

Hall of Fame

An unlikely hero

Ed Nardi battled his way onto the roster, the record books, and back to the sidelines

By JOHN GORALSKI
SPORTS WRITER

As a sophomore, Ed Nardi was cut from the basketball team. As a junior, he faced the axe again. The tiny guard was far from impressive as he struggled to keep up with his peers, but a well-placed call from his older brother Bill helped earn Nardi a second chance.

"I probably wasn't that much to look at. I was a little sickly with asthma, but that actually helped me in my second year," he said. "I got sick during tryouts, so my brother made a phone call to Joe DePaolo, the captain, or Coach [Walt] Lozowski. He asked if they could give me a couple of extra days, and they did."

Nardi made the most of the opportunity. He battled through the next few practices to claw his way onto the junior varsity roster.

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He battled his way through the early season to earn a spot at the far end of the varsity bench. By the end of the 1954 season, Nardi had worked his way into the lineup for the final minutes of a couple blowouts, but it was enough to catch the attention of the varsity coaches.

"I only scored 74 points, but they probably all came at the end of the season," said Nardi. "Coach Lozowski started using me more and more, but the points all came at the end of the year."

At the final practice, Lozowski pulled his junior guard aside. He thrust a worn basketball into Nardi's hands and laid down the gauntlet with one word. "Practice," he said before walking away.

Nardi accepted the challenge. "Anyone who played for him knows. He put a little fear into you, but it was a good thing. He disciplined you, and he was good," said Nardi. "My brother was my guide, but I was up in the air. I didn't know if I wanted to do it or not, but he pushed me."

Nardi's brother built a hoop in the yard, and they began to work on his shooting. Between sessions, Nardi would sneak into the back door at the YMCA to battle the neighborhood kids for hours on end. He'd play pick-up games and scrimmages on the asphalt behind Beecher Street School. Nardi threw himself into the game as if it was all that mattered.

"Between my junior and senior year, I did a lot. I don't think there was a day that went by where I wasn't dribbling or shooting," he said. "There weren't any leagues or camps at the time. Anything that you did, you had to do on your own."

The hard work paid off, and Nardi came ready to play for his senior season. Coaches were surprised at the start.

"He was a good ball player. He could really shoot and dribble the ball," said Joe Orsene, the assistant coach at the time. "He was a great ball handler, but he was a really

	Southington Sports Hall of Fame
Inside the Numbers	
<u>Southington High School Basketball</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Second Team All-State (1955). •Scored 74 points as a junior. •Scored 30 points in a single game (1955 school record). •Scored 364 points as a senior (18 ppg). •Co-captain (1995) 	
<u>Central CT State Basketball</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Scored 879 points in 4 years (13.8 ppg). •Leading scorer as a freshman (220 points, 1955-56). •Leading scorer as a sophomore (322 points, 1956-57). •Leading scorer as a senior (1958-59). •Co-captain (1957-58). •Eastern Region All-Tournament team with 22 points per game (1957) •Set single game scoring record (35 points vs. Salem in 1957) •Won the New England Regional Tournament. •Played in NAIA national tournament in Kansas City, MO. 	
<u>Officiating</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Varsity Basketball Referee (1963-69). 	
<u>Coaching</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •SHS boys basketball coach (1971-1984) 	



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Ed Nardi,
2011 Southington Sports Hall of Fame inductee

good shooter. He and Dickie [Lorenzo] were very good friends, and with those two guys in the back court, you didn't have to worry. They could handle the ball, and they could shoot."

Nardi was a starting guard on opening day. He powered the attack with 364 points over the 20 game schedule. He scored 30 points against Woodrow Wilson. He scored 33 points against Goodwin Tech. When the smoke cleared on the season, Nardi was the top scorer with 18.2 points per game. He was named to the second team all-state roster, and he had grabbed the attention of college scouts.

"I think I was just a slow developer. My mother actually started me a little bit early in school," he said. "I started to come out a little bit in my senior year, and it really carried over. High school was really just phase one."

But first, Nardi needed to focus on his studies. Central Connecticut State College coach Bill Moore laid out an educational plan to prepare the young guard. Once again, Nardi's brother urged

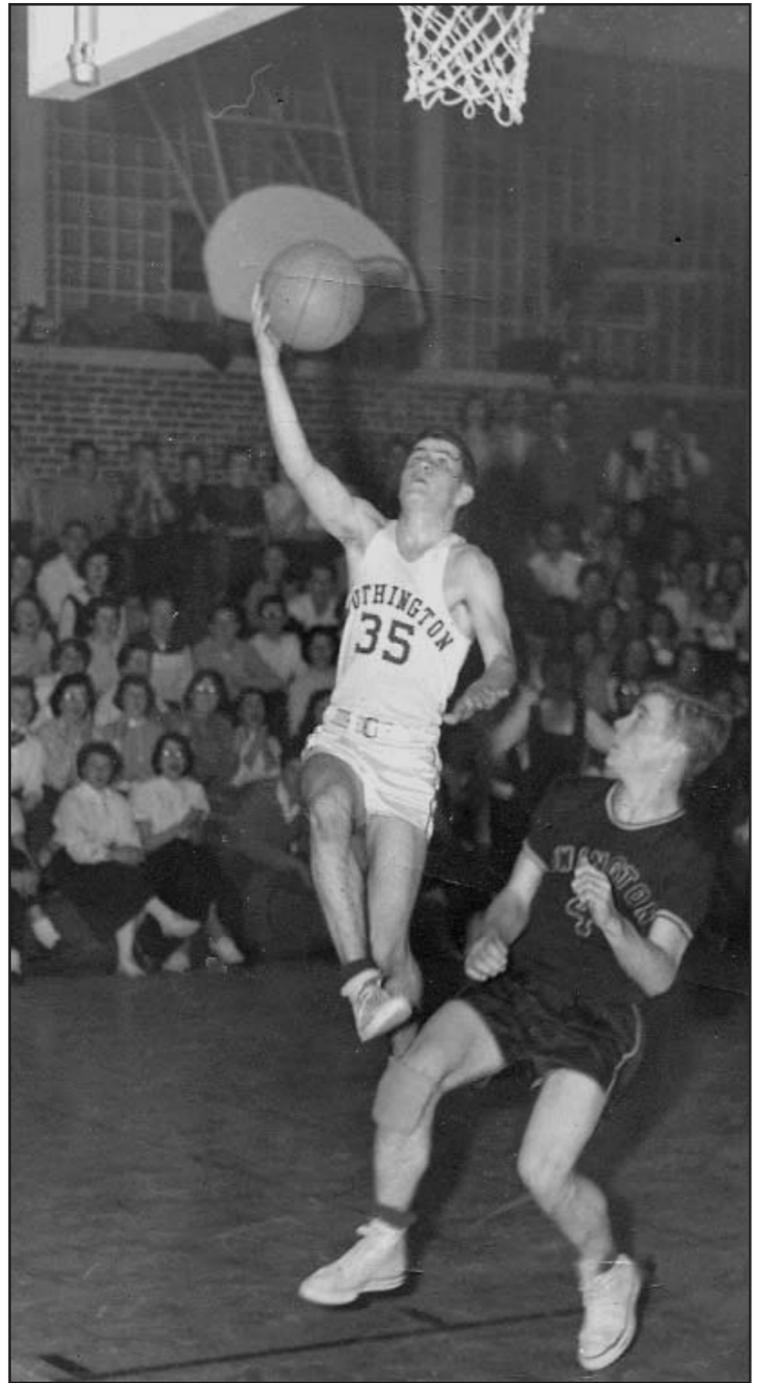
his younger sibling to accept the challenge.

"My grades weren't really that great, so Coach Moore came to my house and talked to my mother and brother," he said. "I wasn't convinced that I wanted to do it, but he started setting up a schedule of summer school and night school. I had to do decent in both, or I wasn't going to make it."

Once again, Nardi rose to the challenge. He survived the preparation studies and hit the ground running. At the first day of practice, Nardi was ready to go.

"When I got to Central, I don't think they were really that good. They were really thin at guard," he said. "I sat out a couple of games, but then I got right into the lineup. They played a shortened schedule at the time, but I played well my first year."

The team upset Southern CT State College, and Nardi led the way with 27 points. The team battled their way above .500, and Nardi paced their attack. He finished with 220 points in 16 games, leading his squad as a freshman. As



SUBMITTED

Ed Nardi makes an easy layup against Newington in 1955.

a sophomore he did it again, scoring 322 points over an 18 game season. He broke a single season scoring record at the school with 35 points against Salem, and was named to the Eastern Regional all-tournament team with a 22 points per game scoring effort.

Nardi was elected captain as a junior and a senior. He battled through injuries as an upperclassman, and finished with 879 points over a 66-game career (13.8 points per game).

"After college, I played a little bit of semi-pro basketball," he said. "We had leagues in town, and we travelled all over to play other teams. I played pretty much into my 30s. I got married when I was 25, but I was doing a lot with softball and basketball. I just couldn't give it up. I got into refereeing, and I became a varsity official for six years."

Then, Nardi entered the next phase of his basketball career. The boy that struggled with his studies had become a teacher at Holcomb School. He transferred to Kennedy Junior High School for a year of English grammar before accepting a job at DePaolo Junior High School in 1969 where he taught until 1995.

He began coaching at the junior high and was promoted to the high school coaching position in the early 1970s. Nardi ushered eight Southington teams to the CIAC tournament over his 12-year career. In 1974-75, the Knights rallied to a 19-3 record and a quarter-

final berth, and all three losses were all decided by one point at the buzzer.

Now, the boy that had been cut as a sophomore was making those tough decisions. To make it easier, Nardi ran an intramural program so that anybody who wanted to play could work on their game.

"That's the hardest part of the job—cutting people," he said. "But you only have two or three weeks to get ready for your first game, so you really can't take too long. You have to get your defense and your offense in, but you can get 50 or 60 kids out...If I think they have any shot at all, I'd keep them just to see what happened."

Members of the Southington Sports Hall of Fame selection committee took notice of Nardi's career. His drive and success at all levels of the game sets him apart. He battled to success in high school. He blossomed in college, and he returned to give back to the Southington community.

On Wednesday, Nov. 9, Nardi will be inducted into the Southington Sports Hall of Fame at the Aqua Turf Club in Plantsville.

"I want to be remembered for giving all I had. When I coached, I did too. I think I want people to remember my all-around effort that I gave to basketball," he said. "We've had so many great athletes in our town. We've had a great tradition in Southington with sports. It's a great honor, and I like the fact that I'm going in with a lot of guys that I grew up with."