

Update: Shaquille O'Neal says he was only joking that LSU 'paid very well' — just being 'the life of the party'



Advocate file photo by TRAVIS SPRADLING -- LSU basketball and NBA great Shaquille O'Neal waves to fans during a football game against Auburn on Sept. 20.

After saying LSU 'paid me very well,' Shaq reiterates it was all in jest

By Sheldon Mickles

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Update, 6 p.m.:

Former LSU and NBA star Shaquille O'Neal said Tuesday he was only joking when he said the school "paid very well" while attending an event Monday night in Los Angeles.

During a question-and-answer session at the annual Los Angeles Lakers "All-Access" event, a fundraiser put on by the Los Angeles Sports & Entertainment Commission,

emcee Bill Macdonald asked O'Neal about his years at LSU with coach Dale Brown.

According to [a blog posted on the Los Angeles Daily News website](#) by Lakers beat writer Mark Media, O'Neal, who played at LSU from 1989-92, said: "Yes, they paid me very well."

Then, as he and about 525 people in attendance laughed heartily, O'Neal added: "Statute of limitations is up. I can talk about it. They paid me very well. That's right baby, LSU."

O'Neal told The Advocate in a phone interview Tuesday morning his comment about being paid was merely a joke. He said it was one of many he told when the event became a little boring.

"You guys know I'm the life of the party, so I had to pick it up," O'Neal said. "So every question they asked me, I had to give them a funny response.

"I was on stage and a guy asked, 'How was your time at LSU?' and I said, 'Yes, they paid me very well,' " he said. "The crowd went crazy. ... It was a joke."

Los Angeles Times sportswriter Mike Bresnahan, who was also at the event, included the quote as a minor footnote to a story he wrote about O'Neal's often-contentious relationship with his former NBA team, for whom he played eight seasons and won three titles, and ex-teammate Kobe Bryant.

O'Neal said Tuesday that someone "with 82 followers" tweeted out the comment to gain national notoriety and it went from there.

"Everyone knows LSU is the most honorable university ... ever," he said. "Everyone also knows I don't sell my soul for anything.

"Everybody knows the relationship me and Dale Brown have, and the love we share for each other," O'Neal added. "Something like that would never happen."

Macdonald later asked O'Neal about his son, Shareef, a 15-year-old high school sophomore. Shareef O'Neal, who will be in the Class of 2018, reportedly has scholarship offers from LSU, UCLA and Southern Cal — among others.

"I asked him where he wanted to go to school (college) and he didn't give me the right answer," Shaquille O'Neal said.

"Which is?" Macdonald asked.

"LSU. I already told him that, 2016, you can probably get a house, you can probably get two cars," O'Neal said. "I'll set it up for you. I know some people down there. Just playing. These are just jokes!"

Upon hearing about the report, Brown noted that O'Neal has long been a practical joker and prankster.

"That's what he does," Brown said. "I've heard people say this doesn't even need a reply. If there's anything that never deserved a reply, it's this.

"But it angered me so bad for that family ... they're as honorable and wonderful people as there are, and they didn't have anything."

Current Tigers coach Johnny Jones, an assistant on Brown's staff when O'Neal played at LSU, said he preferred not to comment.

O'Neal, a two-time All-American and one of only four LSU basketball players to have his number retired, wondered how something he said in jest could become a national story.

"We have to stop letting social media run things. ... It was a joke at an event where I told a lot of jokes," he said. "Everybody knows my time at LSU was nothing but love and sacrifice — all for the university. That's what LSU stands for.

"So, people of the honorable LSU, don't worry about nonsense from these idiots. We know what we do and we know how we do it. That's why I keep coming back every year."

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