

1988-1989 ST. ANTHONY BOYS BASKETBALL TEAM

Coach - Bob Hurley, Sr.

The 1988-89 St. Anthony High School basketball team is one that has received a ton of accolades over the years and deservedly so. It can be argued that the 1988-89 Friars team was the best high school boys' basketball team in the history of New Jersey interscholastic sports. The Friars, coached by legendary Naismith Hall of Fame honoree Bob Hurley, went 32-0 in that magical season, dominating their opponents in practically every single game. Of the 32 wins, only two were not by double digit margins – namely a regular season matchup with Hudson County rival North Bergen (58-50) and the NJSIAA Tournament of Champions title game against Elizabeth HS, won by a 62-55 margin. They won three in-season tournaments and defeated teams from 10 different states.

In that fabled year of 1988-89, the Friars competed as an independent team, thus able to play a schedule unfettered by league/conference competition. That year, the Friars won their own Skyline Classic tournament, defeating Arcadia of California, a team that featured future NCAA Tournament Most Valuable Player Ed O'Bannon and an Archbishop Molloy team that was coached by the legendary Jack Curran and featured a young Kenny Anderson. The Friars also defeated New York powers such as Tolentine and Cardinal Hayes, as well as New Jersey powers such as Christian Brothers Academy and Elizabeth.

The Friars featured three players who would later become first round draft picks in the NBA, namely former Duke All-American point guard Bobby Hurley, former Seton Hall standout Terry Dehere and former Kentucky/Southern Cal forward Rodrick Rhodes. Hurley, currently the head coach at Arizona State, was the No. 7 pick overall in the 1993 NBA Draft by the Sacramento Kings. Dehere, still the all-time leading scorer in Seton Hall history with 2,494 points, was the No. 13 pick of the Los Angeles Clippers in that same draft. Rhodes, who was a freshman on that all-time team, was drafted No. 24 overall by the Houston Rockets in the 1997 NBA Draft.

The Friars won their 50th straight game by defeating Elizabeth in the NJSIAA Tournament of Champions title game. It was the first time that the NJSIAA sponsored the T of C, pitting the six overall Group state champions in one final tourney. A lot of the success of the T of C is directly related to the immense popularity of the Friars that season. They sold out practically every gym they played in that season. Some venues had lengthy lines of fans that flocked to see them in action. Some of the lines were two hours long and at times the overflow crowds could not handle the throng of people who wanted to witness the fabulous Friars and were unfortunately turned away at the door. The T of C finale was held at the Brendan Byrne Arena, called the Meadowlands Arena. Almost 9,000 fans turned up for the second meeting of the season between St. Anthony and Elizabeth and they were not disappointed. Forward Jerry Walker, who went on to have a brilliant career at Seton Hall and was the Big East Defensive Player of the Year his senior year with the Pirates, led the Friars against Elizabeth with 17 points and 13 rebounds, playing against his future Seton Hall teammate, 7-foot-2 center Luther Wright. Walker stands about 6-foot-6. Dehere was the team's leading scorer in the title game, tossing in 20 points. Hurley, who remains the NCAA's all-time leader in assists with 1,076, scored 16 points in the T of C finale against Elizabeth. After the win over Elizabeth, Coach Hurley told reporters that, "this was a very special team. The legacy that Jerry, Bobby and Terry leave behind is unbelievable. We may never see another high school team like this."

Not only did that team have brilliant players, but it was also a breeding ground for future college coaches. Hurley (Arizona State) and his younger brother Danny (Rhode Island) are successful head coaches. Darren Savino has been the lead assistant coach at the University of Cincinnati for the last eight years after successful stints as the assistant coach at St. John's and Rutgers. Rhodes, who was an assistant coach at Seton Hall and Massachusetts, is currently an assistant at Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho. He led Cordia High School to a state sectional championship in Kentucky in 2016 and served as the head coach there for six seasons.

It is extremely doubtful that New Jersey basketball junkies will ever see another team like the 88-89 Friars, very likely the best scholastic hoops team ever, and most assuredly there will never be another St. Anthony's of Jersey City, New Jersey. The school closed at the end of the 2016-2017 school year.