

# **UMBC men's basketball coach reflects on faith at Catholic League Hall of Fame Banquet**

ELLICOTT CITY - Ryan Odom has become well-known in the world of college basketball since his UMBC men's team became the first No. 16 seed in NCAA Tournament history to defeat a No. 1 seed. The Retrievers routed Virginia - also the No. 1 team in the nation at the time - 74-54 on March 16.

The national media descended upon Odom, who said he received countless letters, e-mails and text messages.

Throughout his time in the spotlight, Odom remained unchanged and true to his values of faith, family, belief and hard work, subjects he highlighted during a May 3 keynote address at the Baltimore Catholic League Hall of Fame Banquet at Turf Valley Resort in Ellicott City.

Odom was raised a Southern Baptist, but converted to the Catholic faith of his fiancée, Lucia, when they married.

He took over as interim coach at UNC Charlotte during the 2014-15 season after the head coach became ill. The team played well, but the school let all the coaches go at season's end. That left Odom in a tough spot, especially because one part of the NCAA Tournament was right there in Charlotte, and featured Virginia, the team his dad served as an assistant coach when Odom was growing up.

Things grew even worse when Odom's son became sick at the same time.

"The adversity had hit, so what do you do?" asked Odom, a parishioner of St. Mary in Annapolis. "You dive into your family, and you dive into your faith, and you work at it, and you believe things will turn around for you, and you have faith that things will turn around - and they did."

He was soon offered a job as the head coach at Lenoir Rhyne, a Division II school

also in North Carolina. He led the Bears to a 21-10 record and the NCAA regional finals in 2015-16. Then came the UMBC job offer for 2016-17, and Odom took a team that had won seven games the previous season and guided them to a 21-13 record.

This season, a dramatic Jairus Lyles three-pointer in the final second gave the Retrievers a 65-62 victory over Vermont in the America East championship game. The host Catamounts had beaten UMBC 23 straight times before this win.

"The tears were flowing after that game," Odom said. "Again, God was looking out for all of us."

UMBC earned an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament with that win and was matched up with Virginia in the first round - in Charlotte. The place of that competition gave Odom pause.

"(We were) going back to Charlotte, which is incredible," Odom said. "Where I was at my lowest and deepest and darkest point."

Odom then stopped for a moment and gazed at the crowd.

"What you're hearing right now is my pre-game speech," he said to a very quiet room. "My players knew some of the story, but they did not know all of the story. You're back in that moment (being in Charlotte) for a reason. Now you've got to go do it. What are you going to do?"

Leading up to the big game, no one outside the Retrievers locker room gave his team a chance. UMBC was fine with that because the team felt it could give Virginia a game, and the Retrievers made history.

The Baltimore Catholic League inducted 11 people into its Hall of Fame at the dinner.

Mike Daniel, Towson Catholic; Jake Davalli, Calvert Hall College High School; Dick Dohler, Mount St. Joseph High School; Bob Fornoff, Archbishop Curley High School; Shawn Hampton, St. Frances Academy; Delmar Harrod, Mount St. Joseph High School; Quintin Moody, Cardinal Gibbons High School; Kenny Johnson, Loyola Blakefield; Mark Scallion, St. Maria Goretti High School; Jim "Snuffy" Smith, Loyola

Blakefield; and Teddy Walker, Towson Catholic, make up the Class of 2018.

Those who spoke all talked about how much the Catholic League meant to them and what they learned there both on and off the court. Several spoke with reverence about the competition they loved and the friendships they still keep.

“I just loved those days,” said Daniel, a long-time coach at Towson Catholic and other places.