

## **My Drift**

**Title: Greatest Basketball Coach in Utah History**

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Many people outside the state of Utah are not aware of the fact that Utah is a great basketball state. The four major universities (University of Utah, Utah State, BYU, and Weber State) have sent many teams to the NCAA “March Madness” basketball tournament and the University of Utah has won it. The Utah Jazz has played for the NBA Championship twice and would have won it if not for Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls. The state currently has and has had many great high school, college, and pro basketball coaches. I have picked eight college and pro coaches as being candidates for the greatest basketball coach in Utah history. Here is a short recap about each of the runner-ups and my pick as the greatest Utah coach.



**Jerry Sloan**

Jerry Sloan had a career regular-season win–loss record of 1,221–803, placing him third all-time in NBA wins at the time he retired. Sloan is one of two coaches in NBA history to record 1,000 wins with one club (the Utah Jazz). He also coached for one team longer than anyone in NBA history. The 2009–10 season was his 22nd season as coach of the Jazz. Sloan coached the Jazz to 15 consecutive playoff appearances from 1989 to 2003. He is one of only four coaches in NBA history with 15-plus consecutive seasons with a winning record.



**Dave Rose**

**Dave Rose was named the head basketball coach at BYU in 2005 and began the first of eleven straight 20-win seasons. Rose inherited a 9-21 team and immediately posted a 20-9 record, the second-best turnaround in college basketball that year. Rose recruited Jimmer Fredette in 2007, who was named the National Player of the Year. In 2010, Rose coached BYU to their first NCAA tournament victory in 17 years in a double-overtime win against the University of Florida. His overall record at BYU was 348-135.**



**Stan Watts**

**Stan Watts served as the head basketball coach at Brigham Young University (BYU) from 1949 to 1972. The Murray, Utah native was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 1986. Watts became the sixth coach in history to win 100 games in his first five years. Watts compiled a 371–254 (.594) record and established a strong basketball tradition and a national athletic identity for BYU. His Cougars teams won eight conference titles, appeared in 11 postseason tournaments, and captured the 1951 and 1966 National Invitation Tournament championships.**



**Vadal Peterson**

**Vadal Peterson has the distinction of coaching the most wins in University of Utah history. He guided Utah through 26 seasons from 1927 to 1953. He also led Utah to its only NCAA Tournament title when the Utes defeated Dartmouth 42–40, in 1944. Peterson finished with a record of 385–230 (.626) while head coach of Utah and collected four Mountain States Conference championships and the 1947 National Invitation Tournament title.**



**The 1944 Utah Runnin' Utes Basketball Team**



**Rick Majerus**

**Rick Majerus was the head coach at Marquette University (1983–1986), Ball State University (1987–1989), the University of Utah (1989–2004), and Saint Louis University (2007–2012). Majerus led Utah to the Final Four in 1998, eventually losing to Kentucky in the National Championship Game. He left Utah in January 2004 with a record of 323 wins and 95 losses to get control of his health since he had undergone seven vessel bypass surgeries to his heart while at Utah.**



**Stew Morrill**

**Stew Morrill was an All-American at Ricks College and a two-time All-Big Sky selection for Gonzaga University. He started his coaching career in 1974 as an assistant at Gonzaga and become a head coach at the University of Montana in 1987. Morrill coached at Colorado State University from 1992 to 1998 before resigning and taking the coaching job at Utah State University. Morrill had a record of 602–281 overall (.682) and 384–143 (.729) with Utah State making him the winningest coach in Utah State basketball history.**



**Jack Gardner**

**Jack Gardner coached at Kansas State from 1939 to 1953, compiling a 147–81 record and then coached at the University of Utah from 1953 to 1971, compiling a 339–154 record. He led the Utes to six appearances in the NCAA Tournament and two Final Four appearances (1961 and 1966). He is one of only three coaches to twice lead two different programs to the Final Four. He won seven conference titles and coached five All-Americans including Billy "The Hill" McGill.**



**Billy McGill**

**McGill was the first African-American to play basketball at Utah, and he was inducted as a member of the program's all-century team in 2008. His jersey, No. 12, has been retired by the Utes. As a senior, he averaged 38.8 points per game, which only three other players have ever eclipsed in the college ranks. He also averaged 15.0 rebounds per game that year. He was one of only seven college players to notch more than 2,300 points and 1,100 rebounds in only three years. He averaged a school-record 27 points per game for his career. McGill died in 2014 at age 74.**





**LaDell Andersen**



**MY PICK FOR THE GREATEST BASKETBALL  
COACH IN UTAH HISTORY IS:**

**LADELL ANDERSEN**

**Story time:**

I was a pretty good basketball player my senior year in high school. I was a good shooter with my left or right hand and coach Crump encouraged me to shoot whenever I got open. This resulted in me being one of the highest scorers in the state and the highest scorer in the Class B State Basketball Tournament with 72 points in three games. I had several junior colleges trying to recruit me including Mesa, Carbon, and Snow. I was all set to commit to going to Snow Junior College when coach LaDell Andersen showed up one day and offered me a scholarship to the University of Utah.

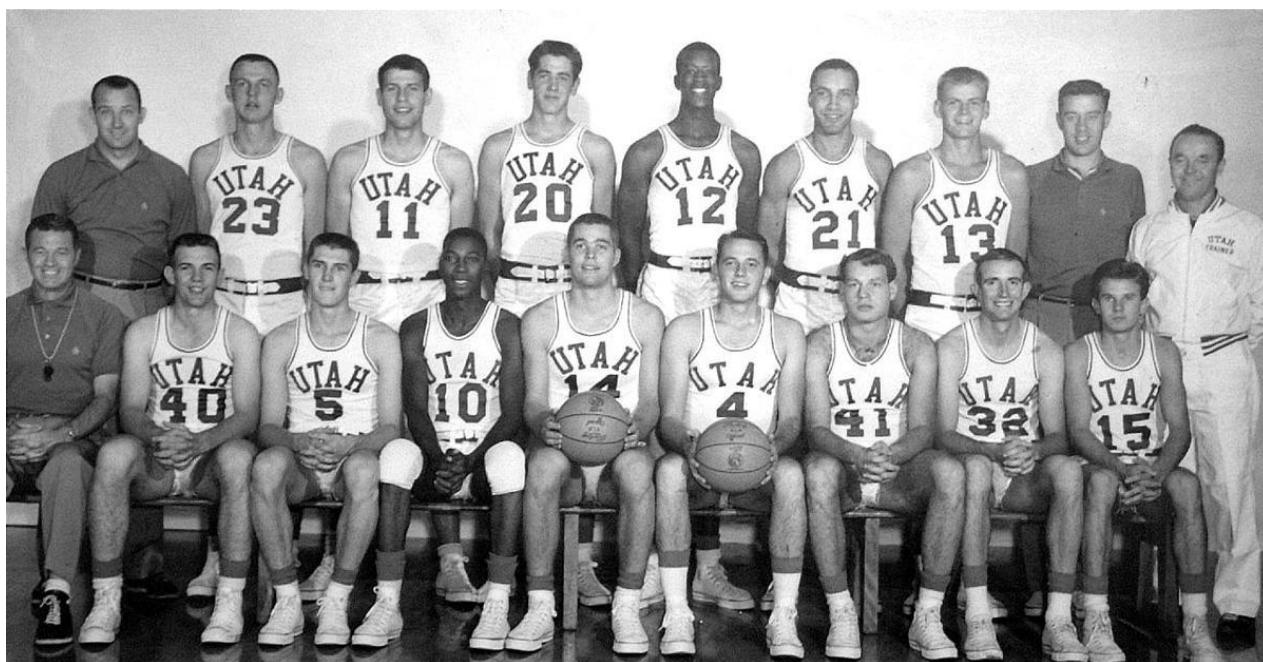


**1958 Pleasant Grove, Utah  
High School Basketball Team  
(That's me #44 behind coach Don  
Crump)**

Well, I knew that the University of Utah had the best team in Utah, the Skyline Conference, and one of the best teams in the country. I liked LaDell and I thought I was good enough to play for Utah. LaDell Andersen was the head coach of the Utah freshman team and the primary assistant coach for the varsity team. Jack Gardner was the head coach of the varsity team. You might not know this, but until 1972, college freshman (football and basketball players) were not allowed to play on the varsity team. I was a starter and third leading scorer on the freshman team – I can't remember us losing a game. At the end of the season, I was one of only four players to move up to the varsity team.

Coach Gardner red-shirted me the following year (1959-1960) which means I practiced with the team but didn't play in any games. The 1960-1961 Utah team was

very good and made it all the way to the Final Four in Kansas City. The 1961 NCAA Division I Basketball Tournament involved 24 schools playing in single-elimination play to determine the national champion. Cincinnati won the national title with a 70–65 victory in the final game over state rival Ohio State. Jerry Lucas of Ohio State was named the tournament's Most Outstanding Player. The national third place game, won by Saint Joseph's over Utah by the score of 127–120 in four overtimes, tied the record for the longest game in NCAA Division I tournament history, set in 1956 in a first-round game between Canisius and North Carolina State. As of the regional finals of the 2019 tournament, no NCAA Division I tournament games since then have gone to a fourth overtime period. Saint Joseph's victory was later vacated because of the 1961 gambling scandal.



**The University of Utah 1960-1961 Final Four Team**

**(Coach Gardner is on bottom left and coach Andersen is at top left – That's me #13 third from the top right)**

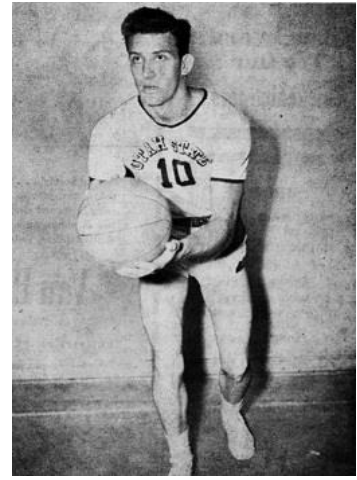
I only saw limited playing time that year and was not too happy with coach Jack Gardner. At the end of the year, coach Andersen left Utah to take the head coaching job at Utah State University. My college basketball career at Utah didn't look good, so I decided to join the U.S. Navy even though coach Andersen asked me if I wanted to join his team (Utah State) in Logan. Sometimes when I think about my college basketball career, I would probably have been better off attending Snow Junior College.

As you can tell by this little story, I knew coach LaDell Andersen and Jack Gardner quite well. LaDell was a teacher, never yelled at his players, and treated us with respect. Everybody I know that ever played for Coach Andersen liked him. I cannot say the same for coach Gardner. As his nickname “The Fox” suggests, he was cunning and would say or do anything in order to win. He was a great coach but very few players liked him.

### **Let's learn more about Coach LaDell Andersen.**

LaDell was born in Malad City, Idaho on October 25, 1929. Andersen attended Utah State University, where he became a member of the Sigma Chi Fraternity. He was an All-Skyline Conference and an honorable mention All-American basketball player in 1951. He was also invited and competed in the 1952 United States Men's Olympic Basketball team tryouts at New York City.

Andersen was hired in 1956 as an assistant coach for University of Utah coach Jack Gardner. Andersen left the Utes in 1961 to become head coach of his alma mater Utah State University.



**Andersen as a player for Utah State in 1951**



**Dale Brown, LaDell Andersen,  
and Dutch Bellnap  
1968 Utah State Coaches**

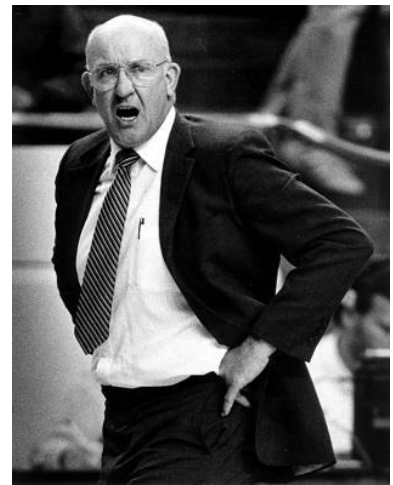
During his tenure as the Aggies head coach, Utah State made four appearances in the NCAA Basketball Tournament including a trip to the Elite Eight in 1970, losing to eventual champion UCLA. Andersen also led them to two appearances in the National Invitation Tournament. He compiled a record of 176–96 (.647) at the school from 1961 to 1971. Former LSU coaching great Dale Brown served as an assistant coach during Andersen's tenure. Andersen recommended Brown as his successor, but when USU officials rejected the idea, Brown went to Washington State for one season as an assistant before succeeding Press Maravich as LSU's coach.

Andersen was also the head coach of the American Basketball Association's Utah Stars for two seasons (1971–72 and 1972–73). Andersen had success with the team and led them to two Western Division regular season titles but both seasons were ended by the Indiana Pacers in the Western Division playoff finals. Andersen compiled a 115–43 (.684) regular season coaching record with the Stars. Despite his success with the Stars, Andersen resigned after his second season with the team.

He returned to Utah State University and was appointed as the school's athletic director in 1973. Andersen held the post for ten years until he was lured back into coaching again in 1983 for Brigham Young University (BYU).

Andersen coached the Cougars for six years and compiled a 114–71 (.616) record. BYU made four post season appearances including three in the NCAA Basketball Tournament and one in the National Invitation Tournament. He resigned as BYU head coach in 1989 and was replaced by Roger Reid.

Andersen continued to be involved in basketball acting as a scout and consultant for the NBA's Utah Jazz organization, partly because of his connections with former Utah State player and longtime Jazz assistant Phil Johnson. He was the person who scouted John Stockton and encouraged the Jazz to draft him when they did.



Coach Andersen at BYU

**That is an overview of Coach LaDell Andersen's career. Now, let's do a little digging and learn a few more interesting facts about my choice for Utah's greatest basketball coach.**

**Former Utah State coach LaDell Andersen shares memories of Wayne Estes  
(This story was published in the Salt Lake City Deseret News on May 19, 2014)**

*ST. GEORGE — When Utah State University cut the ribbon on its new Wayne Estes Center last week, it brought a broad smile to LaDell Andersen's face.*

*Andersen, who turns 90 this October, read about the ribbon-cutting in the Deseret News as he relaxed on the living room couch in his southern Utah home. Andersen lettered as an Aggie basketball player from 1949-52, was the head coach from 1962-71, and served as the school's athletic director from 1973-82. Seeing the name "Wayne Estes" jogged several memories for the old coach.*



*"It's quite a story," Andersen said. "Do you want to hear about it?"*

*Newly hired in 1962, Andersen needed to find players for his team. He enlisted the services of Nog Hansen, a former assistant who had coached football in Montana. The athletic director gave Andersen a credit card and two stipulations.*

*"Here is a credit card to buy your gas to make the trip, but you'll have to sleep in the car. You also have to recruit for all sports," Andersen said. "Fine, but we bought our own motels."*

*While traveling from Missoula to Butte, Hansen suggested they stop in the small town of Anaconda.*

*"There is a great track man over here in Anaconda. I think his name is Estes," Hansen told Andersen. "He had won state in the shot put and discus. He was an all-state center for the football team and a good shooter in basketball."*

*Andersen said he did his best to sell USU's track program to the young athlete, which then included Olympian L.J. Silvester and coach Ralph Maughan. At one point, Estes held up his hand.*

*"He says, 'Coach, let me stop you right there. Yeah, I enjoyed football, and track was all right, but I want to play basketball,'" Andersen said.*

*Estes also said he needed a summer job. Andersen instructed him to get on a train and he would pick him up at Cache Junction.*

*"You will have a summer job and a full-ride scholarship," Andersen said. "The rest is history. Four years later he's a first team All-American with Rick Barry."*

*Andersen said he helped Estes to trim his weight down and refine his game.*

*"He could really shoot the ball, as well as anyone I ever coached," Andersen said.*

*Sadly, a promising career took a tragic turn on Feb. 8, 1965.*

*Estes had just scored 48 points to lead the Aggies to a 91-62 win over Denver. In the process, he had surpassed the 2,000-point mark in career scoring by one point, a new record.*

*Afterward, Estes and some friends happened upon an accident where an automobile had crashed into a utility pole. As they approached the vehicle, Estes accidentally made contact with a power line and was electrocuted.*



*Andersen had just finished his postgame radio show and was driving home with his wife. Along the way, they noticed a crowd had gathered in the street. The coach walked over to find out what was going on.*

*"What's the deal?" the coach asked at the scene of the accident.*

*"It's Estes," someone replied.*

*"He's all right, isn't he?" Andersen had said.*

*"They just shook their heads," Andersen said. "Oh, that was a terrible tragedy, probably the worst of my life."*

*Beyond his athletic talent and ability, there is something else people should know about Estes, Andersen said.*

*"Not only was he an incredible player, but he was even a better person and friend," Andersen said. "I'm glad they are honoring him."*



**Wayne Estes**

**(Coach Andersen and Wayne Estes #33 are also pictured at the top of this article)**

**Yes, Ladell Andersen was just about everywhere in Utah basketball!  
(The following article was written By Doug Robinson and published February 17,  
2016 in the Deseret News)**



**Recent picture of LaDell Andersen at his St. George, Utah home**

*Ladell Andersen used to make his living in crowded, noisy arenas, but these days he lives a quiet life in St. George. He watches a lot of TV, goes to church on Sunday, exercises daily and lives with one of his sons and lots of memories.*

*There's a whole generation of Utah sports fans that has never heard of Andersen, which seems a shame. There was a time when Andersen seemed to be in the middle of all things basketball in this state.*

*It's been 30 years since he quit coaching basketball at a relatively young age. He may be the only man ever to coach at all three of Utah's major universities — Utah, Utah State and BYU — plus the Utah Stars, Salt Lake's original professional basketball team, the pre-merger Utah Jazz of their day.*

*He also has the distinction of having held three head coaching jobs — totaling 18 seasons — without ever being fired.*

*That's what happens when you win two division titles in as many seasons with the Stars, earn nine NCAA tournament appearances, win more than 100 games at all three stops, produce a 403-210 won-loss record, and coach BYU to arguably the greatest regular season in school history, one in which they climbed to No. 2 in the national polls.*

*He retired in 1989, when he was only 60 years old. He left the game because his wife was having serious health problems. "I decided I better take care of her," he says. She passed away in 2010.*

*Andersen is 89 now. He had quadruple bypass surgery a few years ago and both knees have been replaced. “The doctors say I have a strong heart, but I’m 89 so my days are numbered,” he says. “But I’ve had a great life.”*

*He golfed regularly after he retired, but years ago he gave up the game. He exercises every day — “I’m going to try to be here as long as I can,” he says — and watches the news shows and all the ballgames on TV, especially the Utah teams. Like most fans, he was infuriated with Utah’s decision to dump BYU from its basketball schedule. “A terrible decision, just terrible,” he says. “I am so ashamed of them for doing that. You don’t do that to a rivalry. I’ll never root for them again because of that decision.”*

*His son, Rich, lives with him, and another son, Bob, lives in nearby Hurricane and stops by daily with a meal. Another son, Larry, also lives in St. George. Andersen has old friends in the area. One of them is another legend-in-residence, LaVell Edwards, the football coach who has a second home in St. George. Edwards and Andersen have known each other since the early 1950s, when they were athletes at USU — Edwards an all-conference football player and Andersen an all-conference basketball player. They bump into each other at church now and then.*

*Andersen, who grew up in Malad, Idaho, played basketball well enough at USU to earn an invitation to the Olympic basketball tryouts in New York City. He became an assistant coach under Jack Gardner at Utah for six seasons, deflecting an invitation from BYU to apply for its head-coaching job. Instead, he became the head coach at his alma mater in 1961 and guided the Aggies for 10 seasons.*

*Then he coached the Utah Stars of the American Basketball Association for two successful seasons. When management warned him of impending financial difficulties (the team would last three more seasons before folding), Andersen returned to his alma mater again, this time to serve as athletic director. He stayed at Utah State for another 10 years. When Title IX began strapping his already-tight budget, he bailed out and accepted the head coaching job at BYU.*

*“BYU had been after me for years to coach down there and they happened to be looking for a coach,” he says. “I was Mormon and had had success against BYU.”*

*After six years at BYU he quit the game completely, except to do some occasional scouting for the Utah Jazz and to serve on committees for the National Association of Basketball Coaches.*

*His coaching career stretched over more than three decades and along the way he coached the likes of Zelmo Beaty, Wayne Estes, Cornell Green, Willie Wise, Ron Boone, Phil Johnson, Mike Smith, among many other great players.*

*He is called whenever Estes' name comes up. Estes died just hours after breaking the career 2,000-point mark with a 48-point game against Denver. He was named first-team All-American posthumously. Andersen still delights in telling how he recruited Estes during a long recruiting trip through Montana in his car. He thought he was signing an athlete for the school's track team, but Estes told him he wanted to play basketball and was given a scholarship on the spot.*

*Andersen also played a role in the signing of another great player. While working on the All-America committee for the NABC, Andersen contacted coaches around the country asking them to name the best player in their conference. One of the calls was to a coach in Santa Clara, California, who told him the best player in the conference was Gonzaga's John Stockton.*

*"What is he, 6-9, 6-10?" Andersen asked.*

*"No, he's six feet, and he's the best player in the league. No, he's by far the best player in our league."*

*Andersen subsequently told Utah Jazz president Frank Layden about Stockton on a flight to the East Coast.*

*"What is he, 6-9, 6-10?" asked Layden.*

*"No, six feet."*

*Stockton of course became one of the greatest players in NBA history while playing for the Utah Jazz.*

*That was three decades ago as Andersen recalls it from his home in St. George. He'll watch some TV today, go for a walk, get his exercise and talk to his sons.*

*"My doctor said my health is good, so I might be around a while yet," he says.*

**This article pretty much sums up my case for Coach LaDell Andersen being the greatest basketball coach in the state of Utah history.**

**Hope you enjoyed it!**

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