

Cason key to helping build sports in region

By Steve Carp June 10, 2004 Publication: Las Vegas Review-Journal (NV) Page: 1C

Word Count: 567

By STEVE CARP

REVIEW-JOURNAL

When Jack Cason came to Las Vegas in 1950, he had no idea what his future might bring.

He didn't imagine owning gas stations across the valley. He didn't envision himself as a benefactor to all sorts of athletic endeavors. And now, he can't believe he's being honored for his largess with an induction into the Southern Nevada Sports Hall of Fame.

Cason, Tony Knap, Gerald Riggs, Dwaine Knight and Richie Clyne will be honored Friday at Cox Pavilion as the Hall's Class of 2004.

"I saw an opportunity where if you worked hard, you could make something of yourself," said Cason, the owner of Rebel Oil. "The city grew, and I just grew with it."

Cason, 77, said there's no way he could calculate how many teams he has sponsored, how many kids he helped along the way or how many summer jobs he provided UNLV athletes. All he knows is he's glad he had the wherewithal to provide financial assistance.

"Jack was very important to our success," said Knap, a former UNLV football coach. "We were in need of financial help, and he stepped up to support the program. He would give our players summer jobs, which was big because we could keep them in town and keep an eye on them, and they could all work out together."

Cason's son, Pat, played four years for Knap.

"Both my son and my daughter graduated from UNLV, and I have two grandchildren who attend UNLV now," Cason said. "I remember watching the first basketball game, with (coach Chub) Drakulich, and when (Bill) Ireland started football 10 years later.

"UNLV has grown into quite an institution. It's amazing."

Terry Cottle, UNLV's assistant athletic director, said Cason's loyalty to the school never has wavered despite constant changes in the athletic department the past decade.

"Jack's been very supportive over the years," Cottle said. "He's in it for all the right reasons -- for the student-athletes -- without looking for any recognition."

Cason didn't discriminate, either. In addition to helping Little League baseball and Pop Warner football, he sponsored women's sports from the beginning and has backed high school rodeo teams and cheerleading groups.

"I love helping kids," he said. "I always felt that athletics was such a positive experience. I got involved with my kids, and that led to other kids. I coached Little League, youth basketball and Pop Warner football."

Cason was a three-sport athlete in high school in Oklahoma. He went into the Navy just before the end of World War II but didn't see any action while stationed in Hawaii. Following his military stint, he enrolled at Oklahoma on a football scholarship. But a knee injury kept Cason off the field, and he eventually played junior varsity basketball for the Sooners before leaving school to start his life in Las Vegas.

Along with Carl Bailey, Cason opened up a gas station at 9th and Fremont streets. Eventually, that would evolve into Rebel Oil, now with 44 stores in Southern Nevada.

Cason said he's still a bit apprehensive about being inducted into the Hall.

"It's still hard to accept," he said. "But after being told it was for helping all those kids over the years, I said, 'OK.' "

JACK CASON

Age: 77

Residence: Las Vegas

Honors: Owner of Rebel Oil has been a longtime contributor to UNLV and local athletics.

Quote: "I love helping kids. I always felt that athletics was such a positive experience.

Las Vegas Review-Journal (NV)

Date: June 10, 2004

Page: 1C

Copyright (c) 2004 Las Vegas Review-Journal