

# FIRST MAN OFF THE BENCH

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During my senior year at Seneca High School I participated in an intramural basketball league organized by the school and played at the school gym. Each team consisted of seven players and games were played weekly. When I received my team assignment prior to the start of play I discovered that I was one of but two Caucasian players on the roster. The remaining five players were of African-American descent. For the first time in my life I was in a setting where I would be in the minority, despite the fact that at that time the Seneca High School student enrollment was about 85% Caucasian. And right before league play started I learned that I would be even more in the minority when the other Caucasian player quit the squad. Given that I did not know any of the other five players well I was not certain what to expect. Regardless, I decided to play out the season and to fit into whatever role the team required of me.

I soon learned what my function would be on the team. I was the “first (and only) man off the bench.” As the first game began I remember thinking that I was going to have very little playing time. Yet as the game progressed I found I was being called on to relieve other players as they became tired and needed a break. The game ended with my having received a significant amount of playing time. As league play continued I found myself an integral part of the team coming off the bench as needed to relieve other players. The season concluded on a high note with our team of six winning the intramural league championship. And to this day I have the individual trophy from that season which I keep not so much in recognition of the athletic achievement, but more to remind me of how five African-Americans accorded fairness and respect to a minority of one as we all worked toward a common goal.

Recently I had opportunity to reconnect with Larry Bailey '69, one of my teammates from that time. We both recalled playing on the team and the life lessons in cooperation we had learned and put to use. And as each of us becomes more aware of diversity both within and outside of Seneca High School, I would like to pass on a couple of things I have observed recently. One day while visiting at Seneca I encountered two students having a conversation at the bus loading dock. I noted that the language being spoken was not English. At around the same time I went to my nearby branch bank to make a deposit. While waiting I witnessed an African-American teller waiting on a Caucasian woman while the other teller (who was East Indian in descent) was waiting on an Asian man. For the name of the game now is diversity as pertains to day-to-day life. It is hoped that each of you will embrace the diversity around you and become richer because of it. All the best in that endeavor.

Sam Denny  
Class of 1969