



When a young **CHERISE MICKLE** began playing in the Carver Center Girls Basketball League, no one, including her, knew an outstanding career on the hardwood was on the horizon.

But fast forward a few years and many points and rebounds later, and Cherise would become one of the cornerstones of Norwalk High School's memorable run of championships in the early 1980s.

Indeed, the 5-foot-9 Cherise was a starting forward on each of the Lady Bears' three straight FCIAC championship teams in 1981, '82 and '83, while going to the state finals twice and winning the program's first state title. By the time she was done,

the standout power forward would graduate as the city of Norwalk's all-time leading scorer.

"The word I would use is 'dependable.' She was always so dependable," recalled Don Foust, the NHS head coach during those glory years. "Even when she was a freshman and came off the bench for us, I had all the confidence whenever I sent her in the game."

That 1979-'80 Norwalk team went to the FCIAC finals and finished runner-up, but the next three seasons would spell a different outcome as Cherise moved into the starting lineup as a sophomore and helped Norwalk go 25-1 and win the FCIAC and Class LL state championships. She stepped her game up even more as a junior, leading the Norwalkers in both scoring (14.8) and rebounding (10.5) while earning first-team All-FCIAC and All-City honors en route to another conference crown.

She saved the best for last, however, and as a senior co-captain in the 1982-'83 season, she again led the team in scoring (16.4) as the Bears won their third straight FCIAC championship. It was during the conference semifinals, a 52-44 win over Darien, that Cherise Mickle became only the fourth player in city girls basketball history to reach 1,000 career points. She finished with 18 points and 11 rebounds in the win.

But perhaps just as important, after being a valuable and productive role player her first three seasons, Cherise became the team's undisputed leader on and off the court.

"Everybody on the team looked up to 'Mama' that season," Foust pointed out. "I saw her do so many positive things."

While her 1,000th point milestone was a big moment, Cherise wasn't done yet. There was still another FCIAC title to secure a couple nights later, and then four more wins in the state tournament to reach another Class LL final. But despite her game-high 20 points, the top-seeded Bears were upset by No. 6 Bristol Eastern 52-47. The NHS girls still finished a glossy 25-2 while Cherise finished with 1,117 career points and No. 1 on the city's all-time scoring list. She capped off her high school career by being named first-team All-State and All-City MVP.

Shortly after Cherise concluded her scholastic career, Don Foust stepped down as the NHS

MICKLE, from p.39

coach to become the new head coach of the University of Bridgeport women's basketball team. And as fate would have it, one of his first recruits was Cherise Mickle, who was a four-year starter for the Lady Purple Knights.

"I felt so blessed to spend another four years as Cherise's coach," the Hall of Fame coach and 2010 Norwalk Old Timers honoree said. "I told her back then she's probably the only basketball

player in the country to play for the same coach in high school and college eight straight years."

It seemed only fitting that Cherise's entire basketball journey eventually came full circle as well. When her playing days were finally over, she would return to the Carver Center where it all started to coach a team in its boys basketball league. ■