

Levittown Legend Recalls Early Big East Days

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As the college basketball season heats up, it was the appropriate time to catch up with one of the pioneers of the Big East, Levittown hoops legend Danny Dunne.

Dunne played high school ball for the Division Avenue Blue Dragons in 1976 before transferring to Long Island Lutheran. He embarked on a college career at Seton Hall University and played in the first year of the Big East Conference. Dunne actually played in the first-ever Big East basketball game, Seton Hall lost to Boston College, on Dec. 11, 1979.

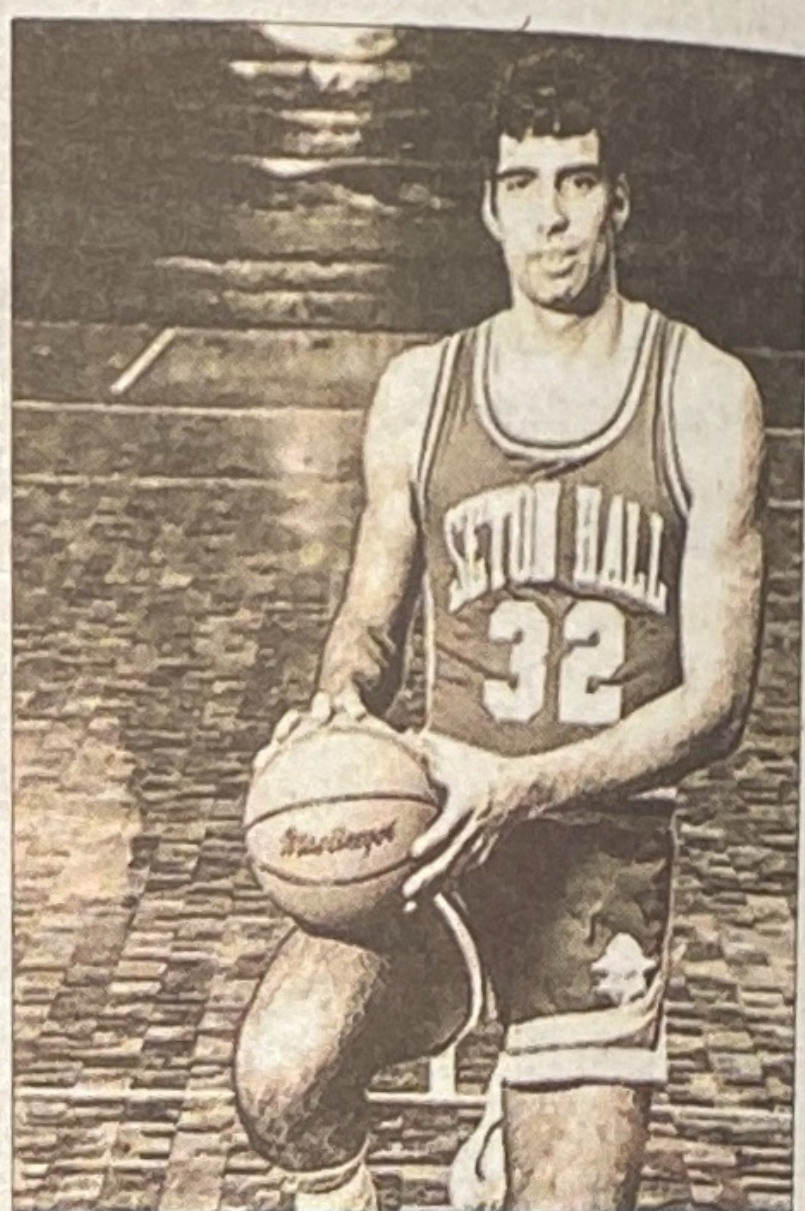
A retired school teacher in Rochester, Dunne got his start at North Side Elementary School, playing for the Levittown Athletic Club. He would later hone his skills and toughness during pick-up games at the courts at Azalea Road Park.

Dunne was called up to Division Avenue's varsity team as a sophomore and teamed with Bobby Orlandini to make a formidable combination on the court. That season, with Dunne and Orlandini, the Blue Dragons defeated perennial powers Westbury and Roslyn in back-to-back games.

A 6-10 center, Danny would transfer to basketball powerhouse Lutheran High School the very next season. Success followed Dunne at Lutheran. In his two seasons at Lutheran, the Crusaders were NYSAIS state champions and New York State Federation semifinalists in 1978-79. They were ranked No. 5 in the state and No. 1 on Long Island.

Dunne was a preseason Honorable Mention All American for the 1978-79 season. He led the Crusaders in rebounds and blocked shots that season and would finish his career with the Crusaders with the all-time single season record for blocked shots with 137, an average of 4.9 per game. In just two seasons, he grabbed 412 rebounds, landing him 10th on Lutheran's all-time list.

Then it was off to Seton Hall, a charter member of the Big East Conference, which quickly became known as one of the best, and certainly toughest, conferences in all of college basketball. In four years at Seton Hall, Dunne would compete against some of the icons of the game, including Patrick Ewing, Hakeem Olajuwon, Chris Mullin, Clyde Drexler, Bill Wennington and Ed Pinkney.



Levittown's Danny Dunne during his playing days at Seton Hall University. (Photo courtesy Seton Hall Sports Information Office)

"Some of my most memorable moments are getting to play major Division 1 college basketball and being part of history in playing the first four years of the Big East," Dunne said. "We got to play on national television on this fledgling all-sports cable network - ESPN."

Dunne also remembers, "Being a skinny kid from Levittown and getting to play at the Mecca ... Madison Square Garden."

He would later play four years of professional basketball in Puerto Rico for the Quebradillas Pirates. He was also a member of the 1980 Puerto Rican Olympic team, but Puerto Rico did not compete in Moscow, following the U.S.-led boycott of the Soviet games.

Dunne says all of his greatest influences came from Levittown, including his father Buddy Dunne, his brother Dennis Dunne as well as Division Avenue High School teachers, Herb Kaufman, Bill Pavlikowski, Robert Danhieux and Ronald Altman.

While still in Rochester, Dunne is working to become a scout or assistant coach in the NBA's G-league. He has an extensive coaching résumé as well, having been a head coach at Molloy College and an assistant at Niagara and Brockport State.

When he does return to Levittown several times a year, Dunne makes sure to visit some of his favorites—Domenico's, Two Brothers Pizza and Dortoni's bakery.

—James Rowan is a Levittown resident