

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ROCKVILLE CENTRE BASKETBALL LEAGUE

The origins of organized youth basketball in Rockville Centre go all the way back to the summer of 1955 – and the Rockville Centre Recreation Department. The Rockville Centre Recreation Department was formed in 1950, and the original Director, Ed Dyroff, ran the first summer league for boys 15 and older at the courts at Hickey field starting in July of 1955. He expanded that program to include an indoor league for High School aged boys in the fall and winter months. Games were played at school gyms and at the temporary Recreation Centre on Maple Avenue, in the building that now houses the Village Water Department.

But it was also in the fall of 1955 that Henry Lewis, with the help of Irv Matloff, Abe Rabinowitz and Leo Merson, formed Little Basketball League, Inc. At the time the league was set up for boy's age 10 to 12 years old. "There was no competition between the leagues," recalls Mr. Dyroff, who is still a Rockville Centre resident. "Both leagues were serving the community." Mr. Dyroff also remembers the ideals which Mr. Lewis and friends instilled when they started the league. "The point was that nobody would sit on the bench," he said. Indeed, one of the registration notices printed in 1955 in the Long Island News and the Owl states: "The main objective of this program will be to give all boys an opportunity to play."

The original concept for the League was to foster the values of "loyalty, behavior and leadership". But Mr. Lewis also hoped to make the Little Basketball League a national program with Rockville Centre as the original charter, similar to Little League Baseball which began in 1939 in Williamsport, Pennsylvania and started in Rockville Centre in 1951. In fact, there was some success spreading the league ideas to different communities, especially here on Long Island. In 1957 the Bank of Rockville Centre of the National League defeated the Crown Drug Hawks of the American League in the "World Series of Rockville Centre Little Basketball League" and went on to defeat Islip in the regional championship game.

Rockville Centre, however, was where the league was met with the most enthusiasm. Prior to the start of the first season a Parent-Players Little Basketball League Kick-off rally was held in the jam packed auditorium at Morris School where the evening ended with a showing of films of the Harlem Globetrotters. On

opening day a caravan of over 100 cars went through the Village and ended at the Junior High School for opening festivities. The Recreation Department director Ed Dyroff was master of ceremonies and speeches were given by school superintendent Herbert F. Johnson, village trustee John A. Anderson the first league president Leo Merson. The opening of the second season was met with equal excitement, as according to the Long Island News and Owl it was “preceded by the largest motorcade in the history of Rockville Centre.”

In 1959 the Little Basketball League officially changed its name to the Boys Basketball League. The themes of participation and balanced teams were evident. According to an article published in The Long Island News and Owl in 1959, League Commissioner Irv Salis stated that “some of the weaker teams would get some help from trades being contemplated this week. In effect, this will serve to equalize the playing strength of the 16 teams.” The League policy of conducting mid season trades to balance teams, while occasionally controversial, is still applied to this day.

Also in 1959 Hank Lewis and Irv Matloff formed a “National Office” to coordinate efforts to expand the League to other communities. An all star game between The North Shore and the South Shore was held in the old Madison Square Garden prior to a Knicks game. Five boys from Rockville Centre played on the winning squad. In those early years Rockville Centre teams traveled to places such as Edison, New Jersey to play in tournaments.

During the 1960’s the League continued to grow by adding new age groups and divisions. In the late 1960’s there was a gradual “merger” of sorts between the Rockville Centre Recreation Department Basketball League and the Boys Basketball League. The Recreation Center was built in 1960 and the Recreation League gradually stopped using school gyms and also stopped using sponsors, some of which became sponsors for the expanding Boys Basketball League.

In the 1970’s the League continued to thrive. Irv Matloff was still an active volunteer, serving as President in the mid seventies almost twenty years after having that post in 1958. The Rockville Centre Boys Basketball League “Round the Rim”, which summarized the Leagues games and reported other League news, was a weekly feature in the News and Owl and was also printed as a newsletter

and distributed to the leagues participants. Travel all-star teams played in tournaments around Long Island.

In the 1980-81 season the League added a Girls division for the first time. Throughout the decade the girl's participation gradually increased and in the early nineties the Rockville Centre Boys Basketball League legally changed its name to the current Rockville Centre Basketball League. All the established rules of equal playing time were applied to the girls program. In 1996, as part of the continuing effort to improve the quality of games, certified adult refs were used for the Sophomore Boys division and eventually were brought in for all games.

Today the League has around 1000 players in grades 3 thru 12 participate each season, including over 300 girls. Throughout the League over 500 regular season games are played on basketball courts in schools all over the village and at the Recreation Center. All teams make the play-offs and the larger divisions break into two play-off brackets, awarding first and second place trophies in each bracket.

And in all these games there are no bench warmers. Good sportsmanship, learning and having fun are emphasized. It is as it should be; it is as it has been for fifty years.