

Back In The Game: Dr. Hightower Excited About New Role As Big Ten Conference Special Advisor for Basketball Officiating

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EDWARDSVILLE - Dr. Ed Hightower will be remembered for many years to come for his work in education as an administrator in both the Edwardsville and Alton School Districts. Hightower also will forever be recalled for his work as a nationally-acclaimed basketball official.

Some remember Hightower's beginning on courts such as Carrollton, Jerseyville, and Alton and his white knee pads. Many enjoyed watching Hightower officiate basketball almost as much as they did the games. Hightower's talent as an official quickly caught national attention. Hightower became one of the country's premier officials by the time he retired. He officiated NCAA basketball for 36 years, including 12 Final Four appearances, earning the Naismith Men's College Official of the Year award in 1992.

Dr. Hightower was the superintendent of schools for many years in District 7 and also a principal in the Alton District, prior to the Edwardsville move. He is retired as a school administrator, but this past week The Big Ten Conference announced a new role for the legendary educator - he will be the Special Advisor for Basketball Officiating, effective immediately. Big Ten Conference Commissioner Kevin Warren made the announcement.

Warren said Dr. Hightower is assigned to review, assess, and audit the conference's women's and men's basketball officiating programs and provide regular feedback and assessments of those programs to ensure that Big Ten Conference and NCAA officiating standards and expectations are upheld.

"Dr. Hightower has distinguished himself as an exceptional basketball official, educator, and leader during his storied career," said Warren. "This combination of experiences makes him an ideal candidate to work with the Big Ten Conference to continue to enhance our women's and men's basketball officiating programs while serving as a mentor to both current and future basketball officials."

Dr. Hightower talked this week about how much the new position means to him at this stage of his life.

"Kevin Warren is very data-driven and wants to make sure they are always meeting the milestones he has set," Dr. Hightower said. "I spoke to him this summer and he said he was interested in having an audit and assessment done for women's and men's basketball. He determined I would be the person to head that assessment and be a special advisor to the commissioner."

“I will report directly to him what I am seeing and provide a final evaluation with recommendations to the Big Ten commissioner at the end of the season regarding how we can go about improving the product that the Big Ten produces. This is a great opportunity. I will work closely with him and the athletic directors, coaches, and officials to determine how we can improve.”

Hightower officiated NCAA basketball for 36 years, including 12 Final Four appearances, earning the Naismith Men's College Official of the Year award in 1992. He retired as superintendent of the Edwardsville School district in 2015 following a 19-year tenure leading the district. Hightower received his bachelor's, master's, and specialist's degrees from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and his Doctorate in Education Administration from Saint Louis University.

Dr. Hightower said he was very honored he was selected for this newly created position.

Hightower emphasized he will not be breaking out his white knee pads out of the closet to be on the court again as a referee, but he will attend some games and observe in person and work remotely watching the video to evaluate the product.

He stressed his work is simply to evaluate the product and said: “I also will not be assigning officials.”

Dr. Hightower could have been an official in the NBA, but he declined to fulfill his true passion - education. He was the national and state principal of the year during his time. He moved to Edwardsville in the mid-1990s as superintendent.

“Commissioner Warren is an excellent leader,” Dr. Hightower said. “What he gets at more than anything and what is exciting to me is you can't just make decisions without understanding the origin of why those decisions were made. Commissioner Warren is certainly visionary and I wouldn't doubt if this is replicated in other conferences after it is done.”