A native of Boston, Shawn Hood came to Cleveland State in the mid 80's and helped transform little known CSU into the NCAA tournament's first Cinderella. After completing his playing career in 1987, Hood stayed on at CSU as an assistant coach through the 1994 season before being inducted into the CSU hall of fame in 2000. After coaching stints at Wisconsin under Dick Bennett and in the high school ranks in Northeast Ohio, Hood has returned to his alma mater this season as an assistant with the defending Horizon League champion womens team.

Ryan Aroney had a chance to catch up with Hood to hear his thoughts on returning to Cleveland State.

Ryan Aroney: How does it feel to be back on campus at Cleveland State after so long?

Shawn Hood: It feels like I'm back home. This is my alma mater and my wife's alma mater. My wife is from Cleveland and she has a lot of family and friends here. My former teammates are here. Folks at the university, professors and administrators, have welcomed me as if I never left. It's been wonderful.

RA: During your CSU career you won two conference championships and made the post season three times, including the famous sweet 16 team of 1986. What are your favorite memories from that magical run, now more than twenty years ago?

SH: One of the things that I take greatest pride in is how we turned it around so quickly. We were coming into a program that had only won 8 games. The amount of games that we won

relative to the amount that they had won in the past is my greatest sense of pride.

The specific memories start with the day we found out we were in the NCAA tournament on the third floor of Woodling Gym with all the media there and watching selection Sunday and learning that we had made it to play Indiana. That's one of my fondest specific memories.

Also, going to Chicago and playing at DePaul in that same year and beating them by 15 points and really dominating the game. We learned that we were as good as we thought we were. That was a stamp of confirmation for us. We had lost at Ohio State that year and Michigan beat us pretty good at Michigan. That was our last chance to prove that we could play with the big time and we did it pretty good.

RA: You guys set a school record for victories with 29 and other than those two losses that you mentioned, your other regular season loss was to a Southwest Missouri State team that won 24 games and advanced to the third round of the NIT. After that loss you bounced back to win 14 straight games from January into the sweet 16. How far did you think you could go in the tournament?

SH: After we found out we were going to play Indiana we felt right away that we could beat them. It wasn't until years later, honestly, that many of my teammates and I realized that people thought that it was impossible for us to win that game. We never doubted it at all. I can only imagine what it was like for the media to interview us after that game. We were so confident. We thought we could win two or three easily.

The game that we had our eyes set on was Duke with (Tommy) Amaker, (Jay) Bilis and (Johnny) Dawkins. (Danny) Ferry was a freshman on that team too. We actually had gone to see them practice the day before we played Navy. I honestly believe that going to that practice hurt us a little bit because it was at that time that we felt that we could play with Duke but we forgot one thing. We had to beat Navy first and Navy was better than we thought.

If I had to be critical of anything that coach Mackey and his staff did as basketball coaches, I would have to say that I don't know if they prepared us for how good Navy was. They were good, they had good players, they were a very underrated basketball team.

RA: Did you go into the game focused only on David Robinson and the other guys stepped up to hurt you?

SH: Absolutely. Obviously the Admiral was great and we knew that. We had watched what he did to Syracuse in the first round when we were sitting courtside. It was how good those other guys were that caught us by surprise. They were really good and they played a great game, yet we still had a chance to win at the end and felt like we had the game won and got some unfortunately calls that could have gone the other way (laughs).

RA: Well I have to bring it up. How do you feel about the controversial call at the end?

Was it a foul or a jump ball?

(With CSU winning 70-69 with 13 seconds remaining, CSU's Paul Stewart pulled down the rebound off a David Robinson miss and was tied up by a Navy player. With the possession arrow favoring Navy, the Midshipmen were awarded possession and eventually scored on a Robison put-back to win the game 71-70.)

SH: I definitely felt it was a foul and in fact I felt like their only recourse was to foul. That was the only thing they could do with the amount of time left in the game. Paul Stewart was a big strong guy and I don't believe they thought they could take it from him. I thought they fouled him and I thought they purposely fouled him.

It didn't seem like the referees were going to let these inner-city guys that coach Mackey was bragging about, probably too much, beat the Naval Academy.

RA: Do you think those things, being from the inner-city, coach Mackey bragging you up and the style of play, helped make you such a tough team to beat?

SH: Clearly who we were as individuals made all the difference in the world. I don't know if there is anybody better at assembling the right group of guys than coach Mackey. I remember he said to me when I was starting my coaching career, "Beware of those guys that look good but play bad. If you can find those guys that look bad but play good, you will have great success as a coach in college basketball."

He did as good a job of that as anybody I've ever been around and I like to think that it's helped me. The only other situation that even comes close to that in my mind is what Gary Waters is doing right now over there in the men's office. I'm just really impressed with him and his staff.

RA: CSU followed up the sweet 16 appearance with back-to-back NIT appearances and had a couple of epic match-ups with Illinois State in front of packed houses at public hall. You were a player for the first NIT appearance and a coach for the return trip. What do you remember about those games and the atmosphere at public hall?

SH: Most people don't realize that the final 16 team had such a strong foundation that we could lose five guys off that team and still win 25 games and that's just remarkable. We lost Clinton Smith who was a senior, Bob Crawford was a senior, Steve Corbin was a senior, Eric Mudd got injured and of course Paul Stewart passed away. Five major players off that team we lost and yet we still won and that's an attribute to the foundation that we formed.

We beat Chattanooga to come back home to host a great Illinois State team. I was actually hurt for the last five games of my senior season so it was a great run and great NIT memories but unfortunately I wasn't playing. I would like to think that I could have made some small difference.

The second year I was coaching on the bench with what I think is the all-time most talented Cleveland State team, at least within my era. You had (William) Tomlin, Mouse McFadden,

Kenny Robertson, Herb Dixon, Ray Foster, Bryant Parker, Warren Bradley, Steve Malloy, William Stanley, Desmond Porter, Eric Mudd. Hersey Strong was on that team as well.

That team probably had too much talent, if you will, because they didn't have great chemistry and they still won 22 games. They probably could have won 25 or 26 games, they were that talented. I remember the great crowd at Public Hall and it was another close game with Illinois State who was good again that year.

I think that within the next two years coach Waters is putting together a team that is as close to as talented as that one, so that's exciting.

RA: You mentioned some lessons that you took from coach Mackey when you first got started. What did you learn from that team and that situation with a talented team that needed to work on chemistry?

SH: I don't think that enough emphasis was made on team chemistry. I think that perhaps coach Mackey thought that the talent alone could get it done. I say "get it done" and they won 22 games (laughs) but I think they could have been better. Maybe, and coach Mackey admits this, he should have pulled a couple of guys out and red-shirted them.

That's why I think that coach Waters has a great situation because he has a great combination of guys that are eligible this year and guys that will be eligible next year. But it's hard to have too many guys.

Coach Mackey promised each of those guys a chance to play, and that wasn't done in deception. In coach Mackey's mind, each of them would play significant minutes. And they did, but it hurt the team and the chemistry. That's when I learned that maybe you can have too much talent. Even though I learned that from watching that team, I don't think that's one thing that Kevin Mackey would ever admit (laughs). For him, you can never have too much talent.

RA: How often are you in touch with Mackey?

SH: We talk all the time. He's working for Larry Bird now and we talk all the time. I just love it. When I was making the decision on whether to do this or not, he was one of the main people, besides my wife, that I confided in. It's a great little story. I called him to ask him what I should do and it was the day of the draft. I was so consumed with my thoughts and my situation that I just completely forgot. He took my call and he had an argument for both sides and he gave good insight but he was distracted.

The next morning he called me back and said, "I'm sorry yesterday we were going into the war room. We had some important business going on."

(Laughing) So I apologized for calling him at that time but he said, "I thought about you all night and I needed to call you back and give you better advice."

So of course he supported me doing this and if I wanted to coach college basketball again, he

felt like I needed to be at a level that suited my talents, so his advice was for me to take this job.

RA: After you left CSU you joined the Wisconsin staff under Dick Bennett who is known for his half-court defense. What was it like to be a part of a staff that taught a totally different style than the full-court run and stun style that you were a part of as a player?

SH: Its full-court defense vs. half-court defense and increasing possessions vs. decreasing possessions. Two pretty opposite philosophies and just an incredible learning experience for one guy. You want to talk about blessed? To be able to work for two of the best guys to ever be in the game who had completely opposite philosophies is just beyond belief. I can easily talk up-tempo basketball with full-court pressure and increasing possessions as well as shortening the game, getting back and packing and really controlling the tempo. What it has done is allow me to understand all the little important things of both styles in order to combine the two and I guess understand a style that would be the best of both worlds.

RA: You were on the staff at Wisconsin during a major turn-around for the program that cultivated with a trip to the final four in 2000 as an 8 seed. Did you see similarities while at Wisconsin to your career at CSU?

SH: There are some distinct similarities between what we did here under coach Mackey and what our staff under coach Bennett was able to do at Wisconsin. The one major obstacle that was overcome by both programs was bringing in a large class. It was a group of kids that had enough skill and toughness and size that you could mold and it would impact your program fairly immediately. When you look around at new coaches coming into losing programs, I think that's one variable that will be consistent. Those coaches will usually move out some of the losing attitude and bring in a bulk of winning attitude and inevitably that group will move your program forward. I just don't think there's any other way of doing it. We certainly did that here at Cleveland State and coach Bennett and our staff did that at Wisconsin.

There are also some little specific things that had to be done. You have to get the kids to believe in what you're doing. You can be the best coach in the world but if the kids don't believe in it, it won't reach its potential. When I was here at Cleveland State, if you were to interview us, we all would be consistent in saying that you had to work hard to play against our pressure defense and we were going to push the ball down the floor and score easy baskets. If you asked the kids at Wisconsin, they would say they were going to get back and keep you in front of them and you were going to have a hard time scoring on them in the half court and offensively they were not going to turn the ball over and they would not beat themselves and they would get a good shot every time down the floor. Every kid in those programs believed in what we were doing and they went out and executed.

RA: While you were in Wisconsin, current CSU coach Kate Peterson Abiad was an assistant with the women. What type of working relationship did the two staffs have at Wisconsin and did that play a role in bringing you back to CSU?

SH: I'm here because of Kate Peterson Abiad, there's no question about that. I did not have to

do this. I was perfectly happy coaching high school basketball. I was having a blast with people out in Lorain who respected my experience and listened to me and leaned on me and it was really rewarding for me. But Kate being the recruiter that she is, she convinced me that it was time for me to move on with my gifts and to bring them back to Cleveland State. We had a good relationship at Wisconsin, we talked all the time. They were good and we were good and it was a wonderful relationship. I trust Kate and I believe in her abilities as a basketball coach. Again, I'm learning so much from her and I know that I made the right decision.

RA: You are the all-time leader at CSU in assist-to-turnover ratio, 4th in steals, and 7th in assists, and you started all 30 games as a freshman which still ranks tops all-time for a first year player. Fittingly, you were inducted into the CSU hall of fame in 2000. What do all of these accomplishments mean to you?

SH: Honestly, when I was playing here, I never felt like I would have any records or accolades that would hold up for years to come. The only vision that ever made a difference to me was winning. There was nothing that I wouldn't do as a point guard on the court to win basketball games. All of those individual accolades were really just a byproduct of my desire to win. It's kind of cool to say that I'm the all-time assist-to-turnover guy, and 4th in steals or whatever it is. But I wasn't really a steal guy. I just played tough defense and my steals were just a byproduct of our team's efforts and I just reaped the benefits of what they did in front of me.

I played with some really good basketball players. We were better basketball players than most people remember. We have the label of being a real athletic team when in actuality our athleticism was just a little above average. What we had were good basketball players and so the fact that I had a ton of assists has everything to do with my teammates being really good.

RA: How do you want to be remembered by the fans of CSU?

SH: I really hope that my memories have only something to do with my playing days and a lot more to do with me coaching here. I don't know that you can find anyone out there who has more of a sense of pride for this university and this athletic program than I do. As a player I want to be remembered as a guy that cared about winning basketball games and was as a servant for his team. As a coach, I want to be remembered as a guy who would do whatever it took to help the program move forward.