



Carol Ross

**Univ. of Florida Women's Basketball Head Coach
(1990-2002, 12 years)**

1994, 1997 & 2001 WBCA District 9 Coach of the Year

1994 & 2001 SEC Coach of the Year

2001 & 2002 Finalist for Naismith National Coach of the Year

In a stunning announcement on March 22, 2002, **Carol Ross** resigned as head coach of the University of Florida women's basketball team.

Ross, who has spent the last 12 seasons as head coach of the Lady Gators, molded Florida into one of the nation's most competitive and talented programs. Ross leaves as the program's all-time winningest coach with a 247-121 record. She was a finalist for the 2002 Naismith National Coach of the Year award.

"I love this program. When you love something that much, you unselfishly do what is best for it. In this case, what's best is change," Ross said. "I believe the best is yet to come for Lady Gator Basketball. It has been a great journey. I have been blessed to coach many wonderful young ladies. My sense of pride comes in the players who have chosen to wear the uniform."

"To say I was shocked about Carol's decision is an understatement," Florida Athletics Director **Jeremy Foley** said. "I met with her this morning to discuss her contract extension so I was blind-sided about the result of our meeting. Carol has done an unbelievable job developing the Lady Gator Basketball team into one of the finest in the country. We are so proud of the recognition and the class that she instilled into this program. On behalf of the University of Florida I want to thank Carol for everything she has done for this program and the way she and her players have represented the Gator athletic family. We will truly miss her."

Before & After Ross

While her abilities to recruit and mold young talent is well documented, what Ross did with the Lady Gator program is even more impressive.

Putting it gently, before Ross grabbed the Florida reins, the Lady Gators were a competitive bunch in the mighty Southeastern Conference, but not too successful.

In the 16 total years – and 11 SEC seasons — prior to Carol Ross' arrival in Gainesville, UF won a total of 14 conference games. In 12 seasons under Ross, the Lady Gators notched 84 league wins, including a program-record 11 SEC victories in 2001 alone.

UF had never received a bid into the NCAA Tournament before Ross. This season, the Lady Gators appeared in their ninth NCAA Tournament in the last 10 years.

Before Ross: UF finished in the top-five of the SEC standings *once* (1) and never ranked higher than ninth place in the five years prior.

After Ross: The Lady Gators have finished among the league's top-five in nine of the last 11 seasons.

Before Ross: UF tallied one (1) 20-win season in 16 years. **After Ross:** UF is *averaging* over 20 victories per season during her 12-year tenure, and almost 23 wins over the last 10 years.

Before Ross: UF was ranked in the top 25 national weekly polls *twice* (2) in 16 years. **After Ross:** UF has earned a spot among the nation's top 25 weekly poll *112 times* since Feb. 21, 1994.

Before Ross: Never (0) ranked in the *final* top 25 poll. **After Ross:** Seven (7) final rankings in the last nine years.

Ross also developed the Lady Gators into some of the country's finest players. Eight former Lady Gators who have been coached by Ross are currently enjoying successful WNBA careers. Two of those players — **Merlakia Jones** and **DeLisha Milton** – have been named the WNBA All-Star teams. In addition, **Murriel Page** led the WNBA in field goal percentage in 1999 and 2000, while **Sophia Witherspoon** was one of the top scorers for the Portland Fire.

Milton became the second Lady Gator to play for the U.S. Olympic Basketball team, running with the Red, White & Blue in Sydney. Ross even donned the Red, White & Blue herself in 1998, when she selected as head coach of the U.S. Select Team.

Ross' achievements have not gone unnoticed. In 1994, Ross was selected by her peers as the SEC Coach of the Year and the WBCA District 9 Coach of the Year. In 1997 she again received WBCA District 9 Coach of the Year honors for lifting UF to its first top 10 national ranking and a trip to the NCAA Championship Elite Eight. Following the 2001 season, she was awarded both honors after leading the Lady Gators to a 24-6 overall record and a second place finish in the SEC. Ross was a finalist in 2001 and 2002 for the Naismith National Coach of the Year award.

At Florida, Ross has tutored 21 student-athletes to SEC Academic Honor Roll status 34 times and 15 to All-SEC honors 26 times.

Witty, warm, feisty and focused; colorful, caring, driven and distinctly southern, Ross turned the Florida women's basketball program from one without spark into one with spunk by instilling in it personality -- her own.

The 1998-99 season marked the 25th year of varsity women's basketball at the University of Florida. If anyone would know about the ins and outs of the program, it would be its founding "mothers."

When Lady Gator alumnae were asked to list the most significant event in the history of the basketball program, an overwhelming number mentioned "the hiring of Carol Ross."

"I didn't know much about Florida's program when I came in, but Coach Ross and Joi (Williams) had a dream and I wanted to be a part of that dream," said Merlakia Jones, who was a member of Ross' inaugural recruiting class. "I thank God for being a part of that."

Ross and her staff have been able to attract some the nation's best talent, including Jones, DeLisha Milton and Murriel Page, who took a chance on playing at Florida and have never regretted their decision.

Jones also became the first of seven All-Americans under Ross at Florida, who share 25 All-America honors.

Prior to Florida

Since the day she signed scholarship papers to play basketball at Ole Miss, her home-state university, Ross spent 23 years - including the 2002 season - both creating and soaking up the traditions of arguably the finest women's basketball conference in the country – the Southeastern Conference.

As a player at Ole Miss in the early 1980s, she was a member of the inaugural SEC All-Tournament Team. Ross was a pesky, tenacious guard who still ranks sixth on the league's all-time steals list.

As a seven-year assistant coach at Auburn, Ross reached the

NCAA Championship game in each of her last three seasons, 1988, '89 and '90. Gainesville resident and 1996 Olympian Ruthie Bolton, along with SEC and USA standout Mae Ola Bolton, were among the players Ross recruited to Auburn.

Ross' resume of Olympians, scholar-athletes, professional players and basketball coaches is lengthy. Twenty three of Ross' former players and recruits have continued their basketball careers on the professional level, including current UF professionals Takilya Davis (Sweden), Merlania Jones, DeLisha Milton, Muriel Page, Bridget Pettis, Tamara Stocks, Tiffany Travis, Tonya Washington and Sophia Witherspoon.

Ross earned her Bachelor's degree in Education from Ole Miss in 1982. Ross was a four-year starter for the Lady Rebels from 1978-81, when Ole Miss logged a 93-50 record. She became the fourth women's basketball player ever to be inducted into the University of Mississippi Athletic Hall of Fame, when she was honored on September 1, 2001.

Ross was named to the inaugural SEC All-Tournament team in 1980 and still holds the Ole Miss school record for steals in a career (333), season (135 in 1980) and in a game (11 vs. Southeastern Louisiana in 1980). Entering the 2002 season, she was No. 4 for career assists (531), her season total of 208 assists is the second-highest and her single game total of 13 dishes ranks tied-for-fifth in Lady Rebel history. Ross is one of only two players to record 1,000 points, 500 assists and 250 steals in a career.

After earning her degree, Ross served as a volunteer assistant at Belhaven College in Jackson, Miss., for one year before returning to the SEC as an assistant at Auburn. During that time she advanced from graduate assistant to top assistant and chief recruiter. She played a key role in the school's development and maturation into a perennial NCAA Tourney team.

The Oakland, Miss., native enjoys the Florida sunshine and all Gator sporting events. When the University hosted the 1999 NCAA Women's Tennis Championship, Ross volunteered her services to operate the scoreboard, field press box questions on the phone and soak in another successful season. She is a great tennis fan, having attended several professional Grand Slam events.

Ross was an active member of the Gainesville community, having served as a board member for both the American Cancer Society and the Coaches vs. Cancer organization, which honored her as its 2000 Coaches vs. Cancer Champion Award winner. She has volunteered for a variety of community organizations through speaking engagements with UF student-athletes on topics such as literacy, while also participating in fundraising efforts for numerous charity groups.

Ross vs. All Opponents

Alabama	11-7
Alabama State	2-0
Appalachian State	1-0
Arizona	1-1
Arizona State	1-0
Arkansas	13-2
Arkansas State	2-0
Auburn	6-10
Barry	1-0
Baylor	1-0
Bethune Cookman	4-0
Boise State	1-0
Boston College	0-1
Bowling Green	1-0
Brigham Young	0-1
California	2-0
Central Florida	8-0
Chicago State	1-0
Clemson	0-1
Colorado	1-1
Colorado State	0-2
Connecticut	0-1
Creighton	1-0
Dayton	1-0
Duke	1-1
Duquesne	1-0
East Carolina	1-0
E. Michigan	1-0
Elon	1-0
Fairfield	1-0
Florida Atlantic	4-1
Florida A&M	1-0
Fla. International	1-0
Florida State	14-2
Fordham	1-0
Furman	2-0
George Washington	2-0
Georgetown	1-1
Georgia	5-15
Georgia Southern	2-0
Hampton	1-0
Harvard	1-0
High Point	1-0
Holy Cross	1-0
Huntsville	1-0
Illinois	1-2
Indiana	1-0
Indiana State	1-0
Iowa	1-0
Kansas	1-0
Kansas State	1-0
Kent State	1-0
Kentucky	10-4
Lamar	1-0
Louisiana-Lafayette	1-0
Louisiana State	8-5
Louisiana Tech	1-0
Loyola Maymount	1-0
Lynn	1-0
Maine	1-0
Manhattan	1-0
Marquette	1-1
Maryland	1-0
Massachusetts	1-0
Memphis	1-1
Mercer	1-0
Miami	7-1
Mississippi	11-2
Mississippi State	8-6
Montana	1-0
Montana State	1-0
New Hampshire	1-0
New Mexico	1-0
New Mexico State	1-0
New Orleans	1-1
North Carolina	1-1
N.C.-Charlotte	2-0
North Carolina State	1-0
North Texas	1-0
Oakland	1-0
Ohio	1-0
Old Dominion	0-1
Pennsylvania	1-0
Penn State	1-1
Pepperdine	1-1

Head Coach Carol Ross

Ross' Record

Year	Overall	SEC	SEC Finish	Home	Postseason
1990-91	17-11	3-7	t-8th	10-4	—
1991-92	15-13	4-7	t-7th	8-5	—
1992-93	19-10	6-5	t-4th	9-3	NCAA
1993-94	22-7	8-3	3rd	14-0	NCAA
1994-95	24-9	7-4	t-4th	10-2	NCAA
1995-96	21-9	6-5	t-5th	9-1	NCAA
1996-97	24-9	9-3	t-3rd	9-3	NCAA
1997-98	23-9	10-4	t-2nd	16-0	NCAA
1998-99	19-14	6-8	t-8th	8-7	NCAA
1999-00	21-13	6-8	t-6th	11-3	WNIT
2000-01	24-6	11-3	t-2nd	12-3	NCAA
2001-02	18-11	8-6	t-4th	11-2	NCAA

12 Years 247-121 84-63 128-33 9 NCAA , 1 WNIT

Carol Ross has invested 23 years in the SEC

Four years as a player (Ole Miss)
Seven years as an assistant coach (Auburn)
12 years as a head coach (Florida)

Carol Ross at a Glance

Hometown: Oakland, Miss.

Education: Ole Miss (B.S. in Education, 1982)

Highlights:

- *Finalist for 2002 Naismith National Coach of the Year
- *Finalist for 2001 Naismith National Coach of the Year
- *Named 2001 WBCA District 9 Coach of the Year
- *Named 1997 WBCA District 9 Coach of the Year
- *Named 2001 SEC Coach of the Year (media)
- *Named 1994 SEC Coach of the Year (coaches & media)
- *2000 Coaches vs. Cancer Champion Award recipient
- *Posted 24 upsets wins over higher-ranked opponents
- *Head coach of the 1998 USA Select Team
- *10 consecutive postseason berths (including 2002)
- *Nine NCAA Championship appearances (including 2002)
- *Seven 20-win seasons
- *All-time winningest coach at Florida
- *Coached players on the 1992, '96 & 2000 U.S. Olympic teams
- *Coached the 1997 Wade Trophy winner
- *Coached 1997 SEC Player of the Year
- *Coached Florida's first-ever first team All-American (Kodak & Associated Press)
- *Helped 15 students-athletes to 25 All-SEC accolades
- *Tutored 21 student-athletes to 34 SEC Academic Honor Rolls

Did you Know...

Carol Ross became the fourth women's basketball player to be inducted into the University of Mississippi Athletic Hall of Fame, when she was honored on September 1, 2001.

Providence	1-0	Texas A&M	0-1
Purdue	0-3	Tulane	0-1
Radford	1-0	UC-Santa Barbara	0-1
Rhode Island	1-0	Utah	1-0
Richmond	0-1	Vanderbilt	9-7
Rutgers	2-0	Villanova	1-0
St. Bonaventure	1-0	Virginia	0-2
San Francisco	1-1	Virginia Tech	2-0
South Alabama	1-1	Washington	0-1
South Carolina	12-2	West Virginia	4-1
South Florida	6-0	Western Kentucky	1-0
Southern Cal	1-1	Western Michigan	2-0
Southern Mississippi	1-2	William and Mary	1-0
Southwest Texas	2-0	Wisconsin-Green Bay	1-0
Stephen F. Austin	0-2	Wisconsin-Madison	0-2
Stanford	0-1	TOTAL	247-121
Stetson	5-0		
Tennessee	1-15		
Tennessee State	3-0		
Tennessee Tech	1-1		
Texas	3-1		



Joi Williams

Assistant Coach

12 Years at Florida

Recruiting is the backbone of any successful college basketball program. Each year, coaches from top universities seek out players from across the country to attend their respective schools. For the University of Florida, the person charged with determining which student-athletes will be the future of the program is Joi Williams. Williams, who completed her 12th season in 2002 as an assistant coach with the Lady Gators, served as the chief recruiter on Ross' staff.

A true native of Florida basketball, Williams was raised in nearby Jacksonville and played prep ball at Bishop Kenny. She then attended the University of South Florida in Tampa to continue her basketball career. Williams was a four-year starter at USF from 1984-88. Williams is seventh on the career assists list and held the record for most blocked shots in a game upon her graduation. After only a few years in Gainesville, she has developed a reputation as one of the premier assistant coaching talents. *Lindy's Basketball Annuals* listed her as one of the 'Top Young Recruiters' in the nation in their 1994-95 preseason guide.

"Joi is a great student of the game and she knows the game extremely well," head coach Carol Ross said. "She's very knowledgeable. Her contributions are of a quiet nature. Joi has been here for 12 years so she has a true grasp of what Lady Gator Basketball is all about. She particularly enjoys working one-on-one with the players."

Williams was responsible for the arrival of every student-athlete into the Florida program during the Ross Era. The recruitment of All-American Merlakia 'Lake' Jones began a successful trend for Williams and the Lady Gators. Jones' career was highlighted by being named to the All-SEC team three times, joining her team for three consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances and becoming UF's all-time leading scorer. Williams also stole DeLisha Milton out of the state of Georgia, a move that would become outstanding for both. Milton, a member of the 2000 USA Olympic team, concluded her career as UF's first Kodak first team All-American, as well as became UF's first SEC Player of the Year.

An additional look into the Florida record books demonstrates the impact of Williams' recruiting on the UF program. Former standout players like current WNBA superstar Bridget Pettis and 1998 Kodak first team All-American Murriel Page, represent the continual influx of highly-sought, quality student-athletes to join the UF player ranks in the last 10 years. Milton and Page both continued to develop their talents at Florida, earning selections to several USA Basketball teams, while being selected in the first rounds of the WNBA draft.

Williams' job description, however, is not limited to recruiting. She works with the wing players, while serving as the program's liaison with USA Basketball and professional teams. In addition to her coaching responsibilities, Williams is active with the team in several community and charity events.

Williams enjoys listening to music, biking, the beach and knee surgeries, plus she is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Williams earned a bachelor of science degree in marketing from USF in 1988.

Coach Williams at a Glance

Florida's record with Williams on the sideline: 247-121 (12 years; following 2001-02 season)

As a player: A 5-foot-6 guard at South Florida, 1984-88

Birthdate: November 5th

Hometown: Jacksonville, Florida

Education: Univ. of South Florida (B.S. in Marketing, 1988)

Of Interest:

*Four-year basketball starter at USF

*Listed as one of the 'Top Young Recruiters' in the nation in the 1994-95 preseason guide of *Lindy's Basketball Annuals*

*Responsible for the recruitment of UF All-Americans Merlakia 'Lake' Jones, DeLisha Milton and Murriel Page

*1994-95 recruiting was listed among the top-five in the nation by *Women's Basketball News Service*

*Member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

Current WNBA Players Recruited to UF by Williams

Bridget Pettis
Merlakia Jones
DeLisha Milton
Murriel Page
Tamara Stocks
Tiffany Travis
Tonya Washington



Matthew Mitchell

Assistant Coach

Two Years at Florida

The tall Southern gentleman on the Lady Gator sidelines this season is Matthew Mitchell. The 6-foot-5 native of Louisville, Miss., joined the Florida staff on June 21, 2000 and the energy level surrounding the program has been cranked up to another level ever since.

"Matthew has an energy surrounding him that is contagious," Carol Ross said. "He's excited to teach and learn every day. Matthew is very competitive and passionate about basketball."

On the court, Mitchell coaches the forwards and post players. He also assists in all aspects of recruiting young talent, in addition to serving at the Lady Gator's scouting coordinator.

"Matthew is a young, high-energy coach who brings enthusiasm to the court," Ross said. "He keeps things going all the time. Matthew has a very good rapport with the players. He learned a lot last year. He knows what it takes to be successful. He's one of the most positive people you'll meet."

During the 1999-2000 season, Mitchell was a graduate assistant coach with the University of Tennessee women's basketball program that reached the national championship game before losing to Connecticut. In Knoxville, Mitchell was responsible for all video work, while assisting the coaching staff with recruiting and other administrative duties.

Prior to his work with the Lady Vols, Mitchell spent one year in Yazoo City, Miss., as a coach and teacher at Manchester Academy. He taught American history, while walking the sidelines as head coach of the boys and girls basketball teams, and the track team, in addition to serving as defensive coordinator for the football team.

Mitchell's first experience as a head coach came in 1996, when he traveled to Lexington, Miss., to teach American history and coach at Central Holmes Academy. During his two-year tenure he patrolled the sidelines of the boys and girls basketball teams, as well as the football, track and golf teams.

Mitchell entered the coaching ranks in 1995, as an assistant of the boys basketball team at Winston Academy, where he also graduated from high school in 1989. The 6-foot-5 Mitchell was a standout athlete, competing in basketball, football, baseball, track and golf. He helped the Patriot's track team win the Class A state championship his sophomore year by winning the mile run in a time of 4:39.

Mitchell attended Millsaps College in Jackson, Miss., for two years, when from 1990 to '92, he played basketball and was an all-conference golfer at the small school.

After two years at Millsaps, Mitchell attended Mississippi State University from 1993 to 1995, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in marketing.

He has one daughter, Lacy Mitchell, who is a sixth-grader during the 2001-02 year at Madison-Ridgeland Academy in Madison, Miss.

Mitchell, a native of Louisville, Miss., is the youngest of four sons born to John and Carol Mitchell.

He enjoys golfing and sported a three-handicap at one time.

Coach Mitchell at a Glance

Birthdate: December 16

Hometown: Louisville, Miss.

Education: Mississippi State Univ. (B.B.A. in Marketing, 1995)

Of Interest:

*Extremely talented athlete

*Graduate assistant coach at Tennessee during the 1999-2000 season, when the Lady Vols reached the national championship game

*Sang the national anthem prior to the Lady Gator's Feb. 22, 2001 home game against LSU.

*Was a three-handicap golfer.

*Is the lead singer in his band "Coach Mitchell and the B-Team," which plays throughout the state of Mississippi.

*Achieved rank of Eagle Scout faster than anyone else in the history of Pushmataha Area Council.

*Has one daughter, Lacy



Renee Ladner Assistant Coach

Two Years at Florida

Renee Ladner could be considered the rookie collegiate assistant coach on the Lady Gator staff during the 2001-02 season, but her coaching experience is undeniable. The 2001-02 season was her second year on the Florida sideline.

Carol Ross, who was college teammates with Ladner at Ole Miss, placed her former Rebel point guard in charge of coaching the Lady Gator point guards, in addition to serving as Florida's defensive coordinator. She directs all Lady Gator summer camps and coaching clinics, while being responsible for the team's strength and conditioning progress and developing the practice squad.

"Renee's strength as a coach is with her ability to work with people," Ross said. "She is an excellent motivator and inspires people to give their best."

Ladner brought 18 years of basketball experience to Florida. During the 1999-2000 season she coached St. John (Gulfport, Miss.) High School to the Class 2A state championship, collecting the honor of Girls Basketball Coach of the Year from the Mississippi Association of Coaches. At St. John, Ladner also was responsible for the development of the health, physical education and drug education curriculum.

Ladner compiled a 10-year coaching record of 215-99 with the Lady Eagles, including a 181-31 ledger in the last six seasons. St. John won the District 8/2A title each of the last five years, reaching the "Final Four" of the state tournament in three of her last four seasons. She took the Lady Eagles from a 4-20 record her first season, to its 35-3 record last year.

"This is an opportunity of a lifetime," Ladner said. "When Carol initially called me and asked if I would be interested in the job, I couldn't believe it. There was no way my family or I could turn down the opportunity of moving to Gainesville and working with the Lady Gators."

Prior to her tenure at St. John, Ladner was an instructor and coach for three years at Harrison Central High School in Gulfport, Miss., where she taught ninth grade physical education, and coached the girls and boys basketball teams and the track team.

From 1981 to 1987, Ladner was the science and the physical education instructor for North Gulfport's seventh and eighth grades, in addition to coaching the girls basketball team.

She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Health, Physical Education and Recreation in 1981 from the University of Mississippi. At Ole Miss, Ladner played basketball with current Lady Gator coach

Carol Ross. She later served as a student assistant for the team, coached by Van Chancellor. Ladner then became a sixth-round draft pick by the Women's Professional Basketball League's St. Louis Streaks.

She attended Harrison Central High School, where she was first coached by Van Chancellor.

The former Susan Renee Rutland from Gulfport, Miss., married Eddie Ladner in 1981. Eddie retired from teaching and as the golf coach at Harrison Central this year. He also coached a state basketball championship team, coaching Harrison Central's boys squad to the 1982 title.

The couple has two daughters, Allison (19) and Jennifer (15). Allison was a 6-foot senior on the 2000 St. John championship-winning team and is attending Santa Fe CC in Gainesville. Jennifer, who also plays basketball, is a 10th grader at P.K. Yonge.

Coach Ladner at a Glance

Birthdate: May 2nd

Hometown: Gulfport, Miss.

Education: Univ. of Mississippi (B.S. in Health, Physical Education and Recreation, 1981)

As a player: A 5-foot-4 guard at Mississippi, 1977-81

Of Interest:

*Coached in high school and college by Van Chancellor, now head coach of the WNBA's Houston Comets

*Brought 18 years of coaching experience to UF

*Teammates at Ole Miss with Carol Ross

*Graduate assistant coach at Ole Miss when Carol Ross was a player

*2000 Mississippi Girls Basketball Coach of the Year

*Attended the same high school as former Lady Gator Tiffany Travis

*Drafted by the St. Louis Streaks in the sixth round of the Women's Professional Basketball League

*She and her husband Eddie have two daughters, Allison and Jennifer