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BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME CLASS OF 2008

## Kudos! Pistons owner Bill Davidson honored for contributions

BY VINCE ELLIS • FREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER • SEPTEMBER 6, 2008

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SPRINGFIELD, Mass. -- In a wheelchair, before a packed auditorium at the Basketball Hall of Fame, [Pistons](#) owner Bill Davidson took his rightful place alongside the greats of the game Friday.

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After a short speech in which he paid homage to members of his family, thanked [NBA](#) commissioner David Stern for his vision in growing the NBA and a nod to the willingness to help others as you grow older, the only person in history to own championship teams in three professional leagues became a member of the Hall of Fame.

From his purchase of the Pistons in 1974, to the building of the innovative Palace of Auburn Hills, to his work in helping to implement the modern-day salary cap and free-agency rules, to his ownership of six world championships won by the Pistons, the Shock and the NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning, it was night for the game to give thanks to the lifelong Michigan resident.

"It's a much-deserved honor," said Pistons president Joe Dumars, who presented Davidson for enshrinement. "He's an innovator and a trailblazer, and in this industry the way you're recognized at the highest level is being inducted into the Hall of Fame.

"So I think that it's only fitting that he's a Hall of Famer as of now."

Dumars should know -- he joined the Hall of Fame in 2006.



AP

Said Pistons owner Bill Davidson at his enshrinement Friday into the Basketball Hall of Fame: "This makes my heart beat a little harder because of my history which is many years in the NBA." Davidson, a lifelong Michigan resident, bought the Pistons in 1974. He also owns the Detroit Shock.

CLASS OF 2008

Inductees to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame Class of 2008:

**Adrian Dantley:** Former Pistons forward (1986-89) was one of the most productive scorers in NBA history. In a 15-year career, he scored 23,177 points, which ranks 23rd. The six-time NBA All-Star (1980-82, 1984-86) was named NBA comeback player of the year in 1984. That year, with Utah, he led league in scoring (30.6-point average).

**Bill Davidson:** Lifelong Michigan resident has owned the Pistons since 1974 and the Shock since 1998. His Pistons have won three NBA crowns, and the Shock has won two WNBA titles. Davidson has served as chairman of the NBA Board of Governors and played an integral role in structuring the modern NBA salary-cap and free-agency standards.

Davidson was joined in the class of 2008 by TV analyst and former Pistons and University of Detroit coach Dick Vitale, former Piston Adrian Dantley, centers Patrick Ewing and Hakeem Olajuwon, [Miami Heat](#) coach Pat Riley and women's basketball pioneer Cathy Rush.

Pistons coach Michael Curry, play-by-play announcer George Blaha and former Pistons coach Chuck Daly were in the audience.

A video montage featuring Dumars, Shock coach and former Bad Boy Bill Laimbeer, Stern and others extolled to savvy and business sense of Davidson.

Then Davidson, 85, was wheeled to the podium.

"This makes my heart beat a little harder because of my history, which is many years in the NBA," Davidson said.

He then joked about the "bargain" prices franchises could be purchased for in 1974 and thanked Stern, who became commissioner in 1984, for leading the league to an era of prosperity.

"That's when my humble stake in the Pistons blossomed," Davidson said.

Davidson then made a point about the growth of the NBA. He recalled a story in which he was negotiating for three days to open a glass plant in Hungary.

After a breakthrough, his opponent in the negotiations admitted he knew Davidson the whole time as the owner of the Pistons because he was a starting guard for the Hungarian national team.

And he was almost done with his speech.

"Thank you, I've enjoyed tonight more than you can imagine," Davidson said. "Thanks for your attention."

And then came the applause.

The occasion offered Dumars a chance to thank Davidson for the opportunity to run the organization.

"He handed the keys over to a franchise to a 36-year-old African-American guy and said run with it," said Dumars, who assumed his position in 1999 after a 14-year Hall of Fame [career](#) in the NBA. "I'm appreciative of that because that doesn't happen often. I recognize that and I recognize how special that is. I'll forever be indebted to him for that."

**Patrick Ewing:** A member of the NBA 50th Anniversary Team, Ewing scored 24,815 points during his 17-year NBA career and 11,607 rebounds. He remains the New York Knicks' all-time leader in points, rebounds, blocked shots, steals and field goals.

**Hakeem Olajuwon:** A two-time NBA defensive player of the year, Olajuwon holds the NBA record for blocked shots (3,830) and is the only player to record more than 3,000 blocked shots and 2,000 steals in a career. He was the 1994 NBA MVP for Houston.

**Pat Riley:** A three-time NBA coach of the year who ranks third behind Lenny Wilkens and Don Nelson in all-time NBA victories. He has won five NBA championships, four with the Lakers (1982, '85, '87, '88) and one with Miami (2006).



**Cathy Rush:** A pioneer in women's basketball and an advocate for women's sports who coached Immaculata University to three consecutive AIAW national championships, 1972-74. She was enshrined in the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame in 2000.

**Dick Vitale:** Former University of Detroit (1972-77) and Pistons coach (1978-79). He began his broadcasting career with ESPN in 1979 and has helped make the network an integral part of college basketball's popularity. He is the author of six books chronicling his love affair with basketball. Vitale was the recipient of the Basketball Hall of Fame's Curt Gowdy electronic media award in 1988 and won the NABC Cliff Wells Appreciation Award in 2000.

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**JohnMan** wrote:

Bill is a model owner, who should be honored in Michigan forever as a true winner -- he always WANTS THAT TROPHY, BABY! He wants it as bad as we the fans do. Too bad, the hapless owners of the Lions don't have an ounce of Bill's winning attitude and know-how.

09/09/2008 10:45:56 a.m. EDT

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**mannyman** wrote:

I can and do take the time to say "Thanks" Mr. D. for giving Detroit a franchise that they can be proud of. Your ability to recognize the difference's in two former players Isaiah Thomas and of course Joe Dumars has been huge, imagine had Thomas been charged with leading the Pistons? No, I don't under estimate Mr. D and how much he has meant to Detroit and the region. So Thanks Mr Davidson!

09/09/2008 9:03:31 a.m. EDT

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**Chiavon** wrote:

Congratulations, Mr. Bill Davidson. A true class act, and a fan as well as an owner.

09/06/2008 3:26:23 p.m. EDT

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**DetfaninOrlando** wrote:

Detroit and Detroit fans are truly lucky that we have someone who cares as much about his basketball team as Mr. Davidson does. Not only that, but he actually has the savvy to do something about his desire to be successful, which may be even more rare.

09/06/2008 9:03:16 a.m. EDT

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**scotvve** wrote:

A true class act Mr D !

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