Shipley’s legacy celebrated

Dolores Shipley, second from right, widow of former UL basketball coach Beryl Shipley, is honored with other members of the Shipley family before UL takes on Houston Baptist Friday night during the Beryl Shipley Classic at the Cajundome. PHOTOS BY LESLIE WESTBROOK/WESTBROOK@THEADVERTISER.COM

UL gives family and his players a homecoming

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When Bob Marlin asked Dolores Shipley how many tickets she’d need for this weekend’s Beryl Shipley Classic, she had a bigger vision.

Beryl Shipley’s widow hopes to watch more UL games this season than just those during the newly created tournament — bearing her late husband’s name — that got under way Friday night at the Cajundome.

And Marlin, who grew close to Shipley in the short time he knew the coach before his passing last April, is all for it.

“I hope she’ll be a fixture at our games,” said the current Ragin’ Cajuns coach, who is in second season in charge at UL.

If so, it would be just one more step in the rebuilding of bridges between the Shipley family and the program Beryl

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A sketch of a bust of former UL head coach Beryl Shipley.
Shipley was the coach for 16 seasons in the late 1950s, throughout the 1960s and until it was shut down by the NCAA for recruiting and rule violations in the early 1970s.

For decades, Shipley hailed for being the first coach to integrate black players into the program of a public university in the Deep South — and the school were estranged.

But Marlin, UL president Dr. Joseph Savoie, several former Shipley players, Shipley family members, program supporters and others from throughout the community all have been working recently to heal old wounds.

“It means that people really care,” Dolores Shipley said on Marlin's win over Houston Baptist on Friday. “I think it’s wonderful for us, for our family, and I think it’s absolutely great for the guys. I’m so pleased for Shipley's former players. They really, really, really deserve this. It’s wonderful. ... I know that Beryl would be wonderfully pleased.”

Last Wednesday night, a fundraising gala was held in town to drum up financial support for “Lights Out In Blackham” — a still-being-produced chronicling Shipley's battle against not only school administrators and the NCAA but also social injustice in the South.

Two nights later, the three-day, four-team tourney got under way.

Before UL's game Friday, Marlin presented Dolores Shipley with roses; at halftime, she and other family members were presented with both an autographed family portrait and the picture of a bust of Beryl Shipley that upon completion will be prominently displayed in the Cajundome.

This morning, family members will join ex-players — former All-Americans Bo Lamar, Roy Ebron and Dean Church all are in Lafayette this week — and others close to Shipley, including Marlin, will take part in a graveside service they hope will bring added closure.

Church, Ebron, Lamar, longtime Shipley assistant coach Tom Cox and former team radio play-by-play announcer Ron Gomez all will be recognized prior to tonight's game between UL and Cal State Fullerton, and at halftime they'll take the floor along with other former program members in attendance.

“First home game of the year, to open the tournament in his name — it has come full circle, to a degree,” Marlin said after beating Houston Baptist. “It was a great day (Friday) and I think we're gonna have a great day (today).”