

Ernest Watkins

Basketball

Class of 1988

Ernest Watkins had an epic Basketball career at Nyack High School. He was the second player in NHS history to break the 1000 point mark (after Ron Edwards, NHSAHOF 2015), and he was 4th on the County scoring list when he graduated. Watkins was a pioneer with the 3-point shot, which was introduced during his Senior season. At the legendary County Center in White Plains in 1988, Watkins was the tournament MVP, as Nyack won the Section title. He went on to play College ball at Cortland State.

In his Sophomore season of 1986, Ernie quickly became one of Nyack's most important players. He helped lead the team to a 19-2 record, and a League co-championship, and was also named All-League Honorable Mention. As a Junior, Watkins emerged as a star, averaging 22 points per game, and was named All-Section. Coach Gary Gray (NHSAHOF 2016) said "he always rises to the big games." Ernie did just that when he scored 10 fourth quarter points to lead NHS to a comeback road upset over Nanuet in the first round of the playoffs.

Watkins had his greatest season as a Senior in 1988. He was second in the County with 27 points per game, and he set a single-season Rockland record with 674 points. Ernie was named All-League, All County, All-Section and 5th team All-State. In the playoffs, he scored 37 points in a win over Tappan Zee, and 31 points in a victory over Rye. At the Westchester County Center, Watkins led Nyack to a massive upset over previously-undefeated archrival Albertus Magnus, in the Semi-Finals. In the game, he did not score in the first half because of foul trouble, but when Nyack's lead dwindled to 2, Ernie came in and made a 3-point play. Nyack was able to regain control, and Watkins scored 16 second half points, on the way to the win. In the next game, he went on to score 20 points, as Nyack beat John Jay to win the school's first Section 1 championship.

A major part of Nyack's success in 1988 was their consistent use of the 3-point shot. Not all teams embraced the 3-point shot at first, but NHS showed how valuable threes could be. Watkins was the team's best 3-point shooter, hitting 65 threes that season, paving the way for future Nyack sharpshooters.

Ernest Watkins clearly established himself as one of the greatest Basketball players in Rockland history. He finished his NHS career with 1,287 points, making him Nyack's leading all-time scorer. Watkins went on to play at Cortland State. As a Sophomore, he scored 32 points in a victory and was named All SUNYAC Honorable Mention. One of Ernie's greatest attributes was versatility; he had great shooting range, was an excellent passer, had many steals, and made

numerous clutch plays. Watkins helped usher in the Golden Age of Nyack Basketball.