

Jeff Allen



Back in his basketball days at Norwalk High School, it wasn't very difficult to pick out **Jeff Allen** on the court. And it wasn't because of his towering 6-foot-10 presence.

No, the main reason the Bears' talented center stood out on the hardwood was because of his scoring skills on offense, his shot-blocking ability on defense, his dominance on the boards, and for the way he could change the course of a game ... and eventually a program.

Indeed, when the once-proud NHS boys basketball program returned to its glory days as an FCIAC and state power, Allen was one of the cornerstones in the Bears' transformation.

Some might even say he was a bit of a late bloomer. Allen played only one year of Bidy Basketball because he exceeded the 5-foot-6 height limit when he was 12 and was not allowed to play. As he kept growing, Allen went on to play three years at

West Rocks Middle School and then freshmen basketball when he arrived at Norwalk High.

His sophomore year, the 1976-'77 season, was also the year Ray Barry became the Bears' new head coach. With that, Allen, as well as the entire program, began to flourish under the future Hall of Fame mentor.

Allen started for the JV team and dressed for varsity games that first year, seeing some late-game action in 13 contests and averaging 1.3 points for the resurgent Bears, who returned to the state tournament.

As a junior, Allen raised the level of his game as he started and averaged 12.5 points. But it was as a senior in 1978-'79 when the 6-10 center had a breakthrough season, leading NHS and the city in scoring with a 22.4 average, while his 24 points a game in FCIAC contests was third in the conference. He led Norwalk to a 22-5 record and a berth in the FCIAC championship game where it lost a two-point heartbreaker to Westhill.

The Bears gained a measure of revenge for that loss in the state tournament by beating Westhill in the Class LL Region II title game before falling to eventual state champion Wilbur Cross in the quarterfinals. In his final high school game, Allen had 26 points and 16 rebounds against the mighty Governors.

It was clear Norwalk High basketball was back and Jeff Allen was a big reason why. He finished his career with 889 points in just two full varsity seasons and was named first-team All-FCIAC. He also became only the fourth player in NHS history to be named first-team All-State, joining Reggie Spears, Calvin Murphy, and Sam Miller, all past Old Timers honorees.

Heavily recruited with scholarship offers from over 150 colleges, Allen finally decided on Rutgers University. After one season, however, he transferred to St. John's University, where he played for legendary coach Lou Carnesecca and was a teammate of future NBA stars Chris Mullin and Mark Jackson.

Allen started 83 of 87 games during his three years and as a senior in 1983-'84 he averaged 10.6 points, 6.6 rebounds, and 1.1 blocks. He helped St. John's go 18-12 that season, reach the Big East semifinals, and go to the NCAA tournament. The team spent eight weeks in the top 20 and was ranked as high as No. 8 in the country at one point.

His production that season caught the eye of several NBA scouts and Allen was selected in the third round of the 1984 NBA draft by the Kansas City Kings (now Sacramento Kings) with the 56th overall pick, becoming only the third player from Norwalk to be drafted.

Allen reported to the Kings' camp and while he didn't make the final roster, the team wanted to hold onto him and had him play with their NBA California Summer League team two consecutive years. Allen eventually played professional basketball overseas from 1984-'92, mainly in Spain with stops in Italy and Australia.

Twenty-six years later, Jeff Allen is still involved with the sport as the head girls basketball coach at Cheshire Academy, where he's also an admissions associate for international recruiting. His daughter Audrey is a junior on the girls basketball team, while his son Justin is a senior on the boys basketball team. His oldest son, Jeff, also played basketball at CA and is now a sophomore player at the College of St. Rose in Albany, NY.