

John Newton



John Newton was born to coach. And coach. And then coach some more.

Coaching is exactly what the soon-to-be 65-year-old Newtown has done for the past 34 years, going all the way back to 1977 when the oldest of his four sons, was nine years-old and his father was an assistant coach with Yankee Metal in the Norwalk YMCA Calvin Murphy Biddy Basketball League.

By his fourth season, the elder Newton celebrated what would be the first of many championships he was a part of. The following year, Newton became head coach of his own team and three decades later he's still coaching in the same local youth basketball program – long after his sons Gary, Derick, Kenyon and Dak, and daughter Lachaka, were done playing.

“He’s one of those guys in the program who came in with his kids and never left,” the late Mario Salomone, who used to coach against Newton and later ran the Biddy League, said in a 2002 story in *The Hour*. “Johnny is there for the love of the game and he loves the game because of the kids. He teaches them the game of basketball and the game of life through the game of basketball.”

But the amazing thing about John Newton’s coaching career is not only his longevity, but also the number of different teams he’s coached.

In 2006, for example, Newton coached six basketball teams, including as many as four at the same time. Three of the teams were in the Norwalk Biddy Basketball Association. That came about when the previous season he coached his grandson, Michael, in the 8-year-old division.

Then when Michael moved up to the 9-10 year-old division, his grandfather decided to remain in the 8-year-old division. But Newtown did move up to the 9-10 division as an assistant coach under his son Gary with the Mavericks.

And he continued as head coach of the Rockets in the 11-12 year-old division for sentimental reasons.

“That’s the age group I started with and have been coaching the longest,” Newton said in a 2002 interview with *The Hour*’s George Albano, his fellow honoree tonight. “I’ve been coaching that team for years. The name has changed a few times, but it’s still the same team.”

But coaching three teams in one league wasn’t enough for Newton that winter. He also found time to coach the Magic in the Junior Basketball Association, the league for boys ages 13-15.

Newton would be at the Brien McMahon gym in the morning to coach his 8-year-old team, get over to Tracey School to help his son with the 9-10 year-olds, and later in the afternoon drive to Roton Middle School to coach his JBA squad. Then on Sunday, he would coach the Rockets.

Shortly after he was done with those teams, Newton coached the Titans in the Goodfellas Alliance Summer Basketball League, and that fall he coached the Hoyas in the Norwalk Girls Basketball Association, making it a half-dozen teams in one year.

“Everybody respects him,” Fred Franklin, the founder and commissioner of the Goodfellas Summer League, said in that same 2002 article. “Plus he never turns anybody away. Most teams have 10 kids, but he’ll have as many as 16 kids on his team and play them all. He can’t tell a kid no.”

“Even if I can’t get them on my team,” Newton added, “as long as I get them in the league and on somebody’s team, that’s important.”

Newton’s basketball resume also includes coaching in the Carver Basketball League and in the Norwalk Men’s City League. He has won numerous championships at all different levels, including a boys Biddy League title with five girls on his team.

Born and raised in Farmville, N.C., Newton, ironically, never played organized basketball himself until he moved to Norwalk in 1965 and played in both the City League and Industrial League.

But basketball would not be the only sport Newton coached. With five children, all athletes, he also coached baseball in the Norwalk Small Fry League and Babe Spinola American Little League, and softball in the Norwalk Athletic Association Girls Softball League.

And while he never coached football, he did volunteer as the public address announcer while all four of his sons played in the NAA Pop Warner program and his daughter was a cheerleader.

In between all his coaching, Newton still found time to put in a 36-year career with Connecticut Light and Power before retiring in 2005. He and his wife, Margaret, his childhood sweetheart, celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary on Nov. 5. In addition to their five children, who all attended college, the Newtons have been blessed with eight grandchildren, five of whom have already played for their grandfather and the other three who no doubt will someday.