

Willie Brooks



Willie Brooks has been a fixture on local basketball courts for half a century. And he's still at it and still playing at a high level.

It all began in the Norwalk YMCA Biddy Basketball League, where Brooks played for C.R. Gibson and coach Clarence Fanning. He went on to play three years at Ponus Ridge Junior High School and was the starting guard on the team that won the 1971 city championship.

It was at Brien McMahon High School, however, where Brooks's talent really began to blossom. A three-year varsity player and two-year starter for Hall of Fame coach Ralph King, the 5-foot-8 lightning-quick guard helped the Senators win back-to-back FCIAC championships in 1973 and '74, the program's first two conference titles.

As a junior, Brooks was named second-team All-City and received All-FCIAC Honorable Mention for a McMahon team that won a school-record 23 games. The Senators lost their opening game to defending state champion Wilbur Cross, then won 23 straight — including a perfect 17-0 conference record and their first FCIAC crown

— before falling to unbeaten and eventual state champ Cross again in the Class LL state semis to finish 23-2.

Brooks elevated his level of play even higher his senior year in 1973-74 when he became one of the best players in the FCIAC. The conference coaches certainly thought so as they voted Brooks to the All-FCIAC first team. He averaged 13.5 points in league games and 12.4 ppg. overall for the Senators, who became only the second team in FCIAC history to repeat as league champions.

And while Brooks directed McMahon's high powered offense, he was also the team's best defensive player on the floor.

McMahon also returned to the Class LL state semi-finals that season and finished with a record of 22-3. The Senators went 61-9 during Brooks' three years with the team, including a sparkling 45-5 mark in his two seasons as a starter. In addition to All-FCIAC, Brooks was selected to *The Hour's* 1974 All-City Basketball team.

He finished his career with 569 points while his 314 career assists was the second most in BMHS history, behind only Cleve Penberthy, a 2014 Norwalk Old Timers honoree.

Brooks took his talents to Post Junior College in Waterbury, where he started his second year and won the team's *Sportsmanship of the Year Award*.

After college, Brooks was a staple in the Norwalk Industrial Basketball League for more than two decades with perennial power Perkin-Elmer, where he worked. During that time, he helped lead P-E to five Dusty League championships while being named the league MVP on two occasions.

Playing basketball just one night a week wasn't enough for Brooks, however, as he also played 20-plus years with several teams in the Norwalk Recreation league and won another MVP award.

Brooks, who just turned 60 four days prior to this year's Old Timers dinner, still plays basketball two nights a week. In fact, in the summer of 2014, at an outdoor McMahon-Norwalk alumni game at Ryan Park, Brooks was the oldest player on the hardtop, yet hit the first two baskets of the game and was named MVP in the McMahon victory.

During his long playing career, Brooks also found time to coach, first as a co-head coach of the Brien McMahon girls basketball team and then as an assistant coach with both the McMahon boys under King, his former coach, and the Norwalk High boys program under Ray Barry.

While basketball was always his number one love, Brooks later developed a passion for tennis and became so adept at it he was hired as a tennis instructor for the City of Norwalk and later at the Kings Highway Tennis Club in Darien. Brooks also picked up the game of golf and can often be found on the course at Oak Hills, where he is a member.

Brooks, who currently works for the Norwalk Housing Authority, also volunteers at the local soup kitchen and is a Deacon at the First Congregational Church. The father of two daughters, he is married to the former Donna Spencer Vaughn, a former standout athlete herself at Brien McMahon and sister of 1995 American League MVP Maurice Vaughn.

As a new Norwalk Old Timers honoree, Willie Brooks will now be in the company of three of his former basketball coaches: Clarence Fanning, his Biddy League coach and a 1976 honoree; Leroy Vaughn (1991), his JV coach at McMahon; and Ralph King (1996), his varsity coach with the Senators.