

## Leonard Hamilton Has A Secret Vice That Keeps The Florida State Basketball Coach Young

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After hiding it for all these years, keeping his dark secret, Leonard Hamilton will admit to one bad habit that keeps him up at night. In the wee hours, when he has finished watching film and should be getting his rest, the Florida State coach indulges in his secret late-night life.

“I start surfing through YouTube listening to gospel music,” Hamilton said last week, while his team shot around at Duke. “Gospel videos, that’s my vice. It’s 11:30, and I need to get to bed, but let me enjoy some gospel videos. And I look up and it’s 1 a.m. That happens a lot.”

There, perhaps, is the answer to how a man pushing 72 doesn’t look like he has aged a day for a decade. Or the answer to how he has survived, and thrived, for so long at a school that is too often singularly focused on football.

Hamilton, at least, has won an ACC title in the past two decades, which is more than 10 other ACC teams can say.

This is all very much in keeping with the Hamilton ethos, a man whose entire career has been built on finding ways to win in the quieter corners of the basketball world, a philosophy of giving kids a chance and then not giving up on them, a teacher at heart. The story of his childhood, growing up in a crowded house in Gastonia, clawing his way out, has been told many times. The story of his successful adulthood, not so much.

A week ago, Hamilton passed Bobby Cremins with his 355th win at an ACC school, and Tuesday’s win at Pittsburgh was No. 356. Only four ACC coaches have won more: Mike Krzyzewski, Dean Smith, Roy Williams and Gary Williams. Hamilton has won more conference games than Frank McGuire. And with 554 Division I wins overall, he’s in the top 100 of all time, in the midst of his fifth consecutive 20-win season.

With the exception of a brief and lamentable NBA stint with Michael Jordan’s misguided Washington Wizards — too good to turn down — Hamilton has won everywhere he has been, from a rebuilding job at Oklahoma State to a building-from-scratch job at Miami, where the Hurricanes didn’t even have a practice gym when Hamilton helped reboot the program in 1990. This is his 18th season at Florida State, a long time for a guy who considers himself a program-builder, but the wins keep piling up, even if he isn’t counting. What he counts: Only three of his players haven’t graduated in those 18 years.

“When I hang up my whistle, if all I got to show is records and trophies and personal recognition, then I don’t think I would have accomplished very much in terms of what our mission should be and what our job should be as a coach,” Hamilton said. “I’m taking a teenager and urging him into young adulthood. That responsibility is the most important thing we do.”

He has done that his own way, recruiting all kinds of different players, from 7-foot-and-beyond projects like Michael Ojo to one-and-dones like Jonathan Isaac to do-it-all stars who could play anywhere like Michael Snaer. He has turned raw athletes into basketball players and coaxed athleticism from finesse players. And he has played them all, fueling his frenetic defense with waves of substitutions.

There’s no such thing as the end of Florida State’s bench, only the Leonard Hamilton Roulette wheel that could land on anyone on any given night. Nine different players have led the Seminoles in scoring this year, although it’s most often been Devin Vassell, their leading all-ACC candidate.

“We played 11 kids last night,” Hamilton said. “Eleven kids scored.”

“Only 11?”

A beat. Hamilton laughed, deeply.

Hamilton is back in North Carolina on Saturday to play N.C. State, and he'll be back next month for the ACC tournament in Greensboro, a year after his team played Duke for the title in Charlotte. Hamilton said he doesn't really think of himself as a North Carolinian or a Floridian at this point, just a citizen of the basketball world, trying to make it better, one player at a time, sneaking away to watch one gospel video at a time.

That, not winning and losing, is what keeps him up at night.

"There's just a peace that comes over you," Hamilton said, "when you feel good about what you do every day."