



# MASSACHUSETTS SUPERS

By James A. Johnson ©2018

\* This article is dedicated to *Chris Herren* a three-time Massachusetts Player of the Year who refocused his life from drug addiction to a remarkable recovery.

What do Paul Revere, Crispus Attucks, Robert Gould Shaw, Lewis H. Latimer, George F. Hoar, George L. Ruffin, George Washington Williams, John F. Kennedy, Phillip L. Clay, Deval Patrick, Willie O'Ree, William Henry Lewis, **Al Attar, Luke Urban, Skip Karam, Ray Flynn, Ron Perry Sr. and Jr., Patrick Ewing, Chris Herren, Ken Hudson and Rebecca Lobo** have in common? Each has made significant contributions to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in particular and the Nation, in general. Who are Attucks, Shaw, Latimer, Hoar, Ruffin, Williams, Clay, Patrick, O'Ree and Flynn? I will answer that question later. It is the last ten names whose common skills are the centerpiece of this article. This story is about basketball the state's official sport signed into law in 2006 by Governor Mitt Romney.

If you travel down Interstate 90 West from Boston to Exit 6 to I 291 West to I 91 South Springfield, you will find the Basketball Hall of Fame. But, the purists will tell you, this is where James Naismith, an athletic evangelist, invented the game in 1891 at

the International YMCA Training School. This YMCA school later became Springfield College. Naismith nailed two peach baskets to the lower rail of the balcony of the gymnasium and used a soccer ball. In 1894, Spalding manufactured the first basketball at the request of Dr. Naismith. Can you imagine **Bob Cousy, Pete Maravich, Isiah Thomas, Allen Iverson, Kobe Bryant or Stephen Curry** trying to dribble and control this thing? The **Tim Hardaway** killer cross-over dribble? Forget it. It was not until 1928 that a concealed-lace ball was developed.

The following are **THE BEST** high school players from the city of Springfield, since 1957:

<b>Leo Best</b>	-	Classical	-	1957
Ed Gearing	-	Commerce	-	1959
Ed Moriarty	-	Technical	-	1961
<b>Gene Ryzewicz</b>	-	Cathedral	-	1963
<b>Henry Payne</b>	-	Commerce	-	1964
Joe McDowell	-	Cathedral	-	1968
Issac Aycox	-	Commerce	-	1968
Ricky Wallace	-	Technical	-	1976
<b>Mark Hall</b>	-	Commerce	-	1978
<b>Travis Best</b>	-	Central	-	1991
<b>Dwayne Early</b>	-	Central	-	1996
<b>Felicia Barron</b>	-	Central	-	2008
<b>Bilqis Abdul-Qadir</b>	-	New Leadership Sch.	2009	
Kendall Baldwin	-	Commonwealth Acad.	2017	
Makayla Thompson	-	Central	-	2018
Jorges Torres	-	Central	-	2018
Levi White	-	Central	-	2018
Justin Feliciano	-	Central	-	2018
Megan Sharon	-	E. Longmeadow	-	2018
Jalen McCoy	-	Putnam	-	2020

The next stop in the Bay State takes us to the historical fishing and whaling town of New Bedford, in the southeastern part of the state. Since the 1950's, it is high school basketball that has taken center stage. The largest ethnic group is Portuguese. One last name that stands above all others when it comes to high school basketball in New Bedford is Gomes. Is it fortuitous that **Paul Gomes**, 1959, **Marty Gomes**, 1960, and **Tom Gomes**, 1970 all attended New Bedford Vocational High School. Let the record reflect all three were the best in the state in their respective years. And, how can we forget Frank Nightingale in 1961 or coach Ed Rodrigues in the 1980's and 1990's, who produced great teams and players.

In conjunction with New Bedford any discussion of high school basketball in this part of the state, must include its nemesis and neighbor just a trifecta shot away, **Durfee High School in Fall River**. At this point, we must go back to 1947, when the Hilltoppers won the Eastern State title at the Boston Garden. In 1948, with star Andy Farrissey, Durfee won the New England Championship. Luke Urban was the coach. Andy Farrissey revered to this day outperformed the great **Jimmy Piersall** from **Leavenworth / Croft High School** in Waterbury, Connecticut and later of Boston Red Sox fame. The story may be apocryphal, but this defeat possibly was the onset of "Fear Strikes Out", the movie that told about Piersall's bout with mental illness. In 1956 with Luke Urban as coach and Al Attar, a bona fide H.S. All-American, Durfee won the New England diadem again, at the Boston Garden. Attar at 6'2" set a New England tourney scoring record. After that, comes Tom "Skip" Karam, as coach, Luke Urban's star player of 1952. Skip Karam, captured the New England crown in 1966 with star players **Bob Dempsey** and **Ernie Fleming**. The latest Durfee phenom and perhaps the best is **Chris Herren**. Herren performed his tricks at Fresno State in California, under the tutelage of Jerry "The Shark" Tarkanian. In 1999 Chris Herren was drafted by the NBA Denver Nuggets at Number 33, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round.

*At Durfee High School, Chris scored 2,073 career points and was a Second Team Parade High School All-American.* Also, he was selected for the third time as Massachusetts Player of the Year. You can see his story “**UNGUARDED**” on ESPN FILMS.

Although Durfee of Fall River has won five State Championships, the test was and still is, locally, if you have not beaten New Bedford, you really haven’t won at all. In this context, New Bedford and Fall River are inextricably linked.

For those of you in this motorcade, who want to know how significant sport is in our culture, stop by the Center for the Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern Univ. The Executive Director is **Dan Lebowitz**, he can explain and demonstrate to you how sport through the concept of fairness and inclusion can enhance society. The Senior Associate Director is **Deb Jencunas**. **Jeff Konya** is the Athletic Director.



Massachusetts has many basket ball “firsts” as it was spelled in the early years. Not only the game, ball and the hoop, but also the basketball shoe. **Converse, Chuck Taylor “All Star”**, the canvas variety, introduced in 1923 was the forerunner. Converse had a virtual lock on quality basketball sneakers for over forty years. Former President, Gib Ford was a standout player and a member of the 1956 U.S. Olympic Team. Converse, now owned by Nike is located in N. Andover and remains a leader in quality basketball shoes, associated footwear, and apparel.

**Spalding**, synonymous with inflated balls and sporting goods, was founded in 1876 by Albert Goodwill Spalding. Later, joined by his brother J. Walter Spalding they formed A. G. Spalding & Bros. As early as 1904 A.G. Spalding & Bros. sold high-top rubber suction-hole athletic shoes. On June 26, 1958 Spalding & Bros. sponsored the first Parade (Magazine) H.S. All American Basketball Game, held at Kutsher's Country Club, Monticello, N.Y. **Spalding Sports Worldwide**, located in Chicopee and now headquartered in Bowling Green, Kentucky manufactures the official basketball of the NBA and WNBA.

**Reebok International** located in Canton supplies warm up gear and game uniforms for the NBA and the WNBA. It also outfits NBDL, the NBA's minor league and the NFL.

This wonderful game of basketball in Massachusetts has produced a plethora of solid citizens. For example, Men Head Coaches **Bill Carmody**, Ralph Willard (Holy Cross-1967 at Holy Cross; **Mike Jarvis** (coached Patrick Ewing at Rindge & Latin) formerly at St. John's; **Mike Bernard** (Brockton) formerly at Norfolk State Univ.; **Al Skinner** (U. of Mass.) formerly at Boston College, **Tommy Amaker** at Harvard (Jeremy Lin, NBA Brooklyn Nets), **Jim Calhoun** (formerly at Univ. of Connecticut & currently at St. Joseph in West Hartford, CT.) Athletic Directors **Ron Perry Sr.** retired from Holy Cross; **Lew Perkins** (Chelsea) Player & former Athletic Director at Kansas; **Chet Gladchuk** at the U.S. Naval Academy- Annapolis; **Karl Hobbs** at Rutgers and **Jack Kvancz**, former Athletic Director (Boston College) & George Washington Univ. and the quintessential professional, **Rebecca Lobo** (Southwick) with the New York Liberty, Houston Comets and Connecticut Suns of the WNBA, who is now a TV Analyst.

Now the answer to that question I promised. **Crispus Attucks**, an African-American was the first person killed in the Boston Massacre. Colonel Robert Gould Shaw led the **all Black 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Mass. Volunteers in the Civil War**. Shaw's

Monument along with his men stands proud on the Boston Common. Moreover, Shaw and the 54<sup>th</sup> are memorialized in the 1989 movie “Glory”, starring Denzel Washington and Matthew Broderick. Not portrayed in the movie “Glory” is **Sgt. William H. Carney**. **He is the first African-American soldier to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.** Carney, a member of the 54<sup>th</sup>, rescued the flag during a charge on Fort Wagner, S.C. in 1863. **Lewis H. Latimer**, African-American, born in Chelsea, invented the first toilet system for passenger trains in 1873. Latimer invented an electric lamp with a carbon filament for light bulbs. He also worked alongside Alexander Graham Bell and was responsible for preparing detailed mechanical drawings of the telephone. George F. Hoar, U.S. Senator in the 1880’s. **George F. Ruffin** was an African-American, State Judge sitting in Charlestown in 1883. **George Washington Williams**, African-American, was an attorney for the Cape Cod Canal Co. in 1883. **Dr. Phillip L. Clay** is the Chancellor at MIT. Deval Patrick is the Governor of Massachusetts. **Willie O’Ree** is the first Black to play in the National Hockey League on Jan. 18, 1958 with the Boston Bruins despite being legally blind in his right eye. Today O’Ree is the director of youth development in the NHL Diversity Program. On Jan. 25, 2008 O’Ree received a proclamation from the Atlanta City Council at the NHL’s diversity luncheon. The second person of color to play in the NHL is **Mike Marson** in 1974 with the Washington Capitols. **Ken Hudson** in 1968-69 was the second black referee in the NBA.

**William Henry Lewis**, African American attended Amherst College from 1888-1892 and was an outstanding student athlete starring in football and in the classroom. He was selected on Harper’s Weekly – All American Team in 1892. After graduation Lewis attended Harvard Law School and continued playing football (permissible back then) becoming the first African American football player in the future Ivy League. Lewis remained with the Harvard’s Football program as an assistant coach until 1906.

Last, but certainly not least is **Raymond Flynn**, former Mayor of Boston and U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican. Ray Flynn, played basketball for **Providence College** in

1963, when they won the National Invitational Tournament. Flynn, a deadly outside shooter whose jumper was as pure and as soft, as the driven snow, was voted MVP.

As we approach the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday in November we should get down on our knees with profound reverence and give **thanks** for this day and the super men and women from Massachusetts. And then, up with jubilation because the games are about to begin.

## **About the Author**

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