

Black History Month 2024

Al Attles

When Al Attles was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2019, the honor was a culmination of a lifetime of excellence in the game.

Attles achieved prominence as a player, coach and executive. And it all began in Newark, where graduated from Weequahic High School as a star player in 1955.

From Weequahic, he moved onto North Carolina A&T University, where his number would eventually retired. His initial career plan was to return home to Newark and begin a teaching and coaching career at a junior high. When he was drafted by the Philadelphia Warriors in the fifth round (39th overall) of the 1960 NBA draft, he decided to give pro basketball a try.



Photo credit: Garrett Ellwood | NBA

A 6-0 point guard, Attles played 11 years for the Warriors, averaging 8.9 points over 711 games, which ranks eighth in Warriors history. Known for his tough defensive play, his nickname became "The Destroyer." His No. 16 jersey was retired by the franchise.

He became an assistant coach in 1968, while still a player. He was also the team's head coach while still a player, taking over during the 1969-70 season. In doing so, he became one of the first Black coaches in the NBA, or anywhere else in professional sports.

After retiring as a player following the 1970-71 season, he became the coach full time. He coached the Warriors through the 1983 season, winning 557 games, which still ranks him first in team history.

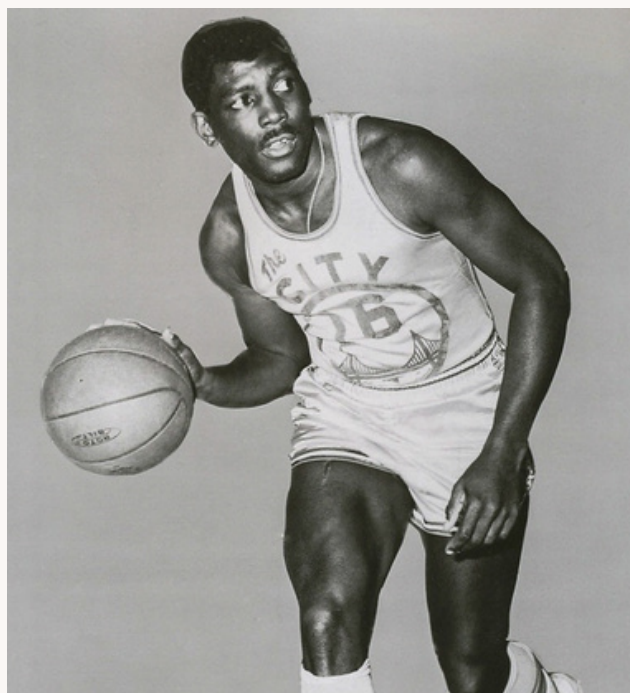


Photo credit: Associated Press

"I even had keys to the classroom," he said of his Newark job in a later interview. "I went down to Philadelphia for tryouts on a lark, really. This was a team with Wilt Chamberlain, Tom Gola, Paul Arizin, some top-line guys. It's funny though. After that first practice, I'm thinking 'I don't know much about the league, but I can play with these guys.'"

Now 87 years old, he has been with the Warriors ever since, first in Philly and then in the Bay Area in California, where the franchise relocated in the early '60s. No one in the history of the NBA has spent more time employed by a single organization. He surpassed Red Auerbach's time with the Boston Celtics for that distinction.

The highlight of his coaching tenure came when he guided the Warriors to the NBA championship in 1975. He became the second Black coach (after Bill Russell) to win a NBA title.

He also served as General Manager of the Warriors for 10 years, beginning while also head coach, and through the 1986 season.

He continued to work in the team's front office, and even returned as an assistant in 1994-95. He eventually became a team ambassador, and he remains a beloved figure in the San Francisco area sports scene.



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In 2014, he was the recipient of the John W. Bunn Lifetime Achievement Award by the Naismith Hall of Fame, which is annual award honoring an individual who has contributed significantly to the sport, and is considered the Hall of Fame's most prestigious award other than enshrinement.

Attles surpassed that, however, with his induction into the Naismith Hall of Fame in 2019, making him one of the few from New Jersey to achieve that honor.