

Henry "Peck" Artopee
Football, Basketball, Baseball, Track
Class of 1930

For many people from Nyack, the "Old High School" refers to the magnificent building on Midland & 5th that they or their parents attended during its long reign as Nyack High School. There was, however, an "Old High School" predating that one, and it was from this Nyack High School on Liberty Street that one of the greatest athletes in school history embarked on a legendary career.

Henry "Peck" Artopee earned 11 varsity letters across four sports during the 1920s and 1930s. He was a powerful basketball forward, a superb baseball hitter and fielder, and one of the fastest runners on the track team. Football, however, is where Peck made the strongest impression. Artopee's skill, power, and unbending tenacity electrified his teammates and instilled dread in his opponents. His growing legend drew massive crowds, and he inspired numerous athletes who followed in his footsteps.

Artopee was bestowed with the nickname "Peck" for his tendency to play innocent jokes on his friends like a popular storybook troublemaker from the time, Henry Peck. On the courts and the fields, however, Peck was a serious and unwavering competitor. Artopee excelled in the 100-yard and 220-yard dashes and the high jump in track, and his penchant for scoring and measured leadership earned him a captaincy in basketball. Peck was also a captain for Nyack on the baseball diamond. He was a stellar hitter, batting .455 as a junior, and a phenomenal defender who almost never made errors and produced excellent play from first base.

Artopee produced a litany of magical performances on the gridiron during his time at NHS. As a senior captain of the football team in 1929, Peck had his most impressive season as he and his classmates helped the Nyack open up the "new" high school at Midland & 5th. Artopee made fans go wild with epic touchdown

runs that left numerous failed tacklers in his wake. He clinched one win with an interception on defense; another with a 50-yard kickoff return and touchdown plunge. Peck even served as the team's punter. His most heroic performance came in his final game for Nyack football. Forced out with a bad leg injury, Artopee returned when he saw his team falling behind. Even though he could barely walk, he stuck out the tough loss on the field with his team, further displaying his wonderful class and leadership.

After NHS, Artopee played semi-pro football and baseball and remained a star on the local sports scene, including for Dr. Pierre Bernard's All-Stars in South Nyack. Peck's legacy would then be enhanced far beyond anything he could do on the field. Artopee served in the U.S. Army for 35 months during World War II, even earning battle stars for action in Normandy and northern France. He was also heroic locally, climbing into a burning truck on the Thruway on Christmas morning 1954 and driving it away from gasoline tanks to avert an explosion.

Despite his heroism, Artopee remained humble and reserved, and he continued to dedicate himself to his hometown. He served in various local government positions as he tried to improve the community, and he even helped build the original Tappan Zee Bridge. Peck continually passed on knowledge and encouragement to others, serving as a mentor to other young African-Americans like 1930s Nyack star Horace Tyrus and so many others.

When the Rockland County Sports Hall of Fame was established, Artopee was inducted with the very first class. He was widely respected for what he did as an athlete, but he was beloved for how he carried himself and how he treated others in sports and as he fought to make the world a better place. Artopee Way between Franklin & Cedar Streets in Nyack was named in his honor, and those who knew him have called him one of the finest gentlemen they ever knew.