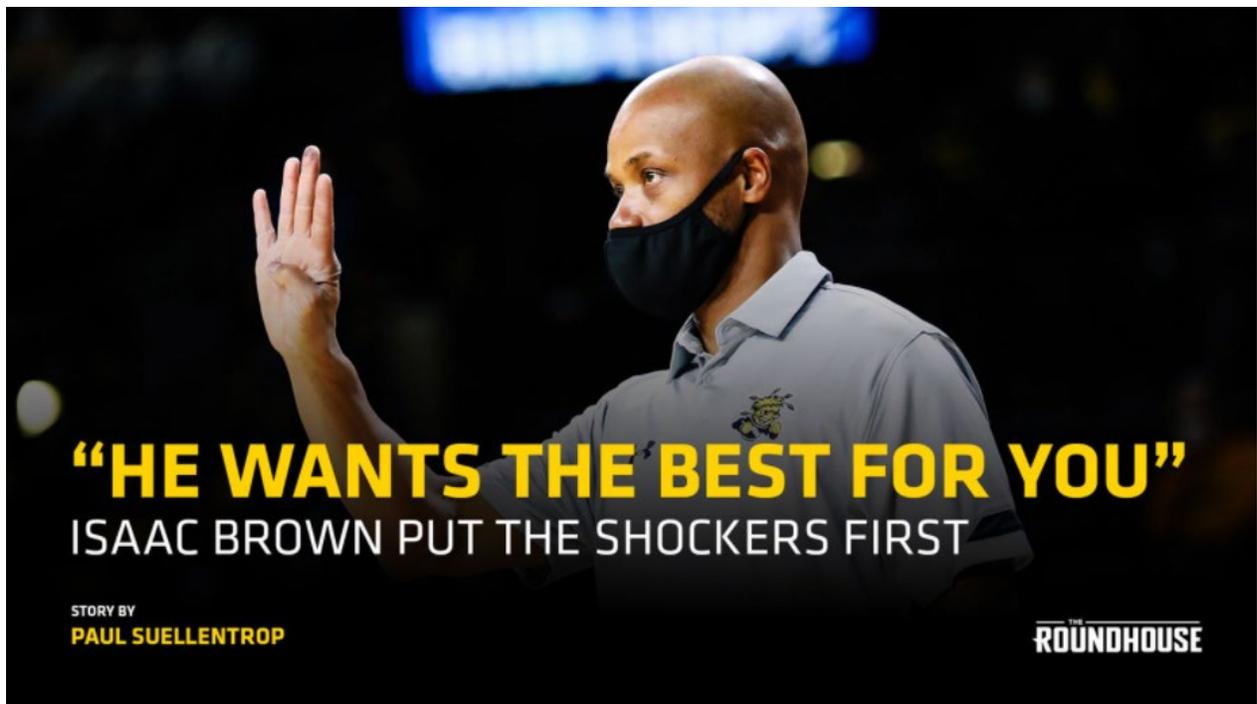


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RH: Wichita State Makes Brown Its Coach

By Paul Suellentrop, Senior Communicator



[Morris Udeze](#) knew Wichita State had its basketball coach on Jan. 2, at halftime of a game at Mississippi.

The Shockers trailed 41-39 and the Rebels led the final six minutes of the half.

"You didn't see any quit on his face," said Udeze, a junior center. "Normally, when you're down and away, it's kind of hard to come back. We looked at his face and we were like 'OK, we've got to seize this moment.'"

This moment does belong to [Isaac Brown](#), no matter how hard he will try to deflect praise and shine the spotlight on others.

Friday afternoon, Wichita State gave Brown a five-year contract as the school's head men's basketball coach. Brown, 51, served as interim coach since Nov. 18 after joining the staff in 2014 as an assistant.

"I'm excited for the players and I'm excited to be the coach at such a great basketball school," he said. "I want to keep things going. We want to compete to be at the top of the league every year."

Udeze and the Shockers had to wait for the removal of the interim title, but they knew they wanted Brown all along.

"He deserved it, especially with all the turmoil going on," sophomore guard [Tyson Etienne](#) said. "The fact we've been able to keep a tight ship and he's been the leader of that, it's deserved."

Moments like the 83-79 win at Mississippi reinforced the affection. Brown took over a tumultuous situation after the coaching change and during a pandemic. He provided calm, steadiness and the right touch with the tough aspects of the job such as playing time, effort and accountability.

At every step, he made Shocker basketball about the Shockers by avoiding the spotlight and turning the shine to his team.

"He's very selfless, very encouraging," Etienne said. "He never makes it about him. He never makes it about the coaches. He always makes it about the players and puts us first."

Udeze said Brown proves that by talking and listening away from the court, away from the topic of wins, losses, scouting reports and baskets.

"You know he wants the best for you," Udeze said. "When somebody is talking to you about life situations, wants to know about your family, you know it's genuine."

The Shockers are 13-4 in this abbreviated season, coming off a landmark victory over No. 6 Houston and in first place in the American Athletic Conference. They are 4-2 on the road and 7-1 in games decided by five points or fewer. Brown's push for the job included big wins, road wins, close wins and a win over a Houston team that thumped the Shockers twice the previous season.

Brown started his interim tenure by pushing away questions about his journey, his prospects, his story to focus attention on the team and the season. Most – including the important people in his huddles – noticed.

"I really just wanted to coach basketball," Brown said. "It's a players-first program and I told them to take ownership of the team. Those guys did."

Brown, quietly, kept proving he could do the job. When the short-handed Shockers lost to Missouri and Oklahoma State early, he corrected defensive deficiencies, gave struggling shooters confidence and guided the Shockers toward more ball movement, sharper cuts and less dribbling.

Against UCF, the move to a 1-2-2 press into a man defense swung the game. He kept them engaged and

energetic during idle times. He helped get Etienne shots against defenses designed to stop him, nurtured [Alterique Gilbert](#) into a strong February and managed his bench expertly. He kept them on task to avoid COVID-19 disruptions that have poked holes in the schedule.

"The leadership from the veteran guys has been huge," Brown said. "A lot of times I will get on a guy about something and I don't have to say it twice. Those guys will pull him in the corner and talk to him."

Brown becomes the first Black head men's basketball coach at a Kansas NCAA Division I school. Against Houston, he carried a black towel, a tribute to former Georgetown coach John Thompson, a leader and fierce advocate for Black coaches. Brown thought about the work done by coaches such as Thompson, Temple's John Chaney and Rob Evans, one of his top mentors, to make Friday possible.

Thompson famously kept a deflated basketball in his office to remind people that life after sports was important and an education helped.

"They were father figures to their kids," Brown said. "My job is to help these kids be successful in life, even when basketball is over."

Brown works out of the conference room in the basketball offices, largely to provide social distancing for visitors. The big office is his, but he will wait until the summer to move in. He ended Friday's practice by telling the Shockers "This is a special time."

Decorating his office will wait. The Shockers play at Tulane on Wednesday.

"I want to focus on winning these basketball games," he said.

[Paul Suellentrop](#) covers Wichita State Athletics and the American Athletic Conference for university Strategic Communications. Story suggestion? Contact him at paul.suellentrop@wichita.edu.