

Homegrown;

The Making of the 1972-73 Providence College Friars

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This book is dedicated to the memory of

**Helen Lonardo
and
Catherine Perrotti**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Chapter 1 Early History

Chapter 2 The Magician

Chapter 3 Bad News

Chapter 4 Unsung Heroes

Chapter 5 1969-70 Season

Chapter 6 1970-71 Season

Chapter 7 1971-72 Season

Chapter 8 1972-73 Season - First Half

Chapter 9 1972-73 Season - Second Half

Chapter 10 1973 NCAA Tournament

Chapter 3 BAD NEWS

Mean Streets

Marvin Barnes was born in Providence in 1952, and like DiGregorio he grew up in the shadows of Providence College, both within a couple of miles of their destinies at the school where they would do so many great things together on the basketball court, as well as develop an unlikely and lifelong friendship. As close as they lived to one another, life for Barnes on the west side of Providence was very different from DiGregorio's upbringing in North Providence.

Barnes lived in the Coddling Court Projects on Dodge Street in a single parent home with his mother and sister. His father was largely absent from his life. Quiet and shy as a boy, Barnes hung around a nearby basketball court on A Street on the west side of the city. It only had one hoop, but this was where all the kids from the neighborhood would congregate and play basketball, as well as other games, such as kick ball and "scatter dodge." This was where Barnes picked up a basketball for the first time. At age nine, he was tall and lanky, and not a very good player. This was a time when he met some of his closest friends, who, along with others around the neighborhood, would help young Marvin Barnes develop into the dominating basketball player he would become.

Barnes also spent considerable time during his early years at the John Hope Settlement House, a nearby rec center that would hold dances and show movies, as well as offer a wide range of activities and sports, which Barnes and his friends all participated.

He attended Kenyon Street Elementary school on Federal Hill in Providence, where he had a gym teacher who stressed gymnastics. Participating in all these different sports and activities in his youth really helped Barnes in the development of his coordination and athletic ability.

Blood Sport

As Marvin Barnes got a little older, he needed to progress quickly in that environment because the competition was so fierce. By the time he got to middle school, it was not uncommon for him to be bullied. He got into his share of fights, and when he played basketball, blood and bruises were part of the game. Everyone wanted to prove how tough they were. One day it got so physical that Barnes broke his leg after being “low-bridged” during a game by Harold Metts, who today is a member of the Rhode Island Senate. This incident served to make Barnes an even tougher player.

During that era, there were some exceptional basketball players around the state, and having to compete with them only helped Barnes to further develop into a top-flight player. There were guys like Bobby Brooks, from St. Raphael Academy, an All-State football, baseball, and basketball player, who was considered one of the toughest players in Rhode Island. Rumor had it that he would walk right up your chest like you were his personal stairway to the basket. There was Richie Santos, Central’s 6’2 scoring guard, an amazing player who earned the status of ‘the anointed one.’ He was the player that everyone thought would be the one to make it to the pros. At Central High School in Providence, he was “the man,” at least until Barnes came out of nowhere and took that distinction away from him. But that would not be until later, after some further growing pains and some adjustments.

Vinny Lopes, the brother of Major League player, manager and coach, Davey Lopes, was another kid who could really play. Rosco Muse and Leon Benton were two other players from Central High who stood out from the pack. Benton, in particular, was someone young Marvin Barnes really respected and held in high regard. A few years older than Barnes, Benton was a kid in a man’s body. He was also an All-State running back on the football team, and everyone looked up to Leon Benton. Sadly, he was still in high school when he died after contracting spinal meningitis. This was a tragedy that touched Barnes deeply.

As a young teenager, Barnes was considered “soft” and undeveloped. That would change, but early on he never got picked to play in any pickup games at the Rec, and he would have to stand on the sidelines a long time before he ever got in a game. He just wasn’t good enough to be given much court time.

It was in the local church league where Barnes began to make a name for himself, and people took notice. All eyes were on him. He was being looked upon as the big man Central High needed to complete a dominant team that was in the making. In those days, middle school was grades 7-9, and high school was grades 10-12. When Barnes got to high school, he was easily the tallest kid at 6’5, and still growing. Central’s basketball coach, Jimmy Adams, known as J.A., told him that he *had* to come out for the team.

Barnes’ high school teammates were determined to make a player out of him, whether he wanted to or not. It became their mission to toughen him up. But at this point in his life, Barnes did not yet have the burning passion necessary to be a really great player, nor was he willing to commit to the work that was required to compete with those at the highest levels of the sport. Despite all his friends pressuring him to go out for the Central High School basketball team, Barnes did not even try out when he entered the 10th grade. He knew that he was not ready.

Barnes was still a work in progress when he entered 11th grade. He had been “killing it” in the Cavalry Baptist church league, but Central High School was a different animal. However, having tasted some success, even if against inferior competition, Barnes was starting to get hungry, and he wanted to take his game to the next level. He really started to go to work, including seeking out many of the older players from his South Providence neighborhood.

Hack City

The courts around South Providence were considered sacred ground. The players referred to it as “Little Rucker,” after Rucker Park, the famed inner-city basketball blacktop court in

Harlem where, through the years, many great players like Dr. J and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar honed their game and showcased their skills. And the South Providence Rec, today called the Davey Lopes Center, was their (Madison Square) “Garden.” Around the city of Providence, this was where a player developed his name and his reputation.

Barnes had another name for the environment where he learned to play basketball in South Providence. He called it, “Hack City” due to the physical brand of basketball played there. It was like the “Hack-a-Shaq” defensive strategy that was routinely used around the NBA to try to hinder Shaquille O’Neal from scoring easy baskets. By fouling Shaq excessively, they would get him on the line, where he shot poorly. The difference was that the guys Barnes played against were playing for keeps. There were no easy baskets playing on the concrete courts of Prairie Avenue and around the west side of the Providence.

There was one occasion when a big football player was brought in to play against Barnes. The player was known as Big Luke, and he had been a member of the Providence Steamrollers football team, and he later tried out for the Boston Patriots. This guy was a real bruiser, and he came in and really hacked everyone up, especially Barnes, who had the duty of covering Big Luke.

They played hard over there, no question about it, but that was exactly how Barnes developed that streetfighter mentality he had when he later played at PC and in the pros. When going up against tough players like Bobby Brooks, his friends would tell him, “If anyone tries to drive on you, step on them, and do whatever you have to do to stop him.” And Barnes never backed down, even if you came at him with knees, elbows, or anything else. Barnes played with a chip on his shoulder, but it was a matter of survival; kill or be killed.

Compared to Big Luke, Bobby Brooks was nothing. Now Barnes’ friends saw how serious he had become for the game, and the relentless drive he had to improve. He was totally dedicated, and everyone was excited about Barnes moving up and playing with them at Central High School.

I Ain't No Scrub

The moment of truth for Marvin Barnes came in the fall of 1968. He was entering 11th grade when he tried out for the varsity basketball team. He was stepping up to the big time, but after the final cut was made, and the names of the twelve players who made the team were listed on the glass window outside the coach's door for everyone to see, Barnes' name was nowhere to be found.

He had been cut.

After that, Barnes didn't want to be seen. He pulled a disappearing act. Or rather, he tried to, because when you're as big as Marvin Barnes there is nowhere to hide.

Not making the team left him devastated and embarrassed. He was the tallest kid in his high school, he had played great ball in the church league, and he had worked really hard over the summer to make the team, but suddenly his dreams were shattered.

"They cut me like I was some scrub," he said years later about the experience. "I ain't no scrub."

At the time, however, Barnes didn't say anything about being cut to anyone besides his mother. Lula Barnes was a strong, devout woman who loved her son to death, and she was so upset by the news that she stormed out of the house and drove right over to Central High School, demanding to see Coach Adams.

"How can you cut my son, who has skills and abilities that no one else on your team has," Lula told J.A. "I've been watching Central play for the last two years you've been coaching here, and there's not one player who has one-tenth of the potential that my son has. You need to put him back on the team right now, and you'll never be sorry."

Barnes was a special player even back then, and when Lula pointed it out to Coach Adams, he didn't need any further convincing. Just like that, Marvin Barnes was practicing with the

team the next day and playing hard to win the respect of his teammates. He also wasn't about to disappoint his mother.

That year, Central had a highly talented basketball team, so when the season started Barnes didn't get much run. But he hung in there. When he did get into a game, his role was strictly as an enforcer. His team didn't look to him to score. They just wanted him to defend, rebound, and block shots.

Finally, when it was his time to shine, Barnes made the most of it. His first start was in a big game on the road against the school's crosstown rival, LaSalle Academy. Both teams came in undefeated, but this was a particularly challenging matchup for Central because LaSalle had two outstanding All-State players on their team. LaSalle's center, Tommy D'Amore, was a great shooter and a very physical player who was known to man-handle his opponents. This was the player Barnes was tasked with guarding. LaSalle also had Eri Ferange, a 6'0" jump shooter who could put up thirty points without breaking a sweat.

It was a difficult assignment for Barnes, but he came through big time, while dominating in the paint. To hold one of the top scorers in the state in check was a phenomenal accomplishment for anyone, but for Barnes, making his first start on varsity, it was his coming out party.

At the end of the game, Central walked out of LaSalle's gym the only undefeated team. Barnes turned heads in that game and he never looked back.

Marvin Barnes had arrived.

He got more playing time after that. Big, strong, and confident, he was more than just an enforcer. He was the total package. He was an intimidator on the defensive end, and now he was an offensive threat, as well. He was a bona fide superstar in-the-making.

That year, Central High had gotten their other superstar back, Richie Santos, after he had dropped out of school the previous year. Santos was a scoring machine, and together with Barnes they were an unstoppable one-two force for Central.

Bad News

Marvin Barnes got his nickname “Bad News” during this time, though not for the reason people may think. In the late 1960’s, former Boston Celtics forward, 6’8” Jim Barnes, was called “Bad News” Barnes, so some of Marvin’s friends started called him “Bad News” Barnes. But to his best pals, it was always just “News” because of all the good news he was making for himself and the community as a player on the basketball court. Later, when he began dominating every game he played in, it was “Bad News” for the other team.

Despite spending the first half of the season on the bench, Barnes led his team in rebounding and blocked shots as Central finished the season undefeated. When it came down to the championship game against East Providence, Barnes was totally locked in. In fact, before the final game, he was in the gym with several other Central players watching the semi-final matchup as spectators when he walked up into the stands seeking out East Providence’s best player, Al Soares, who was sitting up there with his own teammates. Barnes immediately started talking smack to Soares, telling his opponent how Central was going to wipe the floor with them. A war of words quickly escalated and the two of them started to get into it, with Barnes having to be physically restrained and pulled off Soares.

Come game time, Barnes dominated both sides of the ball against East Providence. He was spectacular. He shot an amazing 11 of 15 from the floor and grabbed a game-high thirteen rebounds. But what did not show up in the box score was his intimidating presence. Numerous times, East Providence Townies players rushed their shots, and instead of getting easy buckets they came away empty. Barnes was a huge factor in propelling Central to a 67-63 victory and the Class A Championship. He earned an All-State selection that year, and recruitment letters began coming in from major colleges around the country trying to get a jump on the other schools and hoping to secure an early interest from Barnes in their program.

It was amazing that Barnes garnered so much national attention considering that he barely played half a season for an inner-city high school in Rhode Island. But that's how great Marvin Barnes was, and his projection remained skyward.

1972-73 PROVIDENCE COLLEGE FRIARS

<u>Name</u>	<u>GP</u>	<u>FGM-A</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>FTM-A</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>REB-AVG</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>PTS-AVG</u>
DiGregorio	31	348-728	48	65-81	80	99-3.2	267	761-24.6
Barnes	30	237-436	54	75-109	69	571-19.1	88	549-18.3
Stacom	31	238-431	55	75-87	85	121-3.9	77	551-17.8
Costello	31	115-230	50	52-80	65	149-4.8	93	282-9.1
Crawford	31	70-140	50	32-46	69	187-6.1	19	172-5.5
King	29	108-192	56	36-44	82	112-3.7	33	252-8.7
Bello	23	9-30	30	6-9	66	11-0.4	19	24-1.1
Baker	25	20-45	44	22-34	67	62-2.5	8	62-2.5
Walters	2	0-2	00	2-2	100	3-1.3	1	2-1.0
Dunphy	21	16-36	44	19-33	58	23-1.1	8	51-2.5
McAndrew	15	8-18	44	3-5	60	17-1.1	1	19-1.3
Norwood	14	15-33	45	7-9	76	14-1.1	10	37-2.6
Modest	10	8-16	50	2-4	50	4-0.3	4	18-1.8
TOTALS	31	1,192-2,336	51	398-540	74	1,488-48	628	2,782-89.7
OPPONENTS:								
	31	1,022-2,416	42	324-493	66	1,361-43.9	539	2,368-76.4

14 Games Played at the Providence Civic Center**Attendance 144,878****Average attendance per game 10,350**

1972-73 PROVIDENCE COLLEGE FRIARS 27-4

<u>PC</u>	<u>Opponent</u>		<u>High Scorer</u>		<u>High Rebounder</u>
94	St. Francis	58	DiGregorio	25	Barnes 18
93	Fairfield	57	DiGregorio	37	Barnes 28
79	So. Carolina	64	DiGregorio	18	Barnes 17
92	Santa Clara	97	Barnes	29	Barnes 24
73	Oregon	60	Barnes	23	Barnes 19
107	DePaul	80	Barnes	23	Barnes 20
83	Brown	53	Barnes	18	Barnes 19
79	URI	59	Stacom	30	Barnes 19
77	Canisius	64	DiGregorio	28	Barnes 18
118	W.Kentucky	88	DiGregorio	22	Barnes 16
87	Duquesne	79	DiGregorio	27	Barnes 23
77	UCLA	101	DiGregorio	22	Barnes 13
91	Mass.	78	DiGregorio	24	Barnes 19
87	Jacksonville	84	Stacom	22	Barnes 19
73	BC	64	DiGregorio	25	Barnes 15
70	Niagara	66	DiGregorio	15	Barnes 24
81	St. Joseph's	75	DiGregorio	26	Barnes 19
102	RI	81	DiGregorio	39	Barnes 17
113	Cleveland St.	79	DiGregorio	23	Barnes 22
94	Holy Cross	75	DiGregorio	28	Barnes 21
86	Villanova	71	Stacom	25	Barnes 21
107	Assumption	87	Barnes	29	Barnes 30
87	Seton Hall	65	Barnes	20	Barnes 23
93	St. John's	90	DiGregorio	41	Barnes 15
103	St.Bonaventure	88	Barnes	32	Barnes 22
93	Brown	80	DiGregorio	28	Barnes 21
89	St. Joseph's	76	DiGregorio	31	Barnes 17
87	Pennsylvania	65	Barnes	20	Barnes 13
103	Maryland	89	DiGregorio	30	Barnes 15
85	Memphis St.	98	DiGregorio	32	Crawford 15
79	Indiana	97	Stacom	29	Baker 7

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