



## CICERO LASSITER

*"No problem can be solved with the same level of consciousness that created it."*

*-Albert Einstein*

Cicero Lassiter, the younger of the two sons of James Sr. and Viola Lassiter, followed a very different path to his induction into the Freedom Educational Foundation Hall of Fame. Two years younger than his brother Junior, Lassiter was born in 1949 in Americus, Georgia before moving to Aliquippa as a toddler and eventually settling in Freedom.

Athletics were an important part of Lassiter's high school years, and he displayed his talents as a member of the track and field team and the basketball team. He held Freedom's record for the high jump of 6'3 1/4", which stood for 40 years. As a senior he qualified for the PIAA State Track Meet at Penn State University. During the week prior to the State Meet, Lassiter suffered a neck injury while playing a pickup basketball game at the Eighth Street Playground but still competed in the State Meet and managed an eighth place finish.

Lassiter made a name for himself as a premier basketball player during his junior year. He was a unanimous coaches' choice as first team All-Section of the Mid-Western Athletic Conference and was the conference's number one scorer with 347 points. In 1968 he broke the Freedom's single season scoring record with 522 points, besting Bill Hewko's 507 points scored in 1956. Lassiter's record has since been broken. The WPIAL named him to its 1968 All-Star Team; he was nominated for the Pittsburgh Dapper Dan Round Ball Classic; and the Pittsburgh Press nominated him as a basketball MVP candidate. Lassiter has the distinction of playing in the very first Quigley Classic pitting the Beaver County All-Stars versus the Pittsburgh City Catholic All-Stars.

Lassiter graduated from Freedom Area High School in 1968, but unfortunately sub-par grades prevented him from being recruited by a four-year college. Highland Community College in Highland, Kansas offered him a chance to play on the junior college level. In his one year at Highland, he made first team Interstate League All-Conference while averaging 18 points and 11 rebounds per game. He returned to Beaver County after his freshman year and began working at J & L Steel Company where he says he "dabbled in drugs and alcohol."

After a two-year break from basketball, in 1972 Lassiter regained his focus and returned to college at Missouri Southern University in Joplin majoring in sociology. In 1972 he earned honorable mention by District 16 National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). In 1973 and in 1974 he was named to the first team by District 16 of the NAIA and also received honorable mention as a Small College NAIA All-American. In both 1972 and 1973 Lassiter led the Lions of Missouri Southern to two NAIA national tournaments held in Kemper Arena in Kansas City, Missouri. During a 14-game stretch of the 1973 season, Lassiter recorded 61 assists, setting a record that has not been broken at Missouri Southern. Because of his athletic skills, Lassiter was a three-year basketball letterman averaging 18.4 points and 11.4 rebounds per game. His name is in the record books at Missouri Southern for his scoring and rebounding feats.

As his drug use became more pronounced in 1974, he once again left school. Lassiter did play one year of semi-professional basketball for the Allentown Jets, an affiliate of the Philadelphia

76ers, then returned again to Beaver County where he jumped from job to job in the steel industry either quitting or getting fired while living, as he says, “in a world clouded with addiction.”

It took the end of a relationship and gaining custody of his two young daughters Roleta and Kyra for Lassiter to turn his life around. He turned to church for the first time since he was in his early twenties, began attending Narcotics Anonymous meetings, and took a job with a cleaning service to provide for his girls. The year 1992 was a professional milestone for Lassiter. He met Ed Currie, director of Drug and Alcohol Services of Beaver Valley. Ed encouraged Lassiter to apply for a position as a drug and alcohol counselor; he applied and was hired as a counselor for group therapy sessions and soon earned his Pennsylvania State Drug and Alcohol certification. For 22 years he was a group counselor with Drug and Alcohol Services of Beaver County before retiring in 2015. He is now a consultant with Addiction and Behavior Counseling Associates where he works with individuals on a part-time basis. A Rochester resident and a licensed minister, Cicero teaches adult Sunday school at the Second Baptist Church in Rochester. He is the grandfather of two grandsons, Jabreel Amere Moye and Azariah Prince Bire.

For 19 seasons, Lassiter has coached Big Beaver Falls basketball and has help mold the Tigers into a basketball powerhouse. He served for two years as the eighth and ninth grade coach with a record of 47-1. From 2000 to 2016 he has been the assistant boys basketball coach. During that time the Tigers won two PIAA State Championships, two PIAA state runner-up titles, four WPIAL championships, four WPIAL runner-up awards, and eleven section titles.

The rebirth and rejuvenation of Cicero Lassiter is an inspiration. He has fallen to the depths and has climbed the mountains; his 27 plus years of sobriety and recovery are more important than his athletic records. His achievements in overcoming his own addictions and his work to help others overcome theirs were recognized when he received the Martin Luther King Junior Reconciliation Award in 2015 presented by Christians United Beaver County. This award was presented to Lassiter for embodying the legacy of the slain civil rights leader.

According to Lassiter, “This was all made possible through the mercy grace of God.”