



Basketball icon Dick Barnett preaches message of higher education to local youth

By Phil Hall - April 13, 2018

In the course of his 81 years, Dick Barnett has lived three very different careers: as a 15-season star player in the National Basketball Association, which included stellar performances on the New York Knicks in their 1970 and 1973 championship teams; as a highly respected sports management professor at St. John's University in Queens until his 2007 retirement from teaching; and in his ongoing work as a motivational speaker aiming to encourage young people to focus on personal development through education and responsible behavior.



Dick Barnett is still making an impact, almost 50 years after he retired from the NBA

Barnett recently brought his message of higher achievement through higher education to a special event at Stamford's State Cinema that was sponsored by Signature Bank and the Stamford Peace Youth Foundation. Barnett was addressing members of the Signature Scholars Program, which provides college preparatory tutoring and support

services for 40 Connecticut-based low-to-moderate income high school student athletes. In his presentation, Barnett acknowledged that today's youth faces multiple challenges in achieving their goals.

"It ain't going to be easy," he said with a laugh, noting there were multiple obstacles and temptations littering the road ahead. "We know what they are: aberrant behavior, drugs, sex. But you have to make the choice and try to find the right path. No one is immune to that challenge."

Barnett offered a five-point guide that helped him find a path from college sports to professional basketball and then back to college for graduate and doctorate degrees.

"First, there was conscience: I needed to find out who I was," he explained. "Second was commitment – whatever your dream is, you have to be committed. You can't just come to it once a week or whenever you get to it. Third is conviction, which means you need to know which path you're taking is the right path for you, even if the naysayers say you can't do it. Fourth is courage to say no to the nefarious situations that try to take you off your path. And fifth is control of your mind and body that will allow you to make the right decisions."

While Barnett stressed the value that parents and teachers can offer in providing guidance and support, he nonetheless stressed to his young audience that they were ultimately responsible for their lives and to the seriousness they bring to their education. Barnett paraphrased Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by holding up higher education as a means for young people to "sign their own emancipation proclamation."

Barnett also advised that young people in pursuit of higher education must be willing to raise and answer difficult questions. "As you grow and mature, you need to ask yourself: What's next and how will this change my life?" he said. "Education is about opportunity and possibility. Young people need to be prepared to take advantage of that."

Furthermore, Barnett pointed out, this pursuit was not only about the individual, but also about that individual's role in shaping the wider society.

"America was built on a dream," he continued, adding that he was "very confident" that the next generation will not blight the vision that the Founding Fathers had for the country. "They are bequeathed with this history and they will go on and continue with what makes America great and keep alive the promise of America. It's a great trail to be on."



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