By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Ranking the Best 'Coaching Trees' in College Basketball History

KERRY MILLER
JULY 27, 2016

Larry Brown *David Butler II-USA TODAY Sports*

Though he only spent 11 seasons as a D-I head coach, Larry Brown has the most remarkable coaching tree in college basketball history.

By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**

became an assistant for a former assistant of a coach, that doesn't matter here. All we're looking for are the coaches that have had the best assistants throughout the course of their careers.

In ranking these coaching trees, quality was more important than quantity, but each coach had to have at least four noteworthy assistants in order to make the cut.

If we missed any big ones, please let us know in the comments. One can find just about anything imaginable on the internet...except for a database of coaching trees.

In addition to the obvious inclusions—Gee, do you think Bob Knight made the cut with Mike Krzyzewski as an assistant?—we went through the 100 winningest coaches in college basketball history to mark down when and where each one served as assistant in hopes of catching every coach with at least two future studs, but it's possible someone slipped through the cracks.

Honorable Mentions

1 OF 9

By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**

Thad Matta *Joy LaPrete/Associated Press*

Thad Matta

If you count Brad Stevens—who was a volunteer at Butler during Thad Matta's one season as head coach of the Bulldogs—this is definitely a top eight coaching tree. As is, Matta had both Sean Miller and John Groce on his staff at Xavier and employed Archie Miller for two years at Ohio State. Matta doesn't even turn 50 until next year, and his tree already has strong branches. Just wait until you see what it looks like when he retires.

Eddie Biedenbach

With fewer than 300 career wins, Biedenbach's legacy lives on in his assistants more than his own career. He was the head coach at Davidson for just three years from 1978-81, but he had both Rick Barnes and Bob McKillop on that staff.

Ted Owens

In his two decades as the head coach of Kansas, Owens had both Gale Catlett (565 career wins) and John Calipari (662 wins) as assistants. It's a shame he left when he did, though, because over the next five seasons, Bill Self, Mark Turgeon and even Gregg Popovich would pass through Lawrence.

Lefty Driesell

Like Owens, Driesell coached a pair of future 500-game winners: Catlett and Tom Davis (597 wins). Add in Terry Holland (418 career wins) as both a point guard and an assistant during Driesell's early days at Davidson and this was the toughest omission from the list.

By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**

8. Tom Izzo

2 OF 9

Tom Izzo *Jeff Roberson/Associated Press*

Coaching Career: Michigan State (1995-present)

Noteworthy Assistants: Tom Crean, Stan Heath, Brian Gregory, Doug Wojcik, Stan Joplin, Jim Boylen, Mike Garland

Michigan State has averaged 26.1 wins over the past 18 seasons, and while Tom Izzo has been the conductor of that freight train, he's had some strong assistants along the way.

Izzo's winningest and most well-known former assistant is Tom Crean, who led Marquette to a Final Four (with a little bit of help from Dwyane Wade) before taking his current post as the head coach at Indiana. Crean has 338 career victories, but at just 50 years old, he may double that total over the rest of his career.

By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**

Stan Heath had a few good seasons between his stints at Kent State, Arkansas and South Florida, but he barely amassed a .500 record before returning to the assistant ranks. Likewise, Brian Gregory had a couple of good seasons with Dayton, but he was fired by Georgia Tech this past March and didn't get another head coaching job.

But at 61, Izzo is the youngest of any coach in our top eight, making it silly to assume this tree is anywhere near finished growing. Let's check back in a decade from now and see if this isn't a giant redwood by then.

7. Mike Krzyzewski

3 OF 9

Mike Krzyzewski *Gerry Broome/Associated Press*

Coaching Career: Army (1975-80), Duke (1980-present)

By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**

Mike Krzyzewski is one of the greatest coaches in the history of any sport.

For the most part, though, the apples have fallen far from the tree.

Mike Brey has had an excellent run with Delaware and Notre Dame over the past two decades and could conceivably surpass 700 wins before calling it a career. As things currently stand, though, Brey is the winningest former colleague of Krzyzewski with 455 victories—good for just 82nd place on the all-time wins list.

Tommy Amaker is next on that list at 351 wins, but it took a few bumpy stops at Seton Hall and Michigan before he found his groove with Harvard. Though, turning Harvard into an annual Cinderella candidate is one of the best coaching jobs of the past decade.

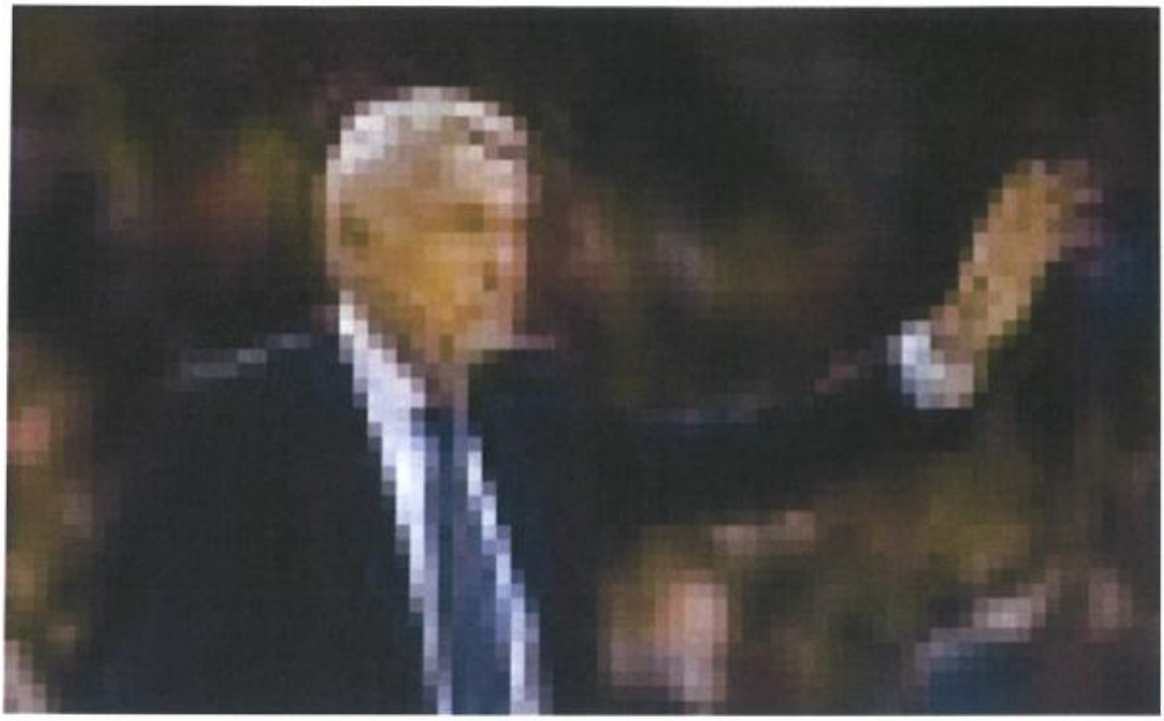
Johnny Dawkins had a tumultuous eight years as the head coach of Stanford, leading the Cardinal to more NIT championships (two) than NCAA tournament appearances (one). Quin Snyder's seven-year run with Missouri wasn't much better, abruptly resigning in the middle of his final season as a D-I coach. And David Henderson had the worst go of them all, taking over at Delaware when Brey went to Notre Dame and amassing a sub-.500 record during his six years there.

Perhaps Chris Collins (Northwestern) and Steve Wojciechowski (Marquette) will fare better, but it's a testament to Krzyzewski's brilliance that teams keep hiring his assistants.

6. Gary Williams

4 OF 9

By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**



Gary Williams *Patrick Semansky/Associated Press*

Coaching Career: American (1978-82), Boston College (1982-86), Ohio State (1986-89), Maryland (1989-2011)

Noteworthy Assistants: Rick Barnes, Fran Dunphy, Mike Lonergan, Jimmy Patsos, Billy Hahn, Dave Dickerson

Without a close second, Gary Williams' coaching tree is the most surprising inclusion.

Jimmy Patsos was his assistant at Maryland for more than a decade, so the former Loyola-Maryland, current Siena head coach was expected to be on the list.

However, did you remember Mike Lonergan was Williams' assistant for one year at Maryland in between his stints at Catholic and Vermont?

Alright, maybe you're among the 1 percent who recall that brief tandem, but how about Williams' pre-Maryland days when he had Rick Barnes as an assistant for one season (1986-87) at Ohio State? Or, going back even further, the four seasons at American with Fran Dunphy at his side?

All told, those four men have combined for 1,563 career D-I wins and are still active coaches.

By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**

5. Dean Smith

5 OF 9

Dean Smith with Michael Jordan in 1994. *Pool/Associated Press*

Coaching Career: North Carolina (1961-97)

Noteworthy Assistants: Larry Brown, Roy Williams, Eddie Fogler, Bill Guthridge

For 30 of Dean Smith's 36 years as the head coach of the Tar Heels, Bill Guthridge was his right-hand man. Because of that nearly career-long bond, Smith didn't have a ton of different assistants to choose from.

The good news for Smith's coaching tree is that Guthridge carried on his legacy. Following so many years as an assistant, Guthridge only lasted three years before retiring, but he won 80 games and took the Tar Heels to a pair of Final Fours in those seasons.

For 10 years (1978-88), Smith also had Roy Williams on his staff, which amounted to a downright silly amount of collective coaching brainpower. During that decade, UNC went 275-61 (81.8 winning percentage), earned a No. 3 seed or better in each NCAA tournament, won a national championship and went to eight consecutive Sweet 16s. Not too shabby.

By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**

Final Four during the second of his two seasons alongside Smith on the bench.

Just for good measure, Smith also had Eddie Fogler as an assistant for 15 years before he went on to spend another 15 years as a head coach between Wichita State, Vanderbilt and South Carolina.

4. Eddie Sutton

6 OF 9

Eddie Sutton *Anonymous/Associated Press*

Coaching Career: Creighton (1969-74), Arkansas (1974-85), Kentucky (1985-89), Oklahoma State (1990-2006), San Francisco (2007-08)

By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**

Prior to his career-ending interim job with San Francisco, Eddie Sutton had 36 years of D-I head coaching experience and only one season with a winning percentage at or below .500. With that type of longevity and success, he was bound to produce a few quality assistants along the way.

For part of Sutton's 11-year run at Arkansas, he had both Gene Keady (550 career wins) and Pat Foster (366 career wins) by his side. During the final two seasons that whole trio was together, the Razorbacks went 58-6 and advanced to the 1978 Final Four, where they lost to what would eventually be the next stop on Sutton's journey.

At Kentucky, he spent one 32-4 season with Leonard Hamilton (478 career wins) on his bench.

But the biggest branch came at Oklahoma State, when he inherited Bill Self (592 career wins) from the staff Hamilton left behind to become the head coach at Miami. Sutton spent three years with Self before the latter went on to rebuild Oral Roberts and Tulsa.

In addition to the non-relative assistants, Sutton also has two sons—Sean and Scott—who played for him and became D-I head coaches.

3. Rick Pitino

7 OF 9

By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**

Rick Pitino *Jamie Rhodes-USA TODAY Sports*

Coaching Career: Boston (1978-83), Providence (1985-87), Kentucky (1989-97), Louisville (2001-present)

Noteworthy Assistants: Billy Donovan, Tubby Smith, Mick Cronin, Herb Sendek, Kevin Willard, Marvin Menzies, Kevin Keatts, Steve Masiello, Reggie Theus, Richard Pitino, Jim O'Brien

How's this for a factoid? 2.6 percent of all current head coaches in D-I basketball once served as an assistant to Rick Pitino. And that doesn't even include arguably the best alumnus of Pitino University, as Billy Donovan left his post at Florida last summer to become the head coach of the NBA's Oklahoma City Thunder.

Granted, compared to most of the other coaching trees on this list, most of Pitino's branches are fairly small. Mick Cronin and Tubby Smith are quality coaches, but Pitino never had any of the 44 winningest coaches in college hoops history on his staff.

Still, it's a bit ridiculous how many future D-I coaches Pitino has already employed with at least another few years remaining on his odometer.

He'll never be the winningest coach in college basketball history—though, he would have certainly at least reached 1,000 career wins (currently at 745) if he hadn't spent eight seasons in the NBA—but his footprint on the sport in terms of second-generation coaches might be the largest ever.

By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**

2. Bob Knight

8 OF 9

Bob Knight during his final season as a coach (2008). *Rodolfo Gonzalez/Associated Press*

Coaching Career: Army (1965-71), Indiana (1971-2000), Texas Tech (2001-08)

Noteworthy Assistants: Mike Krzyzewski, Don DeVoe, Dave Bliss, Jim Crews, Mike Davis

As the only head coach to ever have Mike Krzyzewski as an assistant coach (and a player, for that matter), Bob Knight was already a mortal lock for a spot on this list.

But did you know he had four other assistants who each went on to win at least 300 games as a D-I head coach—two of whom won more than 500 games?

Most people only remember Dave Bliss as the head coach of Baylor involved in one of the most outrageous scandals in the history of the game, but the man won 526 games while rebuilding Oklahoma and SMU and turning New Mexico into a near-annual tournament team.

By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**

Mike Davis—who succeeded Knight as head coach of the Hoosiers—has averaged nearly 20 wins per year over his past 16 seasons with Indiana, UAB and Texas Southern.

We're still waiting on one of Knight's proteges to hurl a chair across the court, though.

1. Larry Brown

9 OF 9

Larry Brown *David Butler II-USA TODAY Sports*

Coaching Career: UCLA (1979-81), Kansas (1983-88), SMU (2012-16)

Noteworthy Assistants: John Calipari, Bill Self, Gregg Popovich, Mark Turgeon, Alvin Gentry, Tim Jankovich

By using this site, you agree to the **Privacy Policy** and **Terms of Use.**

But most of the branches are brand-new trunks.

John Calipari and Bill Self are two of the top coaches in the game today. Calipari is already in the Naismith Hall of Fame, and the odds are in Self's favor to get there soon, as he seeks a 13th consecutive Big 12 title in this upcoming season. Brown was also the head coach for Mark Turgeon's first season as an assistant, and Turgeon is well on his way to more than 500 career wins.

Now add in Gregg Popovich, who was a volunteer assistant to Brown at Kansas during the 1986-87 season before becoming a five-time NBA champion.

Each coach on this list has had at least one assistant go on to do great things, but that quartet annihilates the top four of any other coach you can nominate.

The craziest part is that it all happened during his five-year stint in Lawrence. It's no wonder the Jayhawks won a national championship and averaged 27 wins per season during that time. They had the best collection of instructors imaginable.

Kerry Miller covers college basketball for Bleacher Report. You can follow him on Twitter at @kerrancejames.

Sponsored Content