'You should have fouled more to hit 100!' Coach Tubbs is a fierce competitor."

*Q: You have previously mentioned your most memorable loss was the final game in 1990 against Xavier, your last game at K-State. What was on your mind in that moment?*

A: "You just never think you will lose. You know that it's over and it's just surreal.

*Q: What was it like playing against Mookie Blaylock. Was he the toughest defender you faced?*

A: "Mookie was an unbelievable defender and I had a lot of respect for him. We ended up teammates later in the NBA and are still in touch."

*Q: There's a rumor you and Kansas alum Kevin Pritchard spit in each other's faces in a couple of games. Is there any truth to it?*

A: "(Laughs). That never happened. There was an incident involving a player from OU who spit in the face of one of my teammates, and I got into the middle of it. Maybe that was the story, but Kevin and I were friends in high school and all through college. In fact, we were roommates for 5-Star basketball camps and even at training camp for the Miami Heat. Kevin is a great guy."

*Q: What are your thoughts about the new NCAA regulations about trying to eliminate the one-and-done situation? How did you feel about it as a player versus as a coach?*

A: "I don't really have an opinion either way. It's complicated. I can see arguments for both sides. I think the NBA is just trying to land the best players for their business, but they are recruiting them too early, before they are fully developed. I think that hurts the college game a little."

*Q: Give me Steve Henson's description of ...*

*Mitch Richmond:* "Mitch is a great teammate who loves the game more than anyone. He just flat loves to play ball. He is a loyal friend."

*Dana Altman:* "Great coach. He really studies the game well and knows how to be competitive."

*Danny Manning:* “I always respected him as a player and then as a coach. Always a gentleman. In fact one year in the first game between KU and K-State I came around and ran into his screen. He pancaked me right onto the floor. At the return game beforehand, he came up to me and wanted to be sure I knew that he didn’t mean to knock me on the ground and that he was sorry that happened. Then we wished each other well.”

*Q: You were hired by K-State legend and then-UTSA athletics director Lynn Hickey in April 2016. How did you end up there and what made you decide to leave the Kruger dynasty and be a head coach?*

A: “Interestingly Coach Hickey contacted all three assistants at OU. She eventually named me the coach here and has since left, but I love it here in San Antonio.”

*Q: If I called Kruger today and asked him to describe Steve Henson, what would he say?*

A: “I never like to put words in Coach’s mouth, but he has always referred to my work ethic and competitiveness, so maybe that.”

*Q: Do you follow K-State sports?*

A: “I do. I follow the Big 12 still. Such a great league.”

*Q: What are your thoughts on Bill Snyder and Bruce Weber and their programs?*

A: “Bill Snyder is the greatest coach in the history of football, and while we all know how amazing it is growing up in Kansas and being close to it, people outside of the region really can’t appreciate how amazing Bill Snyder is.

“Coach Weber is really a great Coach. He and Coach Kruger are very similar in pregame preparation. (The Wildcats) defend better than any other team in the



conference, and when they combine that with a good shooting day, they are very competitive. I have a lot of respect for Coach Weber. He is really good for K-State.”

*Q: Is being head men’s basketball coach at K-State your eventual dream job?*

A: “(Laughs). Good one, Jeff. I am so blessed to have the opportunity to coach where I am now.”

Steve Henson’s Pro Basketball Journey{span class=“print\_trim”}1990-92: Milwaukee Bucks

1992: La Crosse Catbirds (CBA)

1992-93: Atlanta Hawks

1993: Charlotte Hornets

1993-94: Rapid City Thrillers (CBA)

1994: Fargo-Moorhead Fever (CBA)

1994: Mexico City Aztecas (CBA)

1994-95: Portland Trail Blazers

1995-97: Virtus Roma (Italy)

1997-98: Grand Rapids Hoops (CBA)

1998: Detroit Pistons

1998-99: Panionios (Greece)

1999: Detroit Pistons

1999: Scavolini Pesaro (Italy)