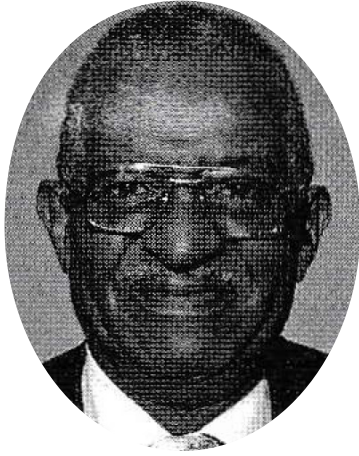


## Reggie Spears



If there never was a Calvin Murphy, then **Reggie Spears** may have been the greatest basketball player to ever come out of Norwalk.

"Calvin used to say Reggie was better," says Bobby Miller, the younger brother of the former NBA all-star guard who was inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame in 1993. A decade and a half before Murphy led Norwalk High School to a state championship in 1966, his cousin Reginald Spears was the talk of the town for the Green and White.

Born in Whiteville, NC, Spears moved to Norwalk at an early age and attended local schools. By the time he entered Norwalk High in 1950, he was already known for his exploits on the hardwood and would go on to enjoy a standout three-year career.

A 6-foot-2, 175 pound forward, Spears wasted no time making an impact, leading the team in scoring as a sophomore with a 12.7 average. Although Norwalk was only 5-15 that 1950-'51 season, the locals lost by only six points, 53-47, to eventual state and New England champion Bridgeport Central with Spears scoring 10 points.

But it was during his junior year, the 1951-'52 season, that Spears really emerged as one of the best basketball players in the state, averaging a team-high 25.9 points per game as Norwalk improved to 10-7 and made the state tournament.

Three times Spears scored 30 or more points, including a career-high 38 against Danbury in the Hat City. He also tossed in 30 points against Norwich in the opening game of the state tournament as the 13<sup>th</sup>-ranked Norwalkers nearly upset the No. 3 team before losing a 63-62 heartbreaker.

Spears also made history that season as he became the first player from the city of Norwalk to be named all-state in basketball.

More accolades would await the Norwalk standout in the 1952-'53 season as Spears was named senior captain and averaged 23.4 points to lead NHS to an 11-7 mark and back to the state tourney. This time, the Green and White would win its opening game as Spears scored 32 points in an 80-52 victory over Naugatuck.

His 20<sup>th</sup> point that night also made Spears the first player in city history to reach one thousand career points. He would add 17 more points in a 61-52 loss to Hartford Public in the second round, the final game of Spears's brilliant scholastic career. He would earn all-state honors again, and he and Murphy are still the only players from the city of Norwalk to ever be named all-state twice. He finished with 1,029 career points.

"Reggie was a hard worker and a great competitor," Walter Dudding, Spears' coach at NHS, said in a 1993 interview. "He was a team player."

It also came as no surprise in 1971 when *The Hour Newspaper*, in its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, named the city's all-time greatest high school basketball team, Reggie Spears and Calvin Murphy were two of the five players tabbed. Jack Cronin, Marvin Spencer, and David Spears, Reggie's younger brother, were the other three selections.

Reggie Spears graduated from Norwalk High in 1953, but his basketball career was far from over. He would earn a basketball scholarship to American International College in Springfield, MA, where he played for two years before transferring to Shaw University in Raleigh, NC, where he played his final two seasons.

In the summer of '53, before his first semester at AIC, Spears was even invited to Chicago for a tryout with the world famous Harlem Globetrotters and attended several practice sessions. And after his college days, he played one season with a team in Danbury in the old ABA, averaging close to 25 points a game and earning MVP honors in one tournament.

Spears would continue playing in several local leagues right up until 1970 with the Bridgeport YMCA. He also coached briefly in the early 1960s in the Norwalk Bidy League where one of the players he coached against was a future star named Calvin Murphy, who a few years later would break Spears scoring records at Norwalk High.

While Spears was best known for basketball, he was also an outstanding baseball player who played center field for NHS. He also played in college and for the Laurel Athletic Club team in Norwalk during the '50s. In addition, he played soccer at Norwalk High.

Now retired, the 68-year-old Spears, father of five and grandfather of two, lives in Bridgeport with his wife Linda.