

# CENTER COURT

February, 2024

Newsletter of the Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame

## A Message from the Executive Director.....

After all the excitement and enjoyment that the 2023 women/girls' basketball season brought us, can 2024 possibly match up?

In 2023 - UCONN continued its painful and disappointing streak of injuries and every game was a battle; we watched Iowa's Caitlin Clark continue her torrid scoring on endless highlights; LSU reigned supreme as they marched to the championship, while their star, Angel Reese, became an NIL (Name, Image, Likeness) sensation; Hamden High School and E.O. Smith High School both won their first ever CT state championships; and our CWBHOF switched its induction banquet from a dinner to a luncheon!

We're well into this new 2024 season and a couple of things remain unchanged ... Caitlin Clark is still amazing us with her incredible scoring prowess and UCONN is again experiencing unforeseen challenges, as many players are already out with season ending injuries. Anything is possible, but time will tell! What about Tara VanDerveer? On January 21st she became the new winningest coach in basketball history when Stanford beat Oregon State, securing her NCAA-record 1,203rd win!! She passed former Duke men's coach, Mike Krzyzewski, while adding another incredible milestone in her career.

There is most definitely something new and exciting that has changed in 2024! The site of our celebration luncheon has moved, and this year's induction banquet will be held at the Aqua Turf in Plantsville, CT. It will be my pleasure to welcome you to our 2024 CWBHOF induction, on April 28<sup>th</sup>, as we celebrate together, honor and welcome new inductees and enjoy and appreciate friendships - both old and new.

Hope you'll plan to join us.



**Linda J. Wooster**  
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Founder

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**Brenda Reilly, PhD**  
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## 1976 U.S. Olympic Women's Team, recognized for paving the way



Mary Anne O'Connor

In the summer of 1976, in a small two-bedroom flat in the Montreal Olympic Village, the history of basketball was about to change forever. The United States women's national basketball team was "in the house" and their mission, which they boldly accepted, was to turn women's basketball into a major player in the world of sports. Lusia "Lucy" Harris, Ann Meyers, Nancy Lieberman, Charlotte Lewis, Cindy Brogdon, Nancy Dunkle, Patricia Roberts, Gail Marquis, Mary Anne O'Connor (CWBHOF College Player, 1988), Sue Rojcewicz (CWBHOF College Player, 1989), co-captains Pat Head Summitt and



Sue Rojcewicz

Juliene Brazinski Simpson, head coach, Billie Moore, and assistant coach, Sue Gunter, proved to the world that they belonged, by winning the Olympic silver medal (winning three out of five games in a round-robin format).

Forty-seven years after winning the silver medal, the 1976 U.S. Women's Olympic Team, was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame (Class of 2023), recognized as the first U.S. women's basketball team at the Olympics.



## CWBHOF Inductees Honored



Ann Marie Odoy



Gail Strumpf Cheney



Michelle Florin Custis



Dave Strong

On October 12, 2023, four Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame inductees were honored as part of the class of 2023 inducted into the Masuk Athletic Hall of Fame. The Masuk Athletic Hall of Fame recognizes, promotes, and honors athletes, coaches, administrators, community members, and supporters who made significant contributions to the tradition of excellence at Masuk High School.

Ann Marie Odoy (CWBHOF High School Player, 1991) excelled in 4 sports at Masuk: field hockey, basketball, softball and tennis. Her play on the high school basketball court saw her score 2,138 points, voted All State 3 times, All League 4 times and honored as New York Daily News All Star and a Converse Academic All American. While at Boston College, she was a 1,000-point scorer, voted All Big East First Team, a Kodak All American, and upon graduation, was the Boston College Women's Basketball career leader in points, assists and steals.

Gail Strumpf Cheney (CWBHOF College Player, 2012) excelled in 2 sports at Masuk: basketball and softball. In basketball, she was voted to the All State and All League teams. At the end of her high school career, Gail compiled a 99-3 record, and is still Masuk's career leader in rebounds and blocks. While at Fairfield University, Gail helped her team participate in the Women's NIT and the NCAA Women's Basketball Tournaments. Gail is the all time career leading scorer at Fairfield, 2<sup>nd</sup> in rebounds and was voted All League and Player of the Year in the Conference her senior year.

Michelle Florin Custis (CWBHOF High School Player, 2017) excelled in 3 sports at Masuk: softball, soccer, and basketball. During her high school basketball career, the team won 3 league championships and was the undefeated state champions in 1995. Michelle earned All State honors and was voted Connecticut Post Player of the year. She is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading all time scorer in Masuk girls basketball with 1,814 points. While playing at the University of Richmond, Michelle was recognized as a Colonial Athletic Association scholar athlete.

Dave Strong (CWBHOF High School Coach, 2004) was the Athletic Director and coach for many girls' and boys' sports at Masuk from 1969-2011. In his 35 years as girls' varsity basketball head coach, his teams were Division Champions 22 times, League Champions 19 times, State Champions 3 times and State Runners-up 4 times, along the way amassing 704 wins, which is now tied for first (see article next page). Included in those 35 years were 7 undefeated regular seasons, 2 totally undefeated seasons, a #1 ranking at season end in New England, qualifying for the state tournament 35 years in a row, and a 93 game regular season winning streak.

In 2023, Laura DeGennaro Raftery (CWBHOF High School Player, 1999) was inducted into the Hamden High School Athletic Hall of Fame for basketball and softball. The hall of fame provides an opportunity for the Hamden Education Foundation to recognize outstanding athletes from Hamden High School. During her high school career, Laura averaged 20 ppg, totaling 1,331 points, while amassing 208 assists and 171 steals, setting records in her senior year for points (574), assists (96), and average ppg (29). Laura was named to the All-



District and All-State team and earned a full scholarship to Forham University.

## 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 2023 Brenda Reilly High School Basketball Award.

## News from the world of coaching

Tina Gonyea (CWBHOF High School Player, 2004) stepped down as Platt High School head girls' basketball coach (at the end of the 2022-2023 season), a position she held since 2011. Gonyea, who graduated in 1986, was the first 1,000-point scorer in Platt girls' basketball history. Although retired at the current time, Gonyea is leaving the door open for a possible return, to walking the sideline, down the road!



Queen Edwards Smith (CWBHOF College Player 2022) was named head women's basketball coach at Livingstone College, Salisbury, NC. Edwards Smith was a standout tri-sport athlete at Hillhouse High School and had a stellar collegiate career at Quinnipiac College. Her prior coaching experience includes head girls' basketball coach at Wilbur Cross High School from 1996-2007 and assistant coach for the Yale women's basketball program from 2007-11.



Edwards Smith earned her first collegiate head coaching win on Nov. 11<sup>th</sup>, defeating Bloomsburg University, 72-52. The team is 4-12 this season.

When Virginia State University women's basketball team defeated Chowan University (66-47) on Dec 30, 2023 (last game in 2023), Head Coach Nadine Domond (CWBHOF High School Player, 2022), in her 2<sup>nd</sup> year leading the Trojans, earned her 50<sup>th</sup> all time win! Congratulations! The team is 17-3 this season.



Tamra Gonyea, (CWBHOF Board of Directors - Social Media) joined the Lancers of Bristol Eastern High School, in 2023, as the girls' freshman basketball coach.



***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.

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.

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.

We are excited to recognize two recipients of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lee Franzman Team Recognition Award, the **2023 Connecticut Classics 2 Team** and the **1986 Westbrook High School Girls' Basketball Team**, coached by Pete Shuler. Each team will be honored at the 2024 induction ceremony being held on April 28, 2024.

L to R: Regina Trimboli, Hilda Redeem, Clare O'Neill, Lori Powers, June Walton, Jody Rajcula, Lynn Chiavaro, Karen Smith, Laurie Bliss



2023 National Champions, Pittsburg, PA

For the Connecticut Classics 2 Team, the "good old days" are now! The life long athletes on this senior women's basketball team are doing what they have always done...win, and win, and win! They are the reigning national champions (age group 65-69), having won the gold medal in 2023, 2022 (rescheduled from 2021), 2019, 2015, 2013 and took home a silver medal in 2017 at the National Senior Games, Women's Division I. In addition, they have won gold medals in as many state senior games as they participated. The National Senior Games are held every other year, with qualifying competitions in the year preceding the national event.

The next National Senior Games Division I (Age Group 65-69) tournament will be held in 2025 in Des Moines, Iowa (July 24<sup>th</sup> - Aug 5<sup>th</sup>). The records books have not yet been closed for these amazing athletes!



***Jennifer Rizzotti coaches U.S. women's 3x3 basketball team to gold medal***

The U.S. women's 3x3 basketball team, coached by Jennifer Rizzotti (CWBHOF College Player, 2001), won gold at the 2023 Pan American Games, in Santiago, Chile.

Having won NCAA and WNBA championships as a player and three world championships as a coach with Team USA's U-18 program, Rizzotti knows how to win. This year's team included two WNBA players, Azurá Stevens and Lexie Hull, along with Cierra Burdick and Blake Dietrick, two WNBA veterans who currently play for teams in Europe. The U.S. also won gold at Tokyo 2020 in the Olympics' first-ever 3x3 tournament.



Top Row L to R: Carolyn Nelsen, Wendy Hoyt, Jennifer Plancon, Cindy Mierzejewski, Kara Roy

Middle Row L to R: Barbara Kindt, Marielle Oetjen, Jody Kindt, Janet Sparaco, Laurie Brown

Bottom Row L to R: Sue McKenna (Capt.), Pamela Mitchell (Capt.), Joann Donnaruma (Capt.)

You don't have to be big to be good! Westbrook High School is one of the smallest schools in Connecticut but the impact and success the girl's basketball program has had on the state stage has been huge!!

Pete Shuler (CWBHOF High School Coach, 2000), who joined the Knights for the 1978 season, shepherded the Westbrook High School program to a record breaking 6 straight state titles from 1982-1987 (9 overall), with the 1986 team finishing with a record breaking 62 consecutive wins. Westbrook still holds the record for winning 27 straight tournament games! Four players from the 1986 team were All State players, Sue McKenna, Pam Mitchell, Jody Kindt, and Jennifer Plancon, and the team was voted # 2 in New England (averaging 64.1 points per game).

Following their 1986 state championship season, the players were honored with a parade through town, complete with their own basketball float!! Now that is the best way to travel!!

***Excellence Repeated!!***

Dave Strong's record setting mark of 704 wins as head girls' basketball coach at Masuk High School was surpassed in 2023 by Fred Williams (CWBHOF High School Coach 2017), head girls' basketball coach at Northwestern High School.



Fred Williams

Strong, who retired in 2011, coached at Masuk for 35 years and Williams has spent the past 45 years as head coach at Northwestern.



Dave Strong



**MARK YOUR CALENDARS**  
**2024 Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame Ceremony**

**Inductees:**

Stacey Porrini Clingan	Vickie Fulkerson
Kelly Coleman	Larry Savo
David Danko	Tracy Stolle
Paula Fitzgerald	

Sunday, April 28, 2024  
 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.

**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](mailto:david.strong@snet.net).



**New Banquet "Luncheon" Location in 2024**

**Our CWBHOF Induction Banquet (Luncheon) is moving to a new venue this spring. We're very excited to bring our celebration to the Aqua Turf Club in Plantsville, CT. Looking forward to welcoming everyone in April....new spot...same very special memorable gathering!**



***A TIME TO HONOR***

A memorial service will be held for Louise O'Neal, legendary basketball coach, athletic administrator, and a life-long advocate for advancing opportunities for girls and women in sports, on Sunday, April 21<sup>st</sup> at 2:00pm at the Moore Field House at Southern Connecticut State University. For more information, contact Barbara Chesler at [Chesler@snet.net](mailto:Chesler@snet.net).

**NEW RULE CHANGE**  
**2023-2024 H.S.**  
**Basketball Season**

by Pam Moffo



The 2023-2024 high school basketball season has brought a rule change that will most certainly alter team strategies, preparation and skill building in a big way. The era of a 35 second shot clock in Connecticut, for both girls and boys teams, is officially underway! In a trend that has gained momentum across the country, Connecticut is one of five states to incorporate a shot clock this year. CT, Idaho, Minnesota, North Carolina and Oregon joined nine other states that added a clock in 2022-2023. There are now 27 state associations that utilize some type of shot clock. In CT, using the shot clock is required at the varsity level, but optional for both the JV and freshman teams.

Speeding up the game, eliminating "the stall", creating possible blowouts, better preparing players for "next level" opportunities ..... coaches shared many thoughts regarding this new rule in the preseason. What do you think? Hope you'll attend a game and check it out!

**Baskets aren't just for peaches!!**



**Basket Ball**



***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.