Ainge, Danny (1959-)

Danny Ainge, one of the greatest athletes in Oregon history, is the only high school athlete ever named first-team All-American in football, basketball, and baseball.

Born in Eugene, Ainge led North Eugene High School to the Oregon state basketball championship in 1976 and 1977. He played basketball for Brigham Young University, where he earned All-American honors, concluding his college career in 1981 with the John Wooden Award, presented to the best college basketball player in the country.

Drafted by the Toronto Blue Jays in 1977 and playing with them during his college years, Ainge pursued a brief but notable career in baseball. He made his major league baseball debut with the Jays in 1979, and his final game for Toronto was in 1981. He remains the youngest player ever to hit a home run for the Jays (he was twenty years old), and he played in one of baseball's rarest events, a perfect game, in 1981. His final hitting statistics were .220 batting average, 2 home runs, and 37 runs batted in.

The Boston Celtics selected Ainge in the 1981 draft after a legal battle in which the Celtics bought out his baseball contract. He joined the Celtics just as their fortunes rose with Hall of Fame players Larry Bird, Kevin McHale, Robert Parish, and Dennis Johnson. Ainge was a key—and famously pugnacious—player during the 1984 and 1986 championship seasons (Celtics fans will long remember his fight with Atlanta's towering Tree Rollins). In 1989, he was traded to the Sacramento Kings. The next year, he was traded to the Portland Trailblazers, and he was instrumental in helping the team to the 1992 National Basketball Association finals, which they lost to the Chicago Bulls.

After that season, as a free agent for the first time in his career, Ainge joined the Phoenix Suns, with whom he would finish his career in 1995. He helped them to the championship round in 1993, again losing to the Chicago Bulls. During his fourteen years at the top level of basketball, he scored an average of 11.5 points, passed for 4 assists, and garnered 2.7 rebounds per game.

In 1996, Ainge was named head coach of the Phoenix Suns, a position he soon resigned. He returned to professional basketball in 2003 as executive director of the Celtics, where he remains as president of basketball operations. Among the highlights of his administrative work with the Celtics are the NBA Executive of the Year award and the team's record seventeenth NBA title, both in 2008.

Ainge was named to the Oregon Sports Hall of Fame in 1999. He and his wife Michelle, both members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, live in Wellesley, Massachusetts. They have six children.

Written by Brian Doyle

Further Reading:

Quick, Jason. "Trail Blazers Top 40: No. 31 Danny Ainge." *Oregonian*, November 26, 2009. http://blog.oregonlive.com/behindblazersbeat/2009/11/trail_blazers_top_40_no_31_dan.html

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