



MIKE ASHLEY loves to talk about growing up and going to the Roodner Court Neighborhood Center at Nathaniel Ely School to watch the older kids play basketball.

“Everyone in the city who could play was there and we watched on the stage as they played full court,” he recalls.

There were some future All-FCIAC, all-state, and All-City players among them, and even a few future Norwalk Old Timers honorees like Marvin Spencer, Willie Brooks, and Greg Pritchett. For a young Mike Ashley, it was an education in Basketball 101.

The “classroom lessons” he learned certainly paid off some years later as Mike, too, earned his share of accolades on the hardwood as a player at Brien McMahon. Now he joins some of his basketball teachers as a Norwalk Old Timers honoree.

The 1979 McMahon graduate enjoyed an outstanding basketball career for the Senators. As a sophomore, he averaged 26 points a game for the junior varsity team and coach Ralph King rewarded his young guard by letting him sit on the bench for the varsity game that followed. Mike managed to get some playing time at the end of a few one-sided contests, but his minutes increased once the state tournament began.

He came off the bench in the quarterfinals against Westhill to play defense and held the Vikings’ top scorer, who scored 17 in the first half, to just eight points in the final two quarters. But it was during the Class LL state semifinals at the New Haven Coliseum when many local basketball fans first learned who Mike Ashley was. The Senators were in a tight battle against Hartford Weaver when coach King subbed his sophomore guard into the game. He responded by hitting his first five shots to spark the offense, and would finish 6-for-9 for 12 points as McMahon won 69-57 to advance to its first state final ever.

The Senators were back in the Coliseum a few days later to face FCIAC rival Stamford and Mike again came off the bench to play stellar defense and contributed a key bucket in McMahon’s 68-66 overtime win to claim the state championship.

But it was the semifinals that will always be remembered as Mike Ashley’s coming out party. After the game in the locker room, King was asked by reporters who this sophomore they had never heard of was, and the veteran coach replied, “You’ll hear plenty of him in the future.” He was right. As a junior, Mike started at guard and was second on the team and third in the city with a 15.2 scoring average as he helped the Senators win a second straight FCIAC championship and reach the state semifinals.

Then as a senior, Mike, the only returning starter, averaged a team-high 19.4 points while shooting over 50 percent from the field to lead McMahon back to the state tournament. He was named First-Team All-FCIAC and All-City each of his final two seasons while earning second-team all-state honors as a senior.

He received a basketball scholarship to Sacred Heart University, where he continued to hit some big baskets and help the Pioneers make back-to-back NCAA tournament appearances. After

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his playing days Mike returned to the McMahon basketball program as an assistant coach for three seasons before relocating to Chicago and becoming an assistant coach at Harper Junior College. He currently resides in the Atlanta area and volunteers his time working with youth

programs, but not coaching basketball. Instead he introduces them to the game of golf, his second love.

But whether it's on the basketball court or the golf course, this Norwalk Old Timer is still making an impact. ■