

CENTER COURT

February 2025

Newsletter of the Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame

A Message from the Executive Director.....

What an incredible year for women's basketball!

As the 2023-2024 women's collegiate season began, Iowa's Caitlin Clark was already very familiar to fans across the country. The national excitement and attention she sparked reached a peak on March 3, 2024, when she became the NCAA's all-time leading scorer in basketball history with 3,685 points, passing Pete Maravich! Clark was the first Division 1 player to top 3,000 points, 1,000 assists and 800 rebounds, and set an NCAA record of having 59 career games with at least 25 points, 5 assists and 5 rebounds.

Selected first in the WNBA draft by the Indiana Fever, Clark set a rookie record for most three-pointers made in a season, in addition to setting new all-time WNBA marks for most assists in a season and most assists in a single game! For her amazing efforts, Caitlin Clark was named WNBA Rookie of the Year and Time Magazine Athlete of the Year.

Last summer our USA Women's Basketball Team became the most dominant team in the history of the Olympics, when they survived a nerve-shredding final against France, and secured their eighth consecutive gold medal! Their 61 successive wins in Olympic competition dates back to 1992, and their final win established a new record for the most consecutive gold medals won in a traditional team sport. The previous record of seven was held by the USA men's team.

Former UCONN star Diana Taurasi secured her sixth Olympic gold medal and now has more than anyone in any team sport in history! Finally, Kelsey Plum and Jackie Young became the first players to win Olympic gold medals in both 3x3 and 5x5 basketball. Did I mention it's been an incredible year?!

Finally ... our UCONN women have a deep bench! While they haven't escaped injuries, it's been exciting to watch talented team members step up when needed. As the team continues to become more consistent, they'll be able to utilize real impact players coming off the bench. Go Huskies!

Let's continue to enjoy all the energy and excitement of the 2025 season! I hope you are able to join the celebration at our annual inductee ceremony on April 27th at the Aqua Turf in Southington.



Louise O'Neal

Fifteen former players (pictured), friends and colleagues gathered for a memorial service held for Louise O'Neal, legendary basketball coach, athletic administrator, and life-long advocate for advancing opportunities for girls and women in sports, on Sunday, April 21, 2024, at Moore Field House at SCSU.

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CWBHOF Inductees Honored

Connecticut Sports Medal Alliance 82nd Gold Key Dinner



Pictured Linda Dirga and Kate Mullen

Gold Key Recipients

Linda Dirga (CWBHOF, 2012) and Kate Mullen (CWBHOF, 2011) received one of Connecticut's highest sports awards, the Gold Key.

Linda Dirga's basketball officiating career took off in the 1970's and through the mid-80's. She was a member of the Bridgeport CT Officials Board and the

Southwest CT Officials Board. She officiated many Conference Championship games and two state championships in the 1970s, including a Class L State Final, which was showcased for the first time in the new Moore Field House at SCSU.

As a field hockey coach, Dirga guided Pomperaug to eight state titles, eight state runner-up titles and a career record of 437-44-22 over 26 seasons (1984-2010). Her teams won state championships in four different decades, in both Class M and Class L.

Kate Mullen entered her 33rd year at the helm of the Wesleyan University women's basketball program in 2024-25. Mullen has guided the team to nine consecutive winning seasons from 2000-2009, compiling a 153-69 record (.689 winning percentage) during that span. The Cardinals appeared in 16 of the last 22 NESCAC Tournaments and made two trips to the NCAA Championships during that stretch.

In 2017-18, Mullen's squad recorded a 17-8 overall record and a 5-5 mark in the NESCAC. The Cardinals earned the No. 5 seed in the NESCAC Championships and advanced to the semifinals. Mullen was voted the NESCAC Coach of the Year by her peers during the 2002-03 season and in 2004-05, she led Wesleyan to a 22-5 record - the winningest team in program history - while securing a NCAA bid and advancing to the Sweet 16.

Southern Connecticut State University Women's Basketball program honored

SCSU Women's Basketball Alumna were invited to celebrate and honor the incredible winning legacy of the Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) Women's Basketball program. The Banner Reveal Ceremony (scheduled for February 22, 2025) commemorated and honored past contributions and achievements of those who participated in the program and recognized the rich history of SCSU and the indelible mark the program has made in the AIAW Tournaments over the years. (AIAW preceded NCAA.)

New Haven Tap Off Club Provides Funding for Camp Scholarships

The CWBHOF was the recipient of a generous donation from the New Haven Tap Off Club. The Club was organized in 1963 to recognize and honor the rich basketball legacy of New Haven County.

The funds will be used to provide annual basketball scholarships to two New Haven County girls at a local basketball camp. One scholarship will be named "The George Piazza, Jr. New Haven Tap Off Club Scholarship" and the other "The Rudy Canelli New Haven Tap Off Club Scholarship."

CWBHOF is most grateful for the donation and the opportunity to provide camp scholarships in the names of two such highly regarded basketball personalities.

IN MEMORY



The Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame created the **Brenda Reilly High School Basketball Award** in honor of Dr. Brenda Reilly, the Associate Athletic Director of Central Connecticut State University and one of the organization's founders.

The **Brenda Reilly High School Basketball Award** is awarded annually to the most outstanding high school girls' basketball team in

the State of Connecticut. The award is in honor of Brenda Reilly and is given to a team based on the criteria of character and sportsmanship, the principles on which the hall of fame was founded. The coach and a representative of the selected team are invited as honored guests to the Hall of Fame's annual banquet.

The **Hamden High School Girls' Basketball Team** was awarded the 2024 Brenda Reilly High School Basketball Award.

Paula Fitzgerald

Hal Levy High School Achievement Award

Paula Fitzgerald (CWBHOF, 2024) is part of the history of girls' basketball in Connecticut. She served as an assistant coach at Westbrook High School, helping the team to six straight Class S state championships from 1982-87. Her dedication to Westbrook athletes continues today.



Pictured are CWBHOFers Vickie Fulkerson, Judy Deeb, and Paula Fitzgerald

Fitzgerald was an assistant under head coach Pete Shuler from 1980-95, during which time the Knights set a state record with 62 consecutive victories and won eight state championships. Fitzgerald was honored with the Connecticut's Assistant Coach of the Year award in 1995. She was the Westbrook athletic director for 33 years.

The Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame Lee Franzman Team Recognition Award

The Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame unveiled a new team recognition award in 2023, named in honor of Lee Franzman. Lee, a highly respected board member, who served as chair of our nominating committee for many years, passed away in 2021.

We are excited to recognize two recipients of the 3rd Lee Franzman Team Recognition Award: **1979 Conard High School Girls' Basketball Team**, coached by Pamela Moffo and the **1980 Stonington High School Girls' Basketball Team**, coached by Paulla Solar. Each team will be honored at the 2025 induction ceremony being held on April 27, 2025.

Criteria for recognition are:

High school team– State Championship with special consideration for undefeated teams, the first state championship from a school with multiple state championships and teams from the early days of the tournament starting in 1974.

College team – National Championship or significant success at the national level, especially in the early days of the national tournaments.

Industrial, barnstorming, AAU (prior to 1970) and senior team – Significant success at the national level or pioneering success in the early days of women's basketball in Connecticut.

High school, college, industrial, "barnstorming", AAU (prior to 1970) and senior teams will be eligible for recognition. (Only one team from a high school or college coached by the same person will be recognized.) Nomination forms can be found on the website and sent to David Strong, 15 Old Middle Road Turnpike, Woodbury, CT, 06798.

1979 Conard High School Girls' Basketball Team

Between 1972 to 1979, Conard Girls' Basketball was arguably one of the most dominant programs in the state, having won three CCIL titles, compiling three undefeated regular seasons, ranking as the top seed in the Class LL playoffs in consecutive seasons, all capped off by an undefeated season and state championship in 1979.

Coached by Pamela Moffo (CWBHOF, 2010), the Chieftains compiled a seven year record of 116-16 (.879 winning percentage). The team was lead by Kathy Cermola (all-league and all-state recognition as a sophomore, junior and senior) who, along with Paula Clough (12.0 ppg) and Cathy D'Apice (10.5 ppg), scored in double figures throughout the 1978-79 season, averaging 17.4 ppg.

The Class of 1979 girls' basketball team, set the standard for all future classes to follow, winning two CCIL crowns, 61 of 65 games (.938 winning percentage), and 43 of 44 contests in their final two seasons (.977 winning percentage).

Captained by Cathy D'Apice and Cathy Foto, the '79 championship team is the only public school basketball team in West Hartford to win a state title.

In 2006, the 1978-79 team was inducted into the New England Basketball Hall of Fame.

1980 Stonington High School Girls' Basketball Team

Paulla Solar (High School Coach, 2006) became the head coach of the Stonington High School Girls' Basketball Team in 1973. However, it was not until the institution of Title IX that the team had the opportunity to play in an official league, the Eastern Connecticut Conference and the CIAC state tournament.

It was only seven short years later, that the 1980 girls' basketball team, undefeated in the regular season (23-0), won its first state title by defeating Masuk High School in a thrilling overtime game, 61-56. This began a streak of 66 consecutive regular season wins.

Since then, the Stonington Bears have won 2 more state titles, 3 state runner ups, and 11 league championships. There have been twelve all state players in the Stonington girls' basketball program, including two players who attended the University of Connecticut.

The town of Stonington is extremely proud of the accomplishments of the girls' basketball program, and honored the team with induction into the Stonington High School Athletic Hall of Fame in 2017.

FORMER UCONN PLAYERS CONTINUE TO LEAVE THEIR MARK IN GYMS AND CITIES AROUND THE COUNTRY

Portion of Second Avenue North becomes Sue Bird Court

The city of Seattle held a ceremony to rename a portion of 2nd Ave N to Sue Bird Ct in honor of the legendary point guard. In the words of Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell, "Sue Bird is more than a basketball legend – her legacy transcends the game as a symbol of excellence, determination and the power of sports to inspire and uplift communities."

Maya Moore's jersey number retired

The Minnesota Lynx held a ceremony on August 24, 2024, when the team hosted the Indiana Fever, to enshrine Maya Moore's jersey in the rafters as they retired her number (No. 23). Moore's number was the fifth officially retired in franchise history.

Paige Bueckers designs and launches own sneaker

Paige Bueckers made history by becoming the first collegiate athlete to design and launch a Nike Player Edition basketball sneaker. The shoe displays the UConn star's favorite colors - baby blue, and lavender - is adorned with personalized details such as her UConn and home ZIP Codes and reflects her style and inspirations. The shoe sells for about \$200.





MARK YOUR CALENDARS

2025 Connecticut Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame Ceremony

Inductees:

Chantell Alford	Kristin Schatzlein
Brittney Carfora Brune	Michelle Martinik Shoop
Kiah Gillespie	Sue Tomko
Joseph J Mone	Rick Wilson

Sunday, April 27, 2025
 Aqua Turf Club – Kay’s Pier South (Plantsville, CT)
 Social Hour: 12:00 p.m.
 Luncheon: 1:00 p.m.
 Cash Bar

Contribution to the Cause.....The CWBHOF Committee is determined to provide maximum service to/for Connecticut Women’s Basketball. To give you the best we have to give and to keep pace with the increasing demands of our operating initiatives, we would welcome any financial contributions to defray our operating costs. CWBHOF is a Section 501C (3) TAX ORGANIZATION FOR FEDERAL INCOME TAX PURPOSES. Certain Contributions to CWBHOF MAY BE deductible to the person making the contribution. The CWBHOF recommends that a person consult with his/her legal advisors as to the deductibility of the donation. If interested in donating, please contact Louise Albrecht at 203-610-4329.

Women’s Basketball + Caitlin Clark = More Fans!

Written by Linda Wooster

As Iowa’s Caitlin Clark embarked on the final year of her record - breaking collegiate career, fans across the country not only took notice, but they also showed up and tuned in!

Attendance at schools that hosted Iowa increased over 150% compared with their other home games. The Hawkeyes, in fact, played in all the top five most in-demand NCAA women’s games last year. The 2024 championship game between Iowa and South Carolina averaged 18.9 million viewers, becoming the second most watched sporting event, other than the Olympic Games, in the history of U. S. television. For the first time ever, more people watched the women’s NCAA championship than the men’s!

Clark, drafted by the Indiana Fever, continued her record- breaking ways as a pro, and was named WNBA Rookie of the Year. She set new all-time WNBA records for most assists in a season and in a single game, while also setting a rookie record for most three-pointers made in a season! The WNBA also enjoyed an all-time record of viewers during the regular season, and overall attendance at games was up 48%. The Fever broke the WNBA record for home attendance and some games were moved to NBA and NHL arenas to accommodate the huge out-pouring of energized fans.

Without a doubt, Caitlin Clark – two-time College Player of the Year, WNBA Rookie of the Year and 2024 Time Magazine Athlete of the Year – has had an extraordinary impact on the popularity and viewership of women’s basketball.

Did you know?

Antiques Roadshow in CT

Simeon Lipman, an appraiser from the Antiques Roadshow, had the opportunity to appraise the 11 UConn Women’s Basketball Championship Rings back in 2022, when the popular PBS television show, came to Middletown’s Wadsworth Mansion in CT. He indicated that the values of college championship rings do vary but that one championship ring from a UConn Women’s Basketball Championship would be worth between \$3,000 and \$4,000. A complete set of eleven rings, which only one staff member from the UConn team office, Coach Auriemma and Coach Dailey possess, is so special and important it was valued at \$100,000.



CT WOMEN’S BASKETBALL PIONEER AWARD
“Remembering the Pioneers of Connecticut Women’s Basketball”

The Connecticut Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame honors those individuals who have played a role in blazing the trail for women’s basketball in Connecticut, preparing the way for others to follow.

If you know of an individual who you think is deserving of this honor, we would be interested in hearing from you. Please forward all relevant information (i.e. name, contact information, history of involvement in the game, etc.) to David Strong at david.strong@snet.net.



THE BEAUTY OF A CHARITABLE BEQUEST

Charitable bequests to the Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame help to ensure that we may continue our goal of honoring individuals who have contributed to the enhancement of Connecticut women's basketball through their participation, service, support, or achievement.

Please consider the Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame when making future plans.