

INDUCTEE PROFILE

Miller shot his way to Mississippi

Became two-year starter for Rebels

(Editor's note: This interview was done in late 2019, prior to the pandemic. Inductee Eddie Miller passed away on Jan. 20, 2022.)



By earning a scholarship to Ole Miss in 1965, Eddie became Blair County's first basketball player to earn a scholarship to what is now a Power-5 conference.

By Neil Rudel

Altoona Mirror

Eddie Miller was always a fun-loving guy with a sense of humor so it wasn't surprising that when discussing his college basketball career, it didn't take long for him to work in a punchline.

"I held Pete Maravich to 42," Miller often said. "Two below his average."

Indeed, Maravich averaged 44.2 points per game during his three-year career at LSU (1967-70) en route to becoming one of the greatest pure scorers of all time and probably the SEC's best-ever individual talent.

"A show by himself," Miller said. "He was the greatest ballhandler and passer I've ever seen. He was amazing."

As a two-year starter at Mississippi (1966-68), Miller had a close-up view of Maravich, having matched up against him along with other future NBA players such as Pat Riley and Louie Dampier at Kentucky, Neil Walk at Florida and Tom Boerwinkle at Tennessee.

A product of Bishop Guilfoyle High School, Miller led the Ole Miss freshman team in scoring at 18.3 points per game, and then became a two-year starter for the Rebels, averaging 11 points as a sophomore and 8.3 as a junior.

"The competition was pretty tough," Miller said. "Kentucky had just lost to Texas Western (for the 1966 national championship) and Tennessee won the SEC my sophomore year."

The highlight of Miller's Ole Miss career came when he made a game-winning shot as a sophomore in 1967 to win at arch rival Mississippi State, 71-70.

"They had cowbells in the stands, and you couldn't hear," Miller said. "I had only missed one shot that night. We ran a play, and I came off a pick and

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Eddie was thrilled to sign with Mississippi and coach Eddie Crawford.

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the guy (defender) took a step back.”
Nothing but net.

“What I remember,” Miller recalled, nearly 50 years later, “it was so quiet after I made that shot. All the bells stopped ringing.”

In those days, radio was a primary source of information. The game wasn’t televised, and, for sure no one was tweeting game details from Starkville.

“Everybody listened to the radio back then,” Miller said. “The next day, when I walked into class, you would have thought we won the national championship.”

Miller was known in Oxford as “Red” for his red hair.

“I had never been called ‘Red’ in my life,” he said. “Everybody called me Eddie up here. But down there, if I was going to one of the fraternities, it was always, ‘Hey, Red!’”

After helping Ole Miss to its first winning in seven years and earning recognition on the SEC all-sophomore team, Miller experienced elbow problems as a junior. He missed several games, and his average dropped, contributing to his decision to forgo his

senior year.

“I came down on my elbow (as a junior),” he said. “I would still start because I could play defense, but I was never the same on offense.”

He returned to Altoona to join the family business, McMullen Furniture, and started his family. He and wife, Susan, have three children (Erin, Ryan and Patrick) and two grandchildren.

“Ole Miss was a good experience,” Miller said. “I enjoyed it, and I’ve been back 10-15 times. I’d take my sons, and they could find out all the stories I told them were true.”

What he remembers most is how he was treated in Oxford.

Don Kessinger, the former shortstop with the Chicago Cubs, was an Ole Miss product who coached the baseball team and the freshman basketball team.

The two remained in touch, and Kessinger

emailed, “I am so happy and proud for my old friend Eddie Miller.”

Miller credited Kessinger “for making me the defensive player I needed to be to play in that league (SEC).”

Miller graduated from BG in 1964 and attended the Carolina Military Academy, where he captained the basketball team and averaged 21.8 points per game. In a matchup against Allegany High School, the reigning Maryland state champion, Miller poured in 34 points, and recruiting interest intensified.

His coach at Carolina was Cortez Manor, who played at Duke. Legendary coach Vic Bubas pursued Miller for Duke, as did fellow legend Frank McGuire at South Carolina.

He also drew offers from Skip Hughes at Saint Francis, Arizona and Colorado.

His brother Pat had played football at Memphis State “and I was familiar with Ole Miss. I flew down there, and it was a great atmosphere, and they were building a new arena. You could tell they wanted to win, and the people were so nice. I couldn’t believe how nice they were to me. That’s probably the reason I went there.”

In committing to Mississippi in 1965, Miller became one of the first Blair County high school basketball players to get a scholarship to what is now a Power-5 school.

He said going to prep school benefited him, adding, “It was a good experience, and I played junior colleges and freshmen teams — a lot of good competition.”

Competition contributed to Miller’s challenge and success from a young age. His older brother Pat was four years his senior and a mentor.



Miller bio

Sport: Basketball

High school: Bishop Guilfoyle

College: Mississippi

Hall of Fame achievement: Two-year starter and double-figure scorer for University of Mississippi (1966-68).

Current residence: Deceased

"I always played with my brother Pat," he said. "I was used to playing people who were older and better than I was. I was not afraid to go to the basket."

Plus he was a product of the golden age of sports in Altoona as both Altoona High School and BG were turning out numerous athletic standouts throughout the 1960s.

"There were athletes all over the place," Miller said, adding that three members of the BG's starting five during his junior year — Bill Huber, Mike Irwin and Len Zandy — are already in the Hall of Fame. He makes four.

In those days, the Altoona YMCA hosted basketball tournaments and drew statewide competition.

"My hero was Jim Curry," Miller said. "We both had red hair. I think he was the best athlete to ever come out of Altoona. I watched him play over at the Y — when the Y had all those great tournaments."

BG teammate and close friend Tom Frank is Miller's presenter.

"Eddie played his best in big games. That's one of the things I always admired about him," Frank, who also passed away (2020), said. "The Y tournaments were big, and they came in from all over. Henry Lee would play in them. That was big-time action. BG didn't play Altoona High in those days, but our class beat Altoona in all those tournaments the whole way up the line."

Miller scored 50 points against Bellwood-Antis in 1964, which still stands as BG's single-game scoring record.

"They were the only team that ever played me a zone," he said. "The paper said I was 22 of 26, and I'd say I can't believe I missed four shots against a zone. I'm surprised nobody's beaten 50 points. With the 3-pointer, it's not a hard shot anymore."

Irwin, a former Penn State football captain and a local sports historian, said, "Back in that era, I always said the two best shooters in town were Don Appleman and Eddie Miller. He was a great shooter. That was his forte. We always kidded him — he never saw a shot he didn't like."

Miller grew up on Eighth Street between Second and Third avenues, and he'd hone his game no matter the weather.



Eddie puts up a shot over the great Pete Maravich.

"I used to shovel out the alley near our house to shoot," he said. "My hands would get too cold, the tips of my fingers would crack and burn. So that's when I'd start dribbling with my left hand, and I learned how to use both hands. By the time I got to college, I could score from the left or the right."

The playground at Adams School, where many of the city's top players of that era could be found, was a familiar stop.

"That's where everybody played," Miller said. "Art (Taneyhill) was the big cheese."

Though he had gotten some college interest for football from Arizona State and Purdue, Miller said, "I knew I wanted to play basketball, and I enjoyed it. I thought I was better in basketball."

His enshrinement in the Hall of Fame has been a source of pride.

"I always thought there were people more deserving," he said. "I'm very excited and appreciative."

Miller passed away in a Pittsburgh hospital after a bout with pneumonia on Jan. 20 — less than three months before his induction, which was postponed three times due to the pandemic.

His sons followed in his footsteps and played basketball at BG.

Patrick Miller will accept the Hall of Fame award in honor of his dad.

"My dad was real excited," Patrick Miller said. "He was real excited that other people were excited for him, even more excited than him."

"He was really looking forward to being inducted," Ryan Miller said. "In the hospital, he said he wanted to rewrite his speech."