



THE BRIDGE

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**Dedicated to Judge Barry Kramer whose outstanding exploits on the basketball court were equal to his acumen and reputation in court.*

*“Success is a journey, not a destination. The doing is often more important than the outcome.”
Arthur Ashe*

New York, The Empire State, is bound on the north by the St. Lawrence River and the Canadian Provinces of Ontario and Quebec. To the east lie Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut. In the south, New York borders New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Today, the population exceeds 19 million people and almost half live in New York City. *The "Big Apple"* is the largest metropolis in the United States and is unquestionably the entertainment capital of the world. New York City is the hub of the entertainment industry, business and finance. The term *“Big Apple”* was coined in 1924 by John J. FitzGerald, a horseracing writer for the old New York Morning Telegraph. Come with me to the asphalt and learn about *“The City Game”*. “This story is about New York high school basketball and its contribution to the National Basketball Association entwined with politics and its role in individual and group life.

Sport is an activity involving physical skill in which an individual competes against another. To attain a high level of physical skill mental alertness and mental toughness are required.

Basketball is a team sport requiring the mind and body working in tandem. What follows is for the purist who loves the game of basketball.

NEW YORK CITY

In the modern era of New York City High School Basketball, we start in 1956. The four best players are Tom Stith 6' 5" from St. Francis Prep, Tony Jackson, 6' 4" of Thomas Jefferson, **Lenny Wilkens, 6' 1", Boys High** and Doug Moe, 6' 4" of Erasmus Hall. Yes, that is Doug Moe from the University of North Carolina, ABA and former coach of the Denver Nuggets and San Antonio Spurs of the NBA. Also, the same **Lenny Wilkens of Providence College and Seattle SuperSonics who is enshrined in the Naismith Memorial Hall of Fame as a player and coach.**

Special mention must be given to Tom Stith, who scores over 2,000 career points in high school, graduating in 1957. On to St. Bonaventure University, where he is a two-time consensus First Team All-American in 1960 and 1961. In both high school and college, he is awesome. A leaping, whirling, dervish player who simply could not be contained. Tom is drafted by the New York Knicks of the NBA, but contracts tuberculosis playing only 25 games and later passes into basketball heaven. Succinctly stated, Tom Stith is an all-time New York City great. To demonstrate just how skilled he was, 6' 9" Jerry Lucas of Ohio State (later of the Cinn. Royals & N.Y. Knicks) could not handle Tom in the 1961 NCAA Tournament.

In 1956 when Tom was a sophomore at St. Francis Prep, Gus Alfieri was a senior on the basketball team. Gus matriculated at St. John's and was instrumental in their 1959 NIT Championship. The 1959 Dell magazine said that Gus Alfieri with Alan Seiden form one of the best backcourt combinations in the country. In 1958 Gus shot 43% from the floor and averaged 14 points per game. For you hip-hop readers the National Invitation Tournament was a bigger event than NCAA Tournament. Gus Alfieri, coached outstanding teams at St. Anthony's H. S. in South Huntington, N.Y. On Dec. 5, 2016 the basketball court was dedicated in his honor.

SYRACUSE UNIV.

At this point, for purposes of accuracy and completeness, I am compelled to backup to 1953. **Vinnie Cohen**, 6' 1" from Boys H.S. is so good at basketball that he is awarded a scholarship to Syracuse University where in 1957 he attains Honorable Mention All-America. A genuine student - athlete, he enters Syracuse Law School. Vinnie was a senior partner in a major Washington D.C. international law firm. Recently he is named to **Syracuse Univ. All-Century Men's Basketball Team**. The enduring values learned from this wonderful game of basketball: discipline, leadership and team play are significant components of his success. On Dec. 25, 2011, Vinnie entered basketball heaven.

Since we are at Syracuse, **Coach Jim Boeheim** comes to mind. He was Dave Bing's backcourt partner from 1963-66. To set the record straight, **Boeheim** was one of the best scholastic basketball players in New York State at Lyons high school in 1962. You can quote me on this accolade because he is on the Mid-Atlantic States regional H. S. All American Team that includes NY, PA & New Jersey. This region in 1962 included such illustrious names as NBA players Pat Riley, Jack Marin and Bob McIntyre who played at St. Johns University

This is the centerpiece and crux of my story. How basketball's role in individual and group life manifests itself in the lessons of how to win and more importantly how to lose. **Success is how high you bounce, after you hit bottom**. Experience is not what happens to a man or woman; it is what they do with what happens to them. What better way is there to learn these values, than by team play in sports in general and basketball in particular? To keep things relative, another name comes to mind, in 1953 at Manhasset H. S. there is **Jimmy Brown of NFL Hall of Fame**. Jimmy Brown earns 13 varsity letters in high school. I repeat, not 3 or 5, but 13 varsity letters in 5 sports. In addition, Jimmy scores 1,142 career points in basketball and averages over 35 points per game in his senior year in 1953. This Nassau County record was not broken until 1959 by All-American, Art Heyman of Oceanside H. S., Duke Univ. and New York Knicks. As an interesting aside, Art Heyman's rival and nemesis in the schoolyard was none other than Larry Brown of Long Beach,

Long Island., UNC, ABA, Naismith Hall of Fame and currently European head coach of Italian Lega A team Fiat Torino.

You cannot tell me that Jim Brown's participation in sports has no bearing on his other accomplishments in life. Jim Brown received an award from Sports Illustrated as one of the best athletes of the 20th Century. He is also selected by StudentSports in 1999 as one of the top high school athletes of the Century.

Floyd Little another Syracuse All-America superstar was a Special Assistant to the Athletic Director at Syracuse University. In 1975 he earned a Master's Degree in Legal Administration at the University of Denver College of Law. There is no need to set out his plethora of athletic achievements because it is more meaningful if you look it up. For the uninformed, Floyd also played basketball at Hillhouse H. S. in New Haven, Connecticut where the school enshrined him in its Hall of Fame in 2012.

1960 is a big year in New York City and its environs. The two prodigies from the city are 6' 6" Connie Hawkins of Boys H.S. and 6' 5" Roger Brown of Wingate. The Hawk dominates the high and low post-averaging 25 points per game and over 20 rebounds. Roger Brown breaks the city career scoring record and is the most skilled jump shooter from 25 feet ever to come out of New York City. Hawkins eventually gets to the NBA and Brown to the ABA Indiana Pacers. Roger Brown is so well liked that he becomes an alternate on the Indianapolis City Council contemporaneously with playing professional basketball.

LAW & POLITICS

In Yonkers at Roosevelt H. S. there is **Ron Rothstein**, who in the 1990's coaches the NBA Detroit Pistons and in the new millennium becomes the Assistant Coach with the **Miami Heat**. Ron's son plays basketball at Holy Cross and later becomes an attorney. What is it about this game? Perhaps, **Barry Kramer**, 1960 from **Linton H.S. in Schenectady** can tell us; High School All American, 32 points per game, 18 rebounds and 10 assists. Then, he goes on to NYU All-America, a few years in the NBA and earns a law degree at Albany Law School. *In October 2018 Senator*

Jim Tedisco presented Judge Kramer the New York State Senate Liberty Award upon his retirement as Schenectady County Supreme Court Justice.



For the uninformed, Senator Jim Tedisco was an outstanding basketball player at Union College. He set 15 scoring and assist records and is Union's all-time leading scorer with 1,632 points. In 1997 Jim was given the Silver Anniversary Award from the NCAA. In 2002, Senator Tedisco was inducted into the Union Athletics Hall of Fame.

New York is a giant in its contributions to the nation's political development. Many of its leaders went on to national prominence. In fact, four men served as governor of New York before becoming president. They are Martin Van Buren, Grover Cleveland, Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt. New York is a magnet for political outsiders who move to New York and run for political office, such as Senators Robert Kennedy and Hillary Clinton.

With 29 electoral votes, which is third behind California and Texas, New York plays a key role in presidential elections. Its governors and mayors are always considered for possible vice-president and presidential candidates. For example, former Governor, George E. Pataki and former Mayor Rudy Giuliani and current Governor Andrew Cuomo based on what they have accomplished for New York enjoy national prominence.

Also, consider **Mario Cuomo**, athlete and governor who was a skilled baseball player at St. John's University. Apparently, he learned more than hitting and fielding. How to be a team player

is one of the enduring values that he has taken off the field. Former Governor Mario Cuomo, who passed in early January 2015, is definitely in Heaven.

How can we forget **Al Davis of Syracuse University** and Erasmus Hall High School? His contribution to sports in general and the Oakland Raiders of NFL, in particular are immeasurable. Al Davis who passed away on Oct. 8, 2011 was an icon and the face of the *NFL Oakland Raiders* is deeply missed.

For purposes of political correctness, if not just plain fact, the first consensus, African-American, Basketball All-America, is **George Gregory in 1931 from Columbia University**. Yesterday it was Kareem Abdul- Jabbar, Tony “Red” Bruin, *Pearl Washington*, Lloyd “Swee Pee” Daniels, *Kenny Anderson*, *Mark Jackson*, Lamar Odom, Stephon Marbury and Sebastian Telfair in the NBA. In hip-hop argot, New York City is so big, so bad and so wonderful that they had to name it twice – New York, New York. The epicenter of street ball is *Rucker Park at 155th Street and Frederick Douglas Blvd.*

As a basketball cognoscente, the following is a short list of New York greats, not previously mentioned Al Butler, **Billy Cunningham**, **Nate (Tiny) Archibald**, Bob Lanier, Brian Winters, **Nancy Lieberman-Cline**, **Gus Williams**, Ray Martin, Mike Dunleavy, **Billy Donovan**, Bernard and Albert King, **Chris Mullen**, **Kenny Smith**, **Kenny Anderson**, **Christian Laettner**, **Jamal Mashburn**, Felipe Lopez and Omar Cook.

****Kenny Anderson**, NBA All-Star-Archbishop Molloy H. S. is the new head Basketball Coach at Fisk Univ. in Nashville, TN.

Notable Student Athletes:

George Gregory	Columbia	Commisioner Civil Service
Vinnie Cohen	Syracuse	Lawyer
Rudy LaRusso	Dartmouth	NBA Lakers
Tommy Davis	Boys H.S.	L. A. Dodgers
<i>Ernie Davis</i>	<i>Syracuse</i>	<i>Heisman 1961</i>
Kevin Joyce	S. Carolina	Stockbroker
Barry Kramer	NYU	Judge
Larry Brown	UNC	Coach NBA- SMU, UCLA & Kansas

Donnie Walsh
Mitch Kupchak
Karem Abdul Jabbar
Ernie Grunfeld

UNC
UNC
UCLA
U. Tenn.

Pres. & CEO Ind. Pacers
NBA Lakers Gen. Mgr.
Author
Pres. Washington Wizards

As you peruse the above listing, **Ernie Davis** All-American football player is the subject of the 2008 movie “**The Express**”. This motion picture is a sports biography covering his adolescent years in Elmira, New York to Syracuse Univ. “**The Elmira Express**” broke 10 of Jim Brown’s football records including rushing (2,386) yards, all-purpose yards (3,414), scoring (220) and touchdowns (35). Drafted by the Cleveland Browns he signed for an unprecedented \$80, 000. Unfortunately, in May 1963 at age 23, Ernie died of Leukemia and never played one down in the NFL. Ernie Davis in 1958, in addition to being a high school football All-America was a **High School All-America Basketball Player**, leading Elmira Free Academy to 52 consecutive wins.

THE BRIDGE

Sociologist, psychologists, journalists and philosophers have written much about the role of sport in society. Participation in sports helps to provide continuity between childhood, adolescence and adulthood. It is a *bridge*, so to speak, to traverse, hopefully uninterrupted. To lose in a significant way, for the very first time as a mature adult can be a traumatic experience. Through participation and socialization in sports, for both boys and girls coupled with the learned principles and values, it will serve them well throughout life. If you question this statement, ask Jim Brown, Vinnie Cohen, Len Elmore, former NBA player and TV Analyst, Judge Barry Kramer or former President Barack Obama. Also, ask former Presidents George H. Bush, first baseman at Yale and son George W. Bush who played basketball at Phillips Andover Academy. Sport is not a panacea nor does it guarantee success in adulthood, but it can provide tangible and intangible benefits.

Julius Erving, affectionately called “**The Doctor**” is from Roosevelt H. S. in Long Island. The same school that produced actor-comedian Eddie Murphy and radio personality Howard Stern. Julius at 6’ 3” was an inside player and received a scholarship to the Univ. of Massachusetts. By his sophomore year, he grew to 6’ 7”, averaging 20 points and 20 rebounds per game. This is the beginning of the Doctor “J” that the public knows.

That one move in the 1980 NBA Finals personifies why he is **“The Doctor”**, operating and making house calls. Completely absorbing the ball in his large right hand that resembled an eagle’s claw, Dr. “J” blew by his defender. However, Kareem Adul Jabbar cut off the basket on the baseline. While suspended in midair, the Doc managed to wrap the ball around and underneath the backboard for the most spectacular reverse lay-up that anyone has ever seen. This move is the **“wrap-around”** and cemented his legend. For those of you who are too young to remember this move – you can see it on the NBA highlights.

Erving’s acrobatics were matched by his dignified persona and charisma. He was as articulate as he was spectacular becoming a worldwide ambassador to basketball. Julius Erving’s basketball skills can best be described in one word – **Electrifying**.

The following is a brief list of current & past stars:

BOYS:

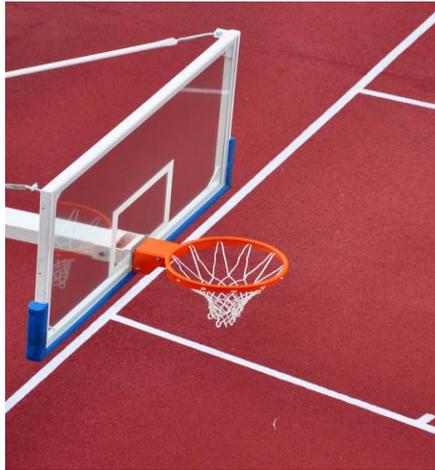
Joe Girard III	2019 & 2018	Glen Falls - Syracuse
Hameir Wright	2017	Albany Acad.
Kvin Hunter	2016	Shenendehowa
Cheick Diallo	2015	Our Savior New Am. Sch.
Kentan Facey	2013	Long Island Lutheran
Omar Calhoun	2012	Christ the King
Jabarie Hinds	2011	Mt. Vernon
Kadeem Jack	2011	Rice
Lance Stephenson	2009	Abraham Lincoln-Univ. of Cinn & NBA
Kemba Walker	2008	Rice in NYC & NBA
Greg Paulus	2005	Syracuse
Sebastian Telfair	2004	Abraham Lincoln *NBA
Lamar Odom	1996	Middle Village *NBA

***Special mention must be given to Joe Girard III who is a senior in 2019. He is 6’ 2” and as a junior averaged 50 ppg., and 7 rebounds. He has scored 3, 306 total points so far breaking the New York state scoring record. Girard has signed to play for Syracuse Univ.**

GIRLS:

Emily Engstler	2018	St. Francis Prep-Fresh Meadows
Andra Epinoza-hunter	2017	Ossing
Dominique Toussaint	2016	Christ the King
Lauren Brozoski	2015	Long Island Lutheran

Sierra Calhoun	2014 & 2013	Christ the King
Samantha Prahalis	2008	Commack
Lorin Dixon	2007	Middle Village
Tina Charles	2006	Middle Village
Nkolika Anosike	2004	Staten Island
Shay Doran	2003	Middle Village



Not too long ago, the name Cony Island conjured up images of famous amusement parks, beaches and hot dogs. Back in the day Abraham Lincoln high school produced notable alums such as ***Ken Auletta*** (Journalist), ***Mel Brooks*** (Comedian), ***Neil Diamond*** (Singer) ***Louis Gossett, Jr.*** (Actor), ***Arthur Miller*** (Playwright), ***Neil Sedaka*** (pop singer) and many others. Today it is better known for its high-rise housing projects and producing outstanding high school basketball players. Abraham Lincoln H. S. (Railsplitters) has produced All-City players such as 6' 11'' Dave Newmark (1964), Stephon Marbury(1994), Sebastian Telfair (2004) and Lance Stephenson (2009) to name a few. Each honed their skills at “the Garden” the neighborhood court and later made it to the National Basketball Association. Every year former coach Bobby Hartstein and Dwyane “Tiny” Morton turn out stars that makes Lincoln a perennial power in the Public School Athletic League (PSAL).

CONCLUSION

In my considered opinion, New York City high school basketball is one of the toughest in America. To make First Team or Second Team All-City encompassing about 200 high schools

public, private and catholic is beyond – All American. It is ALL- UNIVERSE. In any given year a player on the Honorable Mention list is a Division I caliber player. With all due respect, to other cities, states, leagues and conferences - if you come into “*The Big Apple*” to play the All- City team make certain that you bring your “A” game.

There is no strength without struggle. *True success is not a destination but rather a journey.* It is the ability to carry out your mission in life on a continual and effective basis. Those who participate in sports at a young age, winning and losing, have a definite advantage in adulthood.

About the Author

James A. Johnson is a basketball cognoscente, accomplished Trial Lawyer and an active member of the Massachusetts, Michigan, Texas and Federal Court Bars. Jim concentrates in Sports & Entertainment Law, serious Personal Injury and Insurance Coverage under the Commercial General Liability Policy. James A. Johnson, Esq. is a long time and frequent contributor to the Entertainment, Arts & Sports Law Journal and the New York State Bar Assoc. Journal. He can be reached through his Website: www.JamesAJohnsonEsq.com