

AUBREY LEWIS OF MONTCLAIR HIGH SCHOOL

Quite simply, Aubrey Lewis is one of the most decorated high school athletes in New Jersey history.

A 1954 graduate of Montclair High School, he was a star in football, basketball and track & field. He also played some baseball, and hit over .500.

Lewis grew up in Montclair, and as a youngster, he dreamed of competing for his hometown Mounties. He got his chance as a football sophomore in 1951.

He was so good on the gridiron, rushing for over 4,500 career yards and 49 touchdowns, that The Star-Ledger in 2000 named him New Jersey football "Player of the Century" for offense. He was also an excellent linebacker, and Montclair went 26-1 during his career.



A standout on the basketball team, he was also NJSIAA track champion and state-record setter in the 100 yard dash, 220 yards, and discus.

He was offered scholarships by dozens and dozens of colleges before deciding on Notre Dame. He was a halfback on the football team and in track, was the the 1956 NCAA champion in the 400 meter intermediate hurdles. He also tied the world record in the 60 yard dash.

During his senior year at Notre Dame, in 1957-58, he was selected captain of the track team, making him the first Black athlete to be named a captain in school history.

He was drafted by the Chicago Bears in the 1958 NFL draft, but an ankle injury prevented him from sticking with team.

Still, the world had hardly heard the last of Aubrey Lewis.

In 1961, he became a teacher at Paterson Central High School. In doing so, he became the first African-American head football coach in state history.

A year later, he was recruited by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which was seeking

to broaden its force to include minorities. It targeted Lewis as one of the best and brightest candidates in the nation.



He then became one of the first two African-Americans to complete training at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Va. He served as an agent in Ohio and New York. He solved crimes and even served as a personal guard for Jacqueline Kennedy.

He eventually left the FBI for the private sector, where he embarked on a long executive career with F.W. Woolworth Corporation, retiring in 2000 as Senior Executive of Corporate Affairs.

He also served on scores of corporate and community boards, and became vice chairman of the New Jersey Highway Authority, and a commissioner with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. He was also a commissioner on the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority.

During the 1980s, he was the Notre Dame nominee and selected a winner of a NCAA Silver Anniversary award.

Among many other honors, he was inducted into the NJSIAA Hall of Fame in 2000.

When he was in high school, his physical exam showed signs of a heart problem. He convinced the doctor that he had run to his office, causing it to beat more quickly, and he was allowed to play. The same thing happened at Notre Dame. Still, the heart issues persisted later in life, and he was ultimately in need of a transplant when he died at age 66 in 2001.

His death was so significant that it was Page One news in The Star-Ledger, and his obituary was also written in the New York Times.

In 2018, the high school athletic complex at Montclair, which has fields named for some of the greatest coaches in the school's proud history, was dedicated in its entirety as the Aubrey Lewis Sports Complex.

