

Winningest Boys Basketball Coach at Robertsville Middle School – John Spratling

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of January 9, 2023)

John Spratling has coached the Boys' Basketball program at Robertsville Middle School for 24 years. On December 12, 2022, John won his 346th game. This surpassed previous legendary Coach Keys Fillauer's record. Coach Spratling earned a bachelor's degree (1993) and a Masters degree (1995) in Education from East Tennessee State University. He graduated with Cum Laude honors.

Coach Spratling is a 5th grade educator at Robertsville Middle School where he has taught for 28 years. He is married to Vanessa, and the couple have two children, Trejon and Imani.

John is proud of his heritage and credits the Scarboro 85 for paving the way for him to be accepted in Oak Ridge and to become a coach. While he is a humble man, he gets excited too.

John said, "WE DID IT! To GOD be the glory! This is truly a SANKOFA moment. I am mindful of Fred Guinn, Dr. Ahmed Alhamisi (formerly Lawrence Graham) and Robert Berry for their SACRIFICIES made for me and all of us back in 1955. Without them there is no me!

"I am very grateful for my family, friends, past teachers, coaches, mentors, former assistant coaches and players for without each of you this would not be possible. I am truly humble to represent this historic school, Woodland Elementary, Jefferson Junior High School, Oak Ridge High School, East Tennessee State University, the city of Oak Ridge and my beloved Scarboro Community where I grew up. We say THANK YOU to you ALL!!

This webpage (<https://www.berea.edu/cgwc/the-power-of-sankofa/>) from Berea College gives the definition of SANKOFA as:

"**Sankofa** is an African word from the Akan tribe in Ghana. The literal translation of the word and the symbol is "it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind."

The word is derived from the words:

SAN (return),
KO (go),
FA (look, seek and take).

"The **sankofa** symbolizes the Akan people's quest for knowledge among the Akan with the implication that the quest is based on critical examination, and intelligent and patient investigation.



"The symbol is based on a mythical bird with its feet firmly planted forward with its head turned backwards. Thus, the Akan believe the past serves as a guide for planning the future. To the Akan, it is this wisdom in learning from the past which ensures a strong future.

"The Akans believe that there must be movement and new learning as time passes. As this forward march proceeds, the knowledge of the past must never be forgotten.

The SANKOFA symbol has been chosen as the logo for the Scarboro 85 Monument Committee who desires to recognize the gallant efforts of these young individuals in 1955 who desegregated the Oak Ridge High School and the Robertsville Junior High School in Oak Ridge.

Many of them are now getting up in age and several have already passed on with what has been little to no recognition for the amazing forever-change they initiated. Those still living are finally being recognized since the 67th anniversary in 2020. And even more recognition is planned!

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John desires his honor to reflect positively on their valor. The Scarboro 85 are mostly now getting up in years, but they are still as humble as ever and look on their accomplishment as just something that needed to be done and they were the ones who had to do it.

The desegregation in Oak Ridge did not cause the uproar that occurred one year later in Clinton, TN, or two years later in Little Rock, AR. However, there were certainly hardships here and those Black students had to be under daily stress to endure kinds of seemingly small things that hurt greatly. Yet, that is exactly what they did, they endured, with only minor upheaval in the city or even in the schools.

I am proud to have been asked to serve on the Scarboro 85 Monument Committee, along with John Spratling (chair), Naomi Asher, Pat Postma, Rose Weaver, Vanessa Spratling, Anne McBride, Martin McBride, Karla Mullins, Ram Uppuluri, Ziad Demian, and Trina Watson.

If you would want to learn more about the actions being undertaken to recognize the Scarboro 85 in A. K. Bissell Park, please contact any of the committee members or send me an email at draysmith@comcast.net.

And a final thank you to each of the 85 students, much older now, who can hold their heads high and accept appropriate recognition that has been withheld far too long. John Spratling is evidence that it was worth it all. And he is not alone, many Black people now can enjoy opportunities denied far too long.

Thank you, a heartfelt thank you, to all who struggled for integration.

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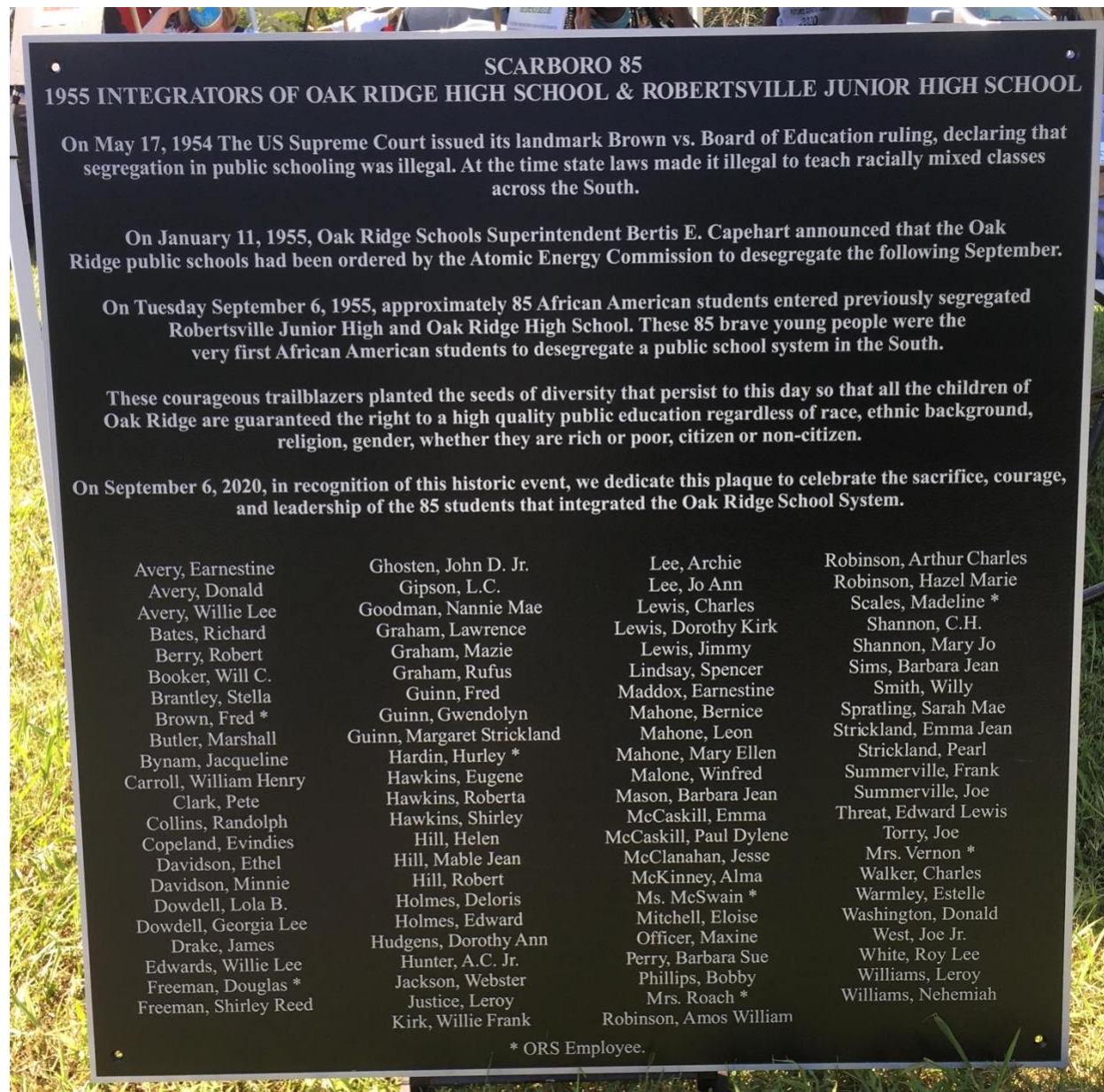
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Scarboro 85 plaque located at the Oak Ridge High School and the Robertsville Middle School

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Caption: Team.jpg:



Spratling and the Robertsville Boys Basketball team of 2022 (Players names from left to Right: #3 Treasure Threat, #15 LaMiere Porter, #21 Liam Gerber, #20 Brad Medzo, #11 Mico Cleveland, #13 Isaiah Wilson, #2 Stephen Ward, Coach Spratling, #0 Dallin James, #23 J'Zyion Slater, #4 Ethan James, #5 Andy Hutson, Not pictured # 1 Damillyan Porter and #14 Jackson Rice.)

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The Scarboro 85 Monument Committee: Front Row left to right, Pat Postma, John Spratling, Martin McBride; Back Row left to right, Karla Mullins, Trina Watson, Rose Weaver, Vanessa Spratling, and Anne McBride. Not pictured, Naomi Asher, Ram Uppuluri, Ziad Demain, and Ray Smith