

Dr. Dick Barnett reaps rewards of an educated life

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Former New York Knicks' star Dr. Dick Barnett speaks with students and athletes as part of Signature Bank's Scholars Program, which encourages young people to be college bound. In conjunction with Stamford ... [more](#)

STAMFORD — Dick Barnett made his dream of a professional basketball career, which ultimately spanned 15 seasons, a reality by following a simple formula.

"You have to nourish your dream every single day," Barnett explained. "For me, that meant playing or practicing basketball on Christmas, on Thanksgiving, on Easter. Even on prom night. A dream is the

sustenance of hope. That's what I had to do in order to achieve."

There were milestone games along the way for the man who was part of two NBA Championship teams (1970, 1973) with the New York Knicks.

There was the Indiana boys basketball state championship final in 1955 between Barnett's Theodore Roosevelt High School and Crispus Attucks High School — led by Oscar Robertson. It was the first Indiana boys basketball state final between two All-Black High Schools.

A "Hoosiers" contest deep in the chapters of history.

More Information

DICK BARNETT

Played 14 years in NBA, nine with New York Knicks.

A 6-foot-4, 190-pound guard who scored 15,358 points in NBA.

Won 1961 American Basketball League (ABL) Championship with Cleveland Pipers. Team owned by George Steinbrenner.

Originator of the lefty fallaway jumper with a scissor kick. Late LA Lakers' announcer Chick Hearn named the shot 'Fall Back, Baby!' Barnett told defenders 'It's Too Late, Baby!' when releasing the shot.

His sports heroes: Jackie Robinson, Joe Lewis. "They faced segregation head on. They made an easier path to pro sports success for countless other black athletes."

"We're actually working on a movie about that game," Barnett said. "It will be called "Forgotten Hoosiers." It will explore that game and what was transpiring in America in 1955. No Voting Act for blacks. Segregation was the law of the land in most of America."

Barnett was a three-time college basketball All-American at Tennessee A&I (now Tennessee State University). They won three NAIA Championships (32-team bracket tournament for small colleges, universities established by James Naismith in 1937). Barnett was Championship MVP in 1958 and 1959.

After two seasons with the NBA Syracuse Nationals, Barnett left to play with the Cleveland Pipers of the American Basketball League. A team owned by George Steinbrenner. Barnett and the Pipers won the 1961-62 ABL Championship. But Steinbrenner wasn't able to leverage the title into an NBA franchise for Cleveland.

Inducted into College Basketball Hall of Fame in 2007.

In conjunction with the NBA, he will be going to Cuba at an unspecified date to do basketball clinics and conduct talks on education.

Author of 21 books. Earned Doctorate in education at Fordham University.

"He was a younger version of George Steinbrenner then," Barnett recalled. "But his enthusiasm about his sports teams achieving was obviously there."

But Barnett, a Gary, Indiana native who is presently 81 years old, wasn't content with fulfilling just one big dream in his life.

The importance of education hit Barnett like a thunderbolt at age 30 in his seventh NBA season and second year with the Knicks.

"I was injured on February 12, 1967 at Madison Square Garden. I ruptured my Achilles tendon," said Barnett, who returned to action for the 1967-68 NBA season. "Suddenly my basketball dream was in jeopardy. I decided at that moment I was going back to school. My intellectual capacity was always there. But my educational focus wasn't."

The importance of education was the reason that Dr. Dick Barnett spent last Wednesday night at the State Cinema in Springdale speaking to roughly 100 children and parents from the Stamford Peace Youth Foundation.

Dr. Dick Barnett "The Dream Whisperer" fulfilled his education promise. He has a Bachelor's Degree from Cal Poly-Pomona, a Masters degree in public administration from NYU along with a Doctorate in Education from Fordham University.

He was a professor teaching Sports Management at St. John's University for four years until 2007.

"I've been all the things I wanted to be beyond a successful basketball player," Barnett said. "I am the Master of my life's dream."

The Stamford Peace Youth Foundation has championed basketball and education as twin goals for boys and girls since it was co-founded by Brian Kriftcher and Lenwood Latta in 2008. Andrew Sklover is a driving force in the Beyond Limits Academic Program, which features peer to peer academic tutoring (kids tutoring kids) in the Stamford Peace complex on Long Ridge Road.

"We want to elevate kids on and off the court," Kriftcher said. "Part of our mantra is that basketball is a privilege. We use it as a tool of positive influence."

Barnett's lecture was part of the Signature Scholars Program, put together by Signature Bank. Signature Scholars provides college preparatory tutoring and support services for 40 Connecticut-based low-to-moderate income high school student athletes along with 40 more student-athletes in Bronx, N.Y.

"We've done three semesters worth of classes thus far with Stamford Peace," said Signature Bank Senior Vice-President and Director of Community Development Michael Schwartz. "One objective is to give kids the skills to be competitive in today's world. A small percentage of kids can be great basketball players. But a good education is how a huge percentage of kids can succeed."

And Dr. Dick Barnett, the author of 21 books, is a shining example of success.

"The youth of today must be vigilant. They must fight for their happiness," Barnett said. "Their dream must live and breathe in their soul. Education has limitless possibilities. The thirst for knowledge is a passion."

rdepreta

@stamfordadvocate.com

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