

## Sam Miller



Success always seemed to have a way of following Sam Miller throughout his basketball career.

Of course, his talent was a very big reason for that.

Local fans who remember his career at Norwalk High School in the early 1970s will certainly attest to that. Miller was a three-year varsity starter for NHS, making an immediate impact as a sophomore in 1969–70 when he averaged 16.9 points a game.

He elevated his game to an even higher level the next season when he was the only junior named to the All-FCIAC First Team after finishing third in the conference with a 21.2 average. He recorded a career-high 32 points against Andrew Warde that season, and besides scoring he led the team in assists, free throws, field goals, and was second in rebounds. He was also the lone underclassman named to *The Hour's* very first All-City Basketball Team.

Miller had one of the best individual seasons in city annals his final season when the 6-foot-3 senior tossed in 21.7 points a game, again finishing third in the league. He led Norwalk to a 21–4 record and the 1972 FCIAC championship, the second in school history and first since his brother, Hall of Famer Calvin Murphy, led the 1966 NHS team to the crown.

In the '72 championship game, Miller scored a team-high 16 points and dished out six assists as Norwalk beat Danbury 61–54. He also guarded Calvin Ward, the Hatters' leading scorer, on defense and held him to just 10 points, 11 below his average.

Miller was always at his best in the biggest games. In the state tournament that year, he scored 21 points in a first-round victory against Xavier, 18 points in a quarterfinal win against Bridgeport Central, and 25 points in the Class LL semifinals, an 81–64 loss to undefeated and eventual state champion Wilbur Cross, the No. 1 high school team in the country. He also fired in a season-high 30 points against state power Hartford Weaver in an early-season non-league contest.

Miller was the leading vote getter and only unanimous pick on the 1972 All-FCIAC team, and was also named all-state, *All-New York Daily News*, and MVP of *The Hour's* second annual All-City team. He finished his outstanding career with 1,302 points, at the time the third most in city history behind only his brother and Marvin Spencer of Brien McMahon.

Heavily recruited by some of the top college programs in the country, Miller chose to play at Washington State University in the highly touted Pac 8 Conference. As a sophomore, Miller scored 26 points against Bill Walton and UCLA, the seven-time defending national champs and No. 1 team in the country at the time. In another conference game against USC, Miller made a key steal against Gus Williams that led to an upset victory.

After being named second team All-Pac 8 and a *Streets and Smith Magazine* Honorable Mention All-American, Miller transferred to Central Washington University his junior year and led the team in assists, was second in rebounding, and third in scoring while being named All-District and helping the No. 2-ranked Wildcats reach the NAIA national championship game.

Following his graduation, Miller played one year of pro basketball in Mexico City and impressed scouts enough that he was invited to the Seattle SuperSonics preseason camp. He would play three seasons in the Continental Basketball Association, the first at Great Falls, Mont., under future NBA coach George Karl.

His three years in the CBA marked the end of a playing career that began in the Norwalk YMCA Biddy Basketball League, where he made the all-star team. Miller also played basketball at Tracey Elementary School and West Rocks Junior High.

His sports journey also included playing in the Norwalk National Little League as an all-star catcher for VFW. In addition, he excelled in football with the Norwalk Ramblers Pop Warner team, then at West Rocks, and even one season at Norwalk High, where he was the only sophomore to start on varsity as a flanker in the fall of 1970. He also ran one year of cross country at NHS.

Following his playing days, Miller returned to Norwalk where he taught elementary and middle school physical education. During that time, he became the head men's basketball coach at Norwalk Community College and later JV coach and varsity assistant at McMahon under his brother Bobby Miller, a 2012 Old Timers honoree. Their brother Calvin was honored in 2003.

Miller eventually relocated to Phoenix, AZ., where he taught at Independence High School and was head basketball coach there eight years. He returned east and taught and coached at James Monroe High School in the Bronx for a decade. He now lives in NYC and teaches at Evander Childs High School, also in the Bronx.