

College hoops' most interesting people: Florida State's Leonard Hamilton

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ESPN.com

September 8, 2015

Perhaps no conversation about Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton has been complete, at least since Season 2 of HBO's acclaimed series "The Wire," without a reference to the character of Baltimore police Major "Bunny" Colvin.

Hamilton sounded almost disappointed that no one had ever clowned him about his doppelganger, who was played by actor Robert Ray Wisdom.

"I'm going to have to go back now and look at it," he said. "I'm intrigued a little bit."

Hamilton doesn't take himself that serious, it just seems that way. Anyone who has watched him on the sidelines during his 28 seasons as a collegiate head coach has probably had the thought cross their mind at some point. Hamilton trails only Duke's Mike Krzyzewski and North Carolina's Roy Williams in ACC wins over the past decade. His first win this season will make him the winningest coach in Florida State history. He's still the winningest coach at Miami, where he coached from 1990-2000.

Once you get past his glare -- that might take a while, because few coaches stay as stone-faced throughout the course of a game like Hamilton -- Hamilton is not defined by the scowl he keeps on the sideline.

He'd rather be defined by how he helps others. To that end, Hamilton partnered up with producer Kyle Bynoe and launched his own gospel music label, 5ive Oceans Music, a year ago.

"I'm the complete opposite of the image that it seems as though I've projected," Hamilton said. "Whenever I speak to groups or churches I always tell people, 'Please tell people I have a little personality.'"

Hamilton has to plead with folks because he's not a self-promoter. If he were, he'd let everyone know of the recruiting momentum the Seminoles have right now with freshman guards Dwayne Bacon (No. 14) and Malik Beasley (No. 28) headlining what RecruitingNation ranks as the No. 11 recruiting class.

Hamilton is off to a good start with the Class of 2016 with commitments from small forward Jonathan Isaac, who is ranked ninth, and guards Trent Forrest (No. 47) and C.J. Walker (No. 81).

"I'm real excited with where we are and what we can become," Hamilton said. "I'm looking forward to this year and years to come. But hey, I'm just as excited about 5ive Oceans and my gospel. I'm going to tell you something, I have some really good music."

Hamilton knows good music. One of his ways to combat the stress that comes with a high major college basketball job is listening to concerts. But he doesn't just cue up a live album on his iPod. He has a collection of about 500 DVDs of live concerts, and as he plays them on his home entertainment center with surround sound and a big screen, they transport him to the front row of a show.

There's James Brown live in the Boston Garden in 1968, Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons live in Chicago in 1962, and Ray Charles and Gladys Knight in the Los Angeles Coliseum in 1971.

His love of music started from watching his grandmother sing in the church choir growing up in Gastonia, North Carolina. Hamilton followed in her footsteps and was an officer on the choir even directing songs on occasion.

His involvement in the church goes back to his earliest memories. To this day, one of his favorite pictures is him dressed in a double-breasted suit when he was about 4 years old (he'd tell you he was looking "clean") holding hands with his cousin as they're entering the sanctuary.

Hamilton had been looking for a way to perform outreach that would blend with the demanding schedule of being a head coach. He knew some gospel artist whom he said were “talented but struggling to realize their dreams” and he wanted to help because he believed in their ministry as gospel singers.

It led to the creation of 5ive Oceans.

“I go to church every Sunday and try to participate as much as possible, but I haven’t been nearly as active as I would like to be,” Hamilton said. “I felt that this would be my ministry.”

Hamilton isn’t involved in the day-to-day operations of his label but is aware of everything that is going on with it. He can rattle off the release dates of three artists on the label as if he’s a skilled A&R for Sony Music.

“You will be shocked by how good they are,” Hamilton said. “I fully expect to win awards with all three.”

If you judged Hamilton strictly off his sideline demeanor, you’d probably envision Hamilton’s acceptance speech going like the infamous rant by Suge Knight, the former head of Death Row Records at the 1995 Source Awards.

Any artist out there that wants to be an artist, that wants to stay a star, and not worry about the executive producer trying to be all in the videos, all on a record, dancing -- come to 5ive Oceans.

Of course, Hamilton is nothing like that. So the next time you see him looking stoic during a game, just remember he’s smiling on the inside.

“I don’t think there’s anyone who has more fun or enjoys themselves more than me,” Hamilton said. “But no one wants to believe that.”