

THE HISTORY OF FLORIDA WOMEN'S BASKETBALL



Sue Chambers was the first woman to receive a basketball scholarship at UF.

Winter 1972 – Dr. Ruth Alexander, Donna Deutsch, Mimi Ryan and Linda Hall Thornton with the assistance of Dr. Clifford Boyd, write the official proposal suggesting guidelines for an intercollegiate athletics program at the University of Florida.

March 1972 – The University of Florida's Faculty Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics unanimously approves the proposal with the effective date to be the 1972-73 school year.

1973-74 school year – The inaugural UF women's basketball squad is a club team and posts an 11-8 record under coach Darlene Wyrnak, who is a graduate assistant at the school. Members of that team include Valerie Bazarte, Susie Brownlee, Sue Chambers, Emma Gracey, Vicky Lavinsky, Cassie Macias, Kathy Wagner and Monte Wynn.

July 1974 – Dr. Paula Welch is hired as the Lady Gators first official coach and teaches in the Women's Physical Education Department.

Jan. 13, 1975 – Florida makes its varsity debut in Alligator Alley, but Valdosta State spoils the team's opener, defeating UF 57-47 despite 17 points from Sue Chambers.

Jan. 18, 1975 – Emma Gracey's 14 points leads the Lady Gators to their first-ever win, a 51-47 victory over Rollins College and sparks a seven-game winning streak.



Then-Athletics Director Bill Carr (far left) and coach Mickie DeMoss (far right) presented commemorative balls to the program's first 1,000 point scorers: Cheryl Fisher and Quientella Bonner.

July 21, 1975 – Guidelines for the Education Act of 1972, Title IX, is signed into law by U.S. President Gerald R. Ford.

Feb. 29, 1976 – The Lady Gators steal front page sports headlines in The Gainesville Sun, which reviews the squad's three-game sweep, capped by a 53-39 victory over Florida State, that gave UF its first state championship ever in women's team competition.

March 1976 – The team boards the UF University Athletic Association aircraft, "The Blue Goose," and travels to their first-ever Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) regional tournament held in Cleveland Miss.

March 11, 1976 – UF downs Alabama 64-56 in the first round of the AIAW Regional III Tournament, but suffered their worst loss in program history later that same day, losing 132-49 to No. 4-ranked Mississippi College to end the season with a 16-8 record.

March 1976 – The College of Physical Education, Health and Recreation reorganize and eliminate dual teaching and coaching positions. Welch, who had planned to continue both, resigns as coach so she can devote more time to teaching and researching sport history.



"One of the funniest moments I can remember was when (coach) Mickey DeMoss was giving us a pep talk at half time in the locker room and stomping her foot on the floor. Her heel came off and flew across the locker room but she didn't want to crack a smile and spoil the moment so she hobbled over to the chalk board and continued to draw plays."

Robin Pokoj, '85

1976-77 season – Cathy Davis, the trainer during the previous season, is hired to double up her responsibilities as trainer and coach, while completing her master's degree.

Nov. 13, 1976 – Freshman Quientella Bonner becomes the first six-footer to play for UF. She goes on to grab a UF-record 1,321 rebounds during her four-year career, a mark that still stands.

The Gainesville Sun SECTION D

WINNERS! Lady Gators Tops



This is just great. We've got a group of happy people up here and without a doubt, this is the greatest win of my career." – coach Paula Welch told the Gainesville Sun on Feb. 29, 1976, after the Lady Gators captured UF's first-ever team state championship

Coach Paula Welch

Jan. 8, 1977 – UF logs its first-ever victory over a Georgia team, when Bonner tallied 28 points with 31 rebounds in a 79-67 win against Georgia Southern. Bonner's 31-rebound effort still remains the Lady Gators' and the SEC's all-time single-game record.

Feb. 26, 1977 – UF captures its second straight FAIAW Tournament with a 72-60 win over FSU.

1977-78 season – The team finishes third at the FAIAW tournament and goes 2-1 in the AIAW Regional, but suffers the first losing season in program history with a 12-14 record.

March 8, 1979 – The Lady Gators advance to the AIAW Region III Tournament as a result of their runner-up state finish, but lose

"Some of my favorite things about Florida were playing pick-up games with the guys in Alligator Alley, my involvement with Campus Crusade for Christ and Leonardo's pizza!"

Sue Chambers McKee, '77

to Mississippi 101-78 to end the season. Future Lady Gator coach Carol Ross scores six points and grabs a team-high nine rebounds in helping her Lady Rebels to victory.

April 1979 – Davis decides not to pursue the Lady Gators' coaching position, which is expanded into a full-time job. UF is 38-40 during her three-year tenure.

1979-80 season – Mickie DeMoss becomes the first full-time coach for women's basketball at UF. Barbara Holzworth joins DeMoss on the sideline as the program's first full-time assistant coach.

Feb. 7, 1980 – The Lady Gators avenge an early season loss to Mississippi State and defeat the Lady Bulldogs 68-62 in the first round of the inaugural Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball Tournament, played in Knoxville, Tenn. UF loses to the eventual-champion Lady Vols the next day. Future Lady Gator coach Carol Ross is named to the All-Tournament team after leading Ole Miss to second place.

Feb. 21-24, 1980 – UF defeats FSU twice, including an 84-71 victory in the title game of the FAIAW Tournament, as the Lady Gators take their third state crown. Barbara Chennault tallied 23 points, while Cheryl Fisher added 20 in the final game.

March 6, 1980 – The Lady Gators drop an 89-58 decision to



Ralph Leone/Visuals Unlimited



The '85 Lady Gator team reached the finals of the NWIT.

"I will never forget the excitement in the lockerroom after winning the semifinal game of the NWIT that put us in the championship game."

Janna Bragg, '89

Georgia Southern in the first round of the AIAW Region III Tournament.

January 1981 – Quientella Bonner and Cheryl Fisher become the first Lady Gators to surpass the 1,000-point plateau.

1981-82 season – Tammy Jackson, Terry Whitehead, Keturah Bell, Hollis Hindes and Pam Stone are the lone Lady Gators boasting interscholastic basketball experience on the 14-member squad, which posts a 13-16 record. Jackson is named All-SEC and earns freshman All-America second team honors. The team opts to compete in the FAIAW Tournament instead of the super competitive SEC Tournament in hopes of qualifying for the national tournament, but loses to Florida A&M in the first round.



"One of the biggest wins I experienced was beating Kentucky by four points before Christmas in 1983 because we weren't 'supposed' to beat them on their home court."

Hollis (Hindes) Wehmeier, '85

March 1982 – The first-ever NCAA Championship Tournament is held for women's basketball. It includes 32 teams.

1982-83 season – Six of the SEC's 10 teams are ranked 19th or better in the Associated Press national poll.

March 16, 1983 – Mickey DeMoss resigns as head coach of the Lady Gator program. She joins the staff of the nationally ranked Auburn team, where she works with future UF coach Carol Ross, who is an assistant with the Lady Tigers. Two years later DeMoss accepts a position as the top assistant of the Tennessee women's team, where she remains today.

April 6, 1983 – Debbie Yow becomes UF's fourth head coach. Within her first month on the job, she signs two of the nation's most highly recruited junior college prospects: Margaret Peters and Michelle Sanchez.

1983-84 season – The Lady Gators win their first nine games of the year, en route to a 19-9 record, the team's first winning season in six years. No fewer than six of the 10 SEC teams are ranked in the same week.

Dec. 22, 1983 – UF defeats No. 20 Kentucky 68-66, the program's first victory over a nationally ranked opponent, thanks to 17 points and 10 rebounds from Margaret Peters.

Dec. 26, 1983 – The Lady Gators earn the No. 19 position the Associated Press (AP) poll, their first-ever recognition in the national rankings.

Jan. 10, 1985 – Tammy Jackson scores 16 points leading UF to an 84-57 win over Radford, presenting Coach Yow the 150th victory of her career.

Feb. 18, 1985 – Tammy Jackson scores 18 points in a losing effort against Miami, but becomes UF's all-time leading scorer.

March 21, 1985 – The team downs Montana 70-49 in the first round of the National Women's Invitational Tournament (NWIT), before posting an 87-80 victory over Drake the following day.

March 23, 1985 – UF plays LSU in the finals of the NWIT and drops a 74-54 decision, but the team concludes the year with a 22-9 record – the first 20-win season in program history.

March – April 1985 – Debbie Yow steps down as head coach to pursue administrative work and becomes active in Lady Gator fund raising. She is currently the athletics director at the University of Maryland.

Summer 1985 – Carol Higginbottom is named the fifth head coach of the Lady Gator program. Joining her staff includes Jim Davis – currently the head coach at Clemson – and Jody Runge.



"I remember when we traveled to Tennessee in January and it snowed when we got there. The heat wasn't working in the gym, so we went to the nearest store to buy thermal underwear, which we wore under our uniform jerseys."

Sharon (Jenkins) Carmouche, '86

1985-86 season – Three starters are lost for the season due to injury and the team struggles to a 10-18 record. Seven SEC schools earn bids into the NCAA Tournament.

1986-87 season – Lea Henry joins the staff as an assistant coach, while Hollis Hindes serves as a graduate assistant.

Feb. 3, 1988 – The first live televised Lady Gator basketball game airs UF falling to Alabama 75-53.

Mar. 1, 1989 – Cassandra Washington leads UF with 25 points, while Sophia Witherspoon and Rhvonja Smith tally 18 points in the Lady Gators' 67-64 victory in the SEC Tournament, the team's first postseason win since 1980. The victory also solidifies the squad's first winning season under Coach Higginbottom, a 15-14 ledger.

Summer 1989 – Rhvonja Smith and Sophia Witherspoon become the first Lady Gators to compete in the U.S. Olympic Festival, and earn a bronze medal for their team.

Feb. 6, 1990 – Camille Ratledge dishes 10 assists in the 66-52 win at South Florida and secures her title as the SEC all-time career assists leader, a place she still holds entering the 1998-99 season. She ranks second in the nation for assists and holds all UF assist records.

Feb. 14, 1990 – Carol Higginbottom-Whitmire resigns with four regular season games remaining in the season. Lea Henry takes over as interim coach and guides the team to a 3-3 record after reaching the second round of the SEC Tournament. Henry is now the head coach at Georgia State.

March 1990 – Cassandra Washington is presented the Tracy Caulkins Award for athletic and academic excellence.

April 17, 1990 – Carol Ross becomes the Lady Gators' sixth full-time head coach. Ross adds Mike Pauley and Joi Williams to her staff.

Dec. 13, 1990 – Co-captains Rhvonja Smith and Sophia Witherspoon both collect the 1,000th points of their careers during the 83-41 victory over Alabama-Huntsville.

Jan. 17, 1991 – Sophia Witherspoon scores 29 points and almost carries UF to a stunning upset of No. 2-ranked Tennessee, but the Lady Vols squeak out of the O'Connell Center with a 71-70 double-overtime victory, in one of the most memorable games in program history.

Feb. 28, 1991 – Sophia Witherspoon joins Tammy Jackson as the only other Lady Gator named first-team All-SEC.

March 1991 – Sophia Witherspoon completes her eligibility as UF's fifth all-time leading scorer and helps the Lady Gators to a 17-11 record.

1991-92 season – The squad ties a school record by winning four SEC games, en route to a 15-13 overall record. UF plays a pair of Final Four-bound teams and drops three six-point-or-less decisions to top-20 ranked teams. A record-five players earn SEC Academic Honor Roll honors. All of this is accomplished despite losing a pair of starters in the preseason to injuries.

Summer 1992 – Tammy Jackson becomes the first Lady Gator to play for the U.S. Olympic Team, which claims the bronze medal in Barcelona.

Mar. 14, 1993 – "Pack your bags Lady Gators of Florida..." The mandate that will be forever treasured in the minds of 12 UF players, coaches and staff. This was the magical moment when ESPN/NCAA Women's Basketball Championship Special host Tracy Warren gives them the best news they've heard in 18 years – they earned a bid to the 48-team NCAA Tournament.

Mar. 17, 1993 – The Lady Gators weren't just happy to be playing in their first NCAA Championship Tournament. They upset host Bowling Green in the first round 69-67.



Doug O'Pfer



Carol Ross was selected by her peers as the 1994 SEC Coach of the Year and later as the 1997 WBCA District 9 Coach of the Year.

"The hiring of Coach Ross is one of the most significant events in the history of the program."

Ann Glasse, '90

1992-93 season – UF resets a school record with six SEC wins. The team's 19 wins are the third highest season total in school history. Merlakia "Lake" Jones earns first team All-SEC honors.

Feb. 2, 1994 – DeLisha Milton records the first - and still only - triple-double in Lady Gator history, when she tags Bethune-Cookman for 11 points, 11 rebounds and 10 steals in only 23 minutes of action.

Feb. 20, 1994 – UF tops South Carolina 80-68 to conclude its home season with a perfect 14-0 record, the program's first undefeated home slate.

Feb. 21, 1994 – The Lady Gators appear in the USA Today/Coaches poll for the first time, cracking the list at No. 25.

March 3, 1994 – Carol Ross is voted the SEC Coach of the Year for guiding the Lady Gators to a program-best third place finish in the league standings after posting an 8-3 league record. "Lake" Jones earns first team All-SEC accolades for the second straight year.

March 4, 1994 – "Lake" Jones scores 19 points in UF's 72-67 victory over Auburn that lifts the Lady Gators to the semifinals of the SEC Tournament for the first time in school history. UF loses to Vanderbilt the next day without the services of Jones who was questionably ejected during the Auburn game. DeLisha Milton becomes the first Lady Gator ever named to the SEC All-Tournament team.

March 16, 1994 – The Lady Gators earn the No. 4 seed in the NCAA West Region and can play host to their first round game, but are forced to travel to College Station, Texas, due to a Rod Stewart concert scheduled in the O'Connell Center. The team drops a disappointing 78-76 defeat to host Texas A&M.

March 1994 – UF ranks No. 20 in the final AP poll, the first time the Lady Gators end the season with a national ranking.

Jan. 23, 1995 – UF extends its home-winning streak to 20 games with a 98-54 triumph over West Virginia. The streak halts at 20 after a 76-69 loss to Tennessee.

Feb. 8, 1995 – The Lady Gators snap a three-game slide, upsetting No. 10 Georgia 59-46 in Athens, marking the program's first win against a top-10 opponent.

Feb. 21, 1995 – "Lake" Jones becomes the program's all-time leading scorer when she hits a four-foot jumper from the right side with 2:28 remaining to lift UF to an 81-62 win over Florida State.

March 2, 1995 – "Lake" Jones is named first team All-SEC for the third time and earns third team All-America honors from Basketball Times and honorable mention notice from Kodak and Associated Press.

March 16, 1995 – The Lady Gators gobble up Radford 89-49 in the first round of the NCAA Tournament, but fall to host Virginia 72-67 two days later. "Lake" Jones ends her career with 2,001 points – a UF record that still stands.

Dec. 16, 1995 – UF downs Kentucky 69-46 in the Milk Challenge played at the Orlando Arena and wins its ninth consecutive game to open the season, equaling the best start in program history with the 1984 & 1985 squads.

March 1, 1996 – UF tallies its third straight 20-win season with a 65-48 win over South Carolina in the first round of the SEC Tournament.

Feb. 10, 1997 – The Lady Gators crack the top-10 in the national polls for the first time in program history, grabbing the No. 10 spot in the Associated Press ranking.

Feb. 16, 1997 – A program-record 4,906 fans cheer on the Lady Gators during an important SEC battle, but watch Alabama down UF 86-81.

Feb. 19, 1997 – The Lady Gators come up short of claiming their first-ever SEC regular season title, falling to fifth-ranked Georgia 66-64. It marks the first time UF is in contention for the league crown, which is decided on the final two days of action.

Feb. 27, 1997 – DeLisha Milton is voted the school's first-ever SEC Player of the Year for basketball. Murriel Page earns first team All-SEC honors with Milton, marking the first time that a pair of Lady Gators grace the first team.



Florida SID

The '93 Lady Gators became the first UF team to earn a trip to the NCAA Championship.

"One of my fondest memories was when the team and coaches were all gathered at Coach Ross' house watching the selections for the NCAA Tournament and the announcer said, 'Pack your bags Lady Gators. You're going to Ohio!' – our first NCAA appearance in history! Many screams, hugs and tears followed the announcement."

Delmanetta Barlow-Mackey, '93



March 2, 1996 – The Lady Gators upset No. 10 Vanderbilt 83-73 and advance to the SEC Tournament semifinals for the second time. UF falls to eventual-champion Tennessee the following day.

March 11, 1996 – UF earns the No. 16 position in the final AP poll.

March 16, 1996 – Senior Crystal Parker becomes the first Lady Gator to be a member of four NCAA Tournament teams. Unfortunately, UF loses 68-61 to San Francisco in the first round.

Jan. 21, 1997 – UF logs its first-ever win over a top-9 ranked team, upsetting No. 8 Tennessee 71-62.



Kathy Catrazzo



Tammy Jackson, a member of the 1992 U.S. Olympic team, carried the Olympic Torch through the streets of Gainesville during the summer of 1996.

March 2, 1997 – UF avenges its regular season loss to Alabama and reaches the SEC Tournament final for the first time in program history with an 83-72 win over the sixth-ranked Crimson Tide in the semifinals. The Lady Gators play a disappointing game in the final and lose 52-47 to Auburn the following evening. DeLisha Milton and Murriel Page are named to the All-Tournament team.



Merlakia Jones became UF's all-time leading scorer on Feb. 21, 1995.

March 9, 1997 – The Lady Gators surround themselves with friends and family in the Gator Room to watch the NCAA Selection Show and cheer as they are selected to host NCAA Championship basketball for the first time in program history.

March 16, 1997 – UF

downs Southern California 92-78 thanks to Murriel Page's 35 points and 16 rebounds and advances to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Championship for the first time.

March 22, 1997 – Murriel Page scores 19 points and grabs 13 rebounds sending the Lady Gators to the NCAA Elite Eight after a 71-57 blowout of No. 5-ranked Louisiana Tech. It is the highest ranked opponent the Lady Gators have ever defeated.

March 24, 1997 – UF just misses a trip to the Final Four, falling to top-seeded and No. 2-ranked Old Dominion 53-51 before an ESPN television audience.

March 1997 – The Lady Gators finish the season ranked No. 7 in the AP poll and No. 6 in USA Today, the highest final rankings in school history.

March 27, 1997 – DeLisha Milton is named UF's first-ever first team Kodak All-American.

April 2, 1997 – DeLisha Milton receives the prestigious Wade Trophy, presented to the most outstanding senior player in the country.

April 28, 1997 – In the inaugural WNBA draft, three Lady Gators – Tammy Jackson, Merlakia Jones & Sophia Witherspoon – are chosen, while Bridget Pettis is an Elite selection of the Phoenix franchise.

May 5, 1997 – DeLisha Milton is selected by the Portland Power as the second overall draft pick in the American Basketball League (ABL), tying the all-time highest selection of any UF athlete with Neal Walk, who was the second pick in the 1969 NBA draft.

Nov. 24, 1997 – UF is ranked a program-high No. 5 in both the AP and USA Today national polls.

Feb. 1, 1998 – UF's basketball teams combined for a little history, as both the men's & women's teams log victories over top-10 ranked opponents on the same date for the first time in school history. The Lady Gators upset No. 6 Vanderbilt 62-46 in Nashville, while the Gators shock No. 7 Kentucky 86-78 in Lexington.

Feb. 8, 1998 – Murriel Page's 19-point, 11-rebound effort in the 79-60 win over Mississippi is the 59th double-double of her career, breaking the Lady Gator's 17-year double-double record owned by Quientella Bonner. Page leads the country in the category with 27 during the season and finishes her career with 65 double-doubles.

March 16, 1998 – The Lady Gators log their record-16th home win of the season, an 89-57 triumph over Virginia Tech, which sends the team to the NCAA Sweet 16 for the second straight year.

March 26, 1998 – Murriel Page joins DeLisha Milton as only the second Lady Gator to earn first team Kodak All-America honors.

April 3, 1998 – Quientella Bonner becomes the second Lady Gator Basketball player to be inducted into the University of Florida's Athletic Hall of Fame, joining Tammy Jackson.

April 29, 1998 – The Washington Mystics make Murriel Page the third overall selection in the WNBA draft.

June 7, 1998 – DeLisha Milton helps the U.S. World Championship Team to the gold medal, scoring 13 points in the 71-65 win over Russia in the final game.

July 1998 – Carol Ross heads the U.S. Women's Select team, which logs a 7-1 record during its three-week tour through Puerto Rico, Poland and Spain.

Kathy Catrazzo



DeLisha Milton (middle) is congratulated by coaches Carol Ross and Joi Williams after receiving the 1997 Wade Trophy, which recognized her as the top senior player in the nation. Milton also became the first Gator to earn first team Kodak All-America honors and the SEC Player of the Year award.

Nov. 24, 1998 – Freshman Brandi McCain dishes a school-record 17 assists against Miami, breaking Camille Ratledge's record of 16.

Feb. 24, 1999 – Brandi McCain becomes the first Lady Gator freshman to earn First Team All-SEC honors.

March 7, 1999 – UF is one of only 11 schools selected to the NCAA Tournament for the seventh straight time.

May 4, 1999 – The Los Angeles Sparks make DeLisha Milton the fourth overall selection in the WNBA draft.

August 14, 1999 – DeLisha Milton is selected to the 2000 USA Women's Basketball Olympic Team. She is the second Lady Gator to play for the U.S. basketball team in the Olympic Games, with Tammy Jackson playing in 1992.

March 29, 2000 – The Lady Gators reach the finals of the WNIT for the second time in school history. UF drops a thrilling 75-74 decision to Wisconsin in front of 13,006 Badger fans.

Mary Howard



On Wednesday, April 3, 2002, Carolyn Peck was introduced before a packed room in the Women's Club on the UF campus as the Gators eighth head coach.

February 22, 2001 – A record sell-out crowd of 12,222 fans cheer UF against Tennessee. It is the fifth-largest crowd ever to watch a basketball game in the O'Connell Center.

December 29, 2001 – Sophomore Vanessa Hayden becomes only the second Gator ever to record a triple-double, as she tallies 17 points, 12 rebounds and a school-record 10 blocks in the victory over Kent State.

March 16, 2002 – Vanessa Hayden logs two blocks in the UF's NCAA First Round loss to BYU, but ends the season as the nation's leading shot blocker with 126 in 29 games (4.3 pg), becoming the first-ever Gator to lead the country in a statistical category.

March 22, 2002 – Carol Ross stunned the college basketball community by announcing her resignation after 12 successful years as Florida's head coach. She steps down as the Gator's all-time winningest coach with a 247-121 record.

April 3, 2002 – Carolyn Peck is introduced as the eighth head coach in Florida women's basketball history.

Special thanks to Dr. Ruth Alexander and Dr. Paula Welch for compiling their book, "Lady Gators... Simply the Best." The work, which documents the women's athletics program at the University of Florida from its beginnings through the 1990-91 school year, was used to complete the information listed on the previous pages.

