

Calvin Murphy



The man considered by many to be Norwalk's greatest athlete ever officially becomes an Old Timer tonight.

Calvin Murphy, a name synonymous with the sport of basketball locally, nationally, and even around the world, adds another honor on his never-ending list of laurels in a career that took him from the gyms in Norwalk to the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, MA.

It began in places like schoolyards around Main Avenue, where Murphy grew up, and the YMCA Biddy Basketball League, a league that would one day be renamed after him, and at West Rocks Junior High School, where people first began to take notice of his talented skills on the court.

The rest of the state and New England noticed the same thing when Murphy arrived at Norwalk High School. He started all three years he was at "the high school on the hill," as he liked to call it and which is now Norwalk City Hall. All Murphy did during those three memorable seasons between 1964-'66 is score a then-state record 2,192 points — which is still a city record — as he led the FCIAC in scoring all three years and the state his last two seasons.

In fact, as a senior he averaged a New England-leading 40.3 points a game, another state record, scoring over 40 points nine times and over 50 five times, including an FCIAC record 62 against Roger Ludlowe and another 59 in the state championship game when he led NHS over South Catholic. He was a *Parade* magazine first-team All-American, a two-time first-team All-State selection, and a three-time All-FCIAC first-team pick.

Murphy next made a name for himself at Niagara University in upstate New York where he was an All-American three straight seasons and once scored 68 points against Syracuse. He finished with a school record 2,548 points and averaged 33.1 points for his career, and that's not counting the 48.9 he averaged on the freshmen team. Freshmen weren't allowed to play varsity back then.

The rest of the world found out what Norwalk and the rest of New England already knew when Murphy entered the NBA in 1970. The ABA and even the Harlem Globetrotters offered him more money, but Murphy wanted to prove the naysayers who said he could never play in the NBA wrong. So he signed with the San Diego Rockets, who drafted him in the second round with the 18th overall pick. The following season, the Rockets moved to Houston and Murphy would spend his entire 13-year NBA career with the same franchise. At 5-foot-9, Murphy was basketball's first little man, although he has always insisted he was of normal height and everyone else in the league at the time was a freak of nature.

But he would certainly hold his own in the land of the giants, scoring 17,949 points in his career, including 57 in one game — still a Rocket record — against the New Jersey Nets on March 18, 1978, exactly 12 years after his 59-point game for Norwalk High in the state finals. Murphy was named to the NBA All-Star team in 1979, and helped lead the Rockets to the Western Conference championship and NBA finals in 1981.

In addition, Murphy became known as one of the greatest free throw shooters in NBA history. He set an NBA record with 78 consecutive free throws made from December 27, 1980 to February 28, 1981, a record which stood until 1993. But Murphy's .958 free throw percentage that 1980-'81 season is still a league record.

Murphy retired after the 1982-'83 season and a year later the Rockets retired his number 23, the first to be retired by the team. But the ultimate honor came in 1993 when Norwalk's favorite son was elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield and officially inducted on May 10, 1993 along with Dr. J, Bill Walton, and five others.

Since his retirement, the 55-year-old Murphy, who still lives in Texas, has remained involved with the Rockets organization. He has served as an assistant coach, worked in the front office in community relations, and for the last 13 seasons has been the television analyst for all Rockets games. He also oversees his successful Texas Youth Academy, an organization he started 15 years ago for youngsters six to 19 years of age, which encompasses sports, educational development, counseling, and his twirling drill team, the "Marching Thunder."

But tonight, Calvin Murphy comes home and officially becomes a Norwalk Old Timer.