

John Peters



When John Peters began playing basketball in the early 1960s at St. Mary's School in Norwalk at the age of 13, and later at Central Catholic High School, little did anyone know it would be the beginning of a love affair between him and the basketball court that still continues today.

The only difference, however, between then and now when you see him on the court is he traded the basketball for a whistle more than three decades ago.

Peters, a Norwalk native and lifetime resident, went on to become one of top basketball officials in the area, joining the Fairfield County Approved Basketball Officials (IAABO #9) in 1973, and he has been running up and down the hardwood every winter since.

But Peters began his association with local sports long before then. In fact, his first sport wasn't even basketball. It was football as a member of the 1961 Norwalk Ramblers Pop Warner Football team coached by Bobby Callahan, the future State Supreme Court Chief Justice and a 1986 Old Timers honoree, and the late Dr. John Petropoulos.

The Ramblers went undefeated that season and Peters, a starting defensive back, led the team in interceptions. In fact, one of his greatest memories in sports occurred that season when he returned an

interception for a touchdown at the famed Polo Grounds in an exhibition game against Ridgefield played during halftime of a New York Titans (who later became the NY Jets) game in the old AFL.

That winter, however, Peters began his long career in basketball with the St. Mary's Grammar School team. Peters was the team's starting point guard for two seasons and a co-captain in 1962 as he helped lead St. Mary's to back-to-back undefeated regular seasons, the Parochial School championship, and a Diocesan runner-up finish both years.

Several months later, in the fall of '65, Peters entered Central Catholic High School where he excelled in two sports. As a member of the track and field team, he set new school records in both the 440 (quarter-mile) and 880 (half-mile) yard runs, and was a member of two relay teams that also established new CCHS records. And as a junior in the spring of 1965, he became the first Central Catholic athlete to qualify for the State Open in track, making it in both the 440 and 880.

But once again, basketball was John Peters' true passion and as a senior during the 1965-66 season he was captain and a starting guard for the Cavaliers, who went 17-5 and won the Thruway League championship. That was also the first Central Catholic team to make the state tournament, attaining a No. 4 state ranking in Class C.

The Cavaliers were led by Joey Pantoya, who Peters called "Central's greatest player," and they both capped off their scholastic careers by being named to the All-Thruway League first team that season. The other guard with Peters in the CCHS backcourt that season was fellow 2006 Norwalk Old Timers honoree Jeff Rousseau.

Peters continued his education at the University of Connecticut, where he was co-captain of the 1967 freshmen basketball team in 1967. The 1970 UConn grad was also a player/coach on his Chi Phi Fraternity team that won the campus championship three straight years.

While his playing days were over, Peters never left the sport of basketball, soon launching a successful career in officiating and joining IAABO in 1973. He served as president of the Fairfield County Board from 1986-88 and as secretary/treasurer from 1988-90.

Peters has refereed numerous high school league and state championship games over the years, including five consecutive FCIAC finals. What's more, he was the referee in 14 Norwalk High-Brien McMahon games during the Ray Barry/Ralph King era, and twice worked all three games in one season between the two longtime city rivals.

Next month, Peters will begin his 34th season as a basketball official.

When he wasn't refereeing, Peters was busy coaching youth league sports, including eight years in both the Norwalk Small Fry Baseball League and Calvin Murphy Bidy Basketball League, three seasons in the International Little League, two years of Norwalk Travel soccer, and one year each in the Norwalk Junior Basketball League and with the All Saints Catholic School eighth-grade travel basketball team.

In fact, Peters says coaching his two sons, Sean and Brian, in Norwalk youth sports is still his greatest thrill.

Peters also served as co-president of the Norwalk High School Fathers Club, and he has also been active with the St. Vincent DePaul Society and St. Thomas The Apostle Church.

After 26 years in sales with Nabisco Brands, Peters retired and for the last five years has been a key account manager with Crystal Rock. He and his wife, Cathy Carroll, also a 1966 Central Catholic graduate, continue to make their home in Norwalk.