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Kinnison, others humbled by invite into 'hallowed ground'

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Mike Kinnison got the call about a month ago informing him that he was being inducted into the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame as part of the class of 2011.

What the Delta State baseball coach didn't know until Tuesday was who would be going in with him.

"That was one of the neat things about this," Kinnison said.

For Kinnison, Tuesday's announcement ceremony at the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame and Museum had a very small-world feel.

There was Jeff Brantley, the former Mississippi State All-America pitcher whom Kinnison has known through baseball circles for years.

And Rita Easterling, who was an All-America basketball player at Mississippi College when Kinnison was in school at rival DSU.

There was Con Maloney, the longtime owner of the Jackson Mets and Generals whose sons Kinnison coached in high school.

And there was a former member of the baseball coaching fraternity, Corky Palmer, the ex-Meridian Community College and Southern Miss head coach.

Also to be inducted at the formal ceremonies next July 29-30 is the late Jerrel Wilson, who was a standout punter at Pearl River Community College, Southern Miss and in pro football.

Wilson was represented at the announcement by USM athletic director Richard Giannini.

All of the inductees seemed genuinely humbled by the honor.

"This has been hallowed ground to me for a long, long time," said Maloney, who owned the Texas League franchise that played at neighboring Smith-

Wills Stadium for 18 years.

Brantley, who won 45 games at MSU before going on to a standout pro career, is now a broadcaster for the Cincinnati Reds.

"It's nice to come back home for something this special," he said.

"I hope this is one more thing that will make my mom proud of me," said Morton native Easterling, who led MC to the 1974 AIAW national title game and went on to star at the international level and in pro ball, as well, before returning to coach her alma mater.

Palmer, a native of Hattiesburg, coached USM to its first College World Series appearance in 2009, his final season.

"This is the highest honor I've ever received," Palmer said. "I'm humbled and appreciative and proud to have coached all my 30 years in Mississippi."

Kinnison, a Yazoo City native who won a national title at DSU in 2004, said he was surprised when he got that phone call a few weeks back.

He likely spoke for all the inductees when he said that achieving such an honor is never really a goal.

"You don't get here by yourself," Kinnison said. "I think we all recognize that."

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