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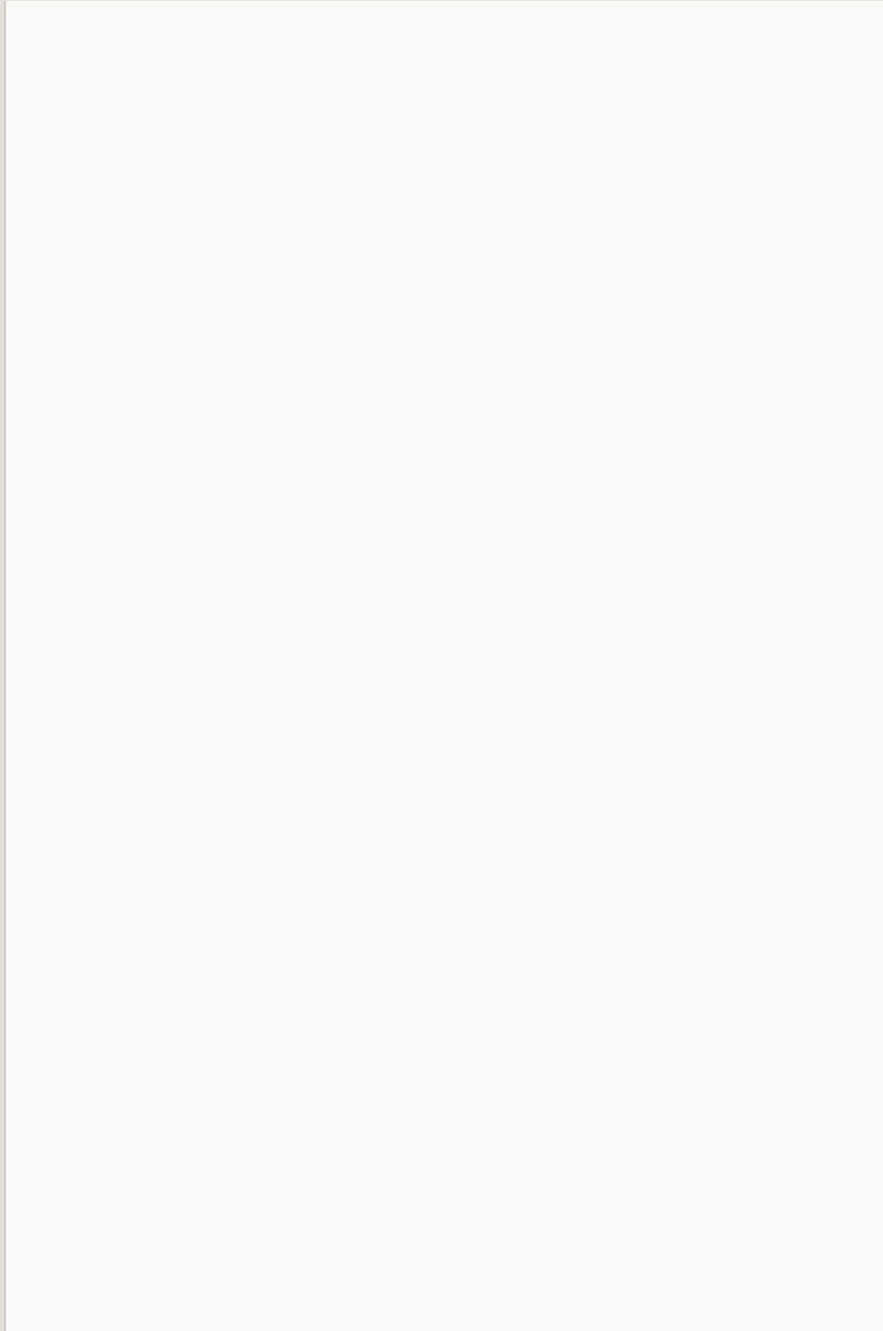
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 [For Rent](#) |
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Wednesday, December 17, 2008

College basketball

Haywood wants to promote UDM

Titans honor legend tonight; in return, he would like to help raise profile of the program.

Terry Foster / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Spencer Haywood remembers late 1968 like it was yesterday.

The Tigers helped heal a city by winning the World Series, he'd just won a gold medal in the Summer Olympics, and people were packing Calihan Hall to watch the University of Detroit.

And, oh, by the way, the attraction at Calihan Hall happened to be Haywood, who early in the season, electrified the crowd against Aquinas College by shattering a backboard on a dunk.

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"They had this guy out there (who) was going to take a charge," Haywood said, laughing. "I jumped over his head.

"So I am up in the air and I am thinking I am going to dunk it. I broke the backboard and there is glass all over the place, and I thought it would be cool to pick up the rim and go like, 'Yeah!' "

There still were 6 1/2 minutes to play, but the Titans were ahead 105-40, so officials decided to end it there.

Tonight, Haywood returns to Calihan for "Spencer Haywood Night." Fittingly, Detroit Mercy's opponent is Aquinas.

The first 1,000 fans to arrive for the 7:30 game will receive a Haywood collector's card, and Haywood will be an honorary guest coach.

Remember the Titans

But there's more on Haywood's mind than revisiting his past.

He wants Titans basketball back on the map. He has offered his support for new coach Ray McCallum and has encouraged former players and alumni to support the program.

"It could give the city some kind of boost," said Haywood, 59. "Our games were sold out for the year. There was so much enthusiasm for the program. It was so exciting.

"For (McCallum) to be successful, it is going to take the type of alumni support that Carolina and all those schools get."

Haywood also wants to make sure history is remembered, though.

He'd like to see championship banners hung along with banners honoring former players such as Dave DeBusschere, John Long, Terry Tyler, Rashad Phillips and Earl Cureton, and former coach Dick Vitale.

"They need to see their history," he said. "There were some serious players that came through here."

Hometown loyalty

Haywood was one of the most high-profile recruits, garnering interest from Kentucky and Tennessee.

But his mentor, the late Will Robinson, advised him to attend Trinidad Junior College in Colorado. One reason was that the U.S. Olympic team held a spot open for a junior college player.

Once Haywood made his mark at the Olympics, he decided to head home to play to Detroit, spurning an opportunity to become the first black player in the Southeastern Conference.

"People thought I was crazy (coming to Detroit)," he said. "I had personal reasons to come here, but I got everything I had because of Detroit."

Though he helped the Titans to a top-10 ranking, he stayed at Detroit only one season before testing the NBA's policy of banning underclassmen from the draft.

The move wound up in the U.S. Supreme Court in 1971, and Haywood won.

After spending 14 seasons in the NBA with six teams, Haywood retired.

Now, he splits time between Las Vegas, where he runs a tile and marble company, and Detroit, where he enjoys watching daughters Shaakra and Isis play at Plymouth High.

You can reach Terry Foster at (313) 222-1494 or terry.foster@detnews.com.

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Spencer Haywood only played one season at the University of Detroit, but he is one of the school's best. (Detroit News file photo)

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