

CENTER COURT

February, 2023

Newsletter of the Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame

A Message from the Executive Director.....

It's been quite a year! We've witnessed amazing accomplishments, welcomed the return of our annual induction ceremony and shared the sadness of loss.

Our UCONN women's team, in spite of being plagued with significant injuries throughout last season, treated us to a terrific performance in the NCAA Tournament. With dramatic victories over NC State and Stanford, they reached the finals. Despite losing to a tough South Carolina team in the championship game, UCONN once again demonstrated why they are one of the top programs in the country.

Speaking of UCONN, former CWBHOF inductee, Maria Conlon, led her Notre Dame of Fairfield High School team to a state championship, while another, Jen Rizzotti, was named president of our WNBA team, the Connecticut Sun. In addition, Jen was recently inducted into the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame in Hartford.

After a two-year hiatus, we warmly welcomed old friends and new to our 2022 banquet. Everyone in attendance was so excited! We discovered that many of the careers of our newest inductees had actually crossed paths. There truly was a special feeling surrounding all of us that evening. In fact, many described it as "magical".

This past year also brought the passing of several of our hall of fame inductees. Sadly we lost Heather Smith, who also served as a member of our executive board; Coach Louise O'Neal; and referee Joan Joyce.

The brand new Lee Franzman Team Recognition Award will be presented for the first time this year! Thanks to Dave Strong and his committee for their hard work in the establishment of this very special honor. Bernice Nicolari's 1976 state championship Shelton girls' basketball team will be the inaugural recipient.

Finally, we are very excited to announce something new concerning our induction ceremony. After 34 years of mid-week, evening gatherings, we welcome you all to join us for a Sunday afternoon celebration! We are looking forward to providing more time for our HOF family, friends and newest inductees to visit.

Please check our website at www.cwbhof.com for additional luncheon details and information about our 2023 inductees. Hoping to see you at noon on Sunday, April 23, at Cascade in Hamden. It will be special!



Linda J. Wooster,
President/Executive
Director/Founder

Louise Albrecht,
Vice President/Treasurer/
Founder

Ann V. Fariss, PhD
Co-Banquet Coordinator/
Founder

Tony Candido,
Fundraising Chair/
Founder

Brenda Reilly, PhD
Founder (Posthumous)

Cyndie Adamski,
Nomination Committee Chair

David Strong,
Historian/Archivist

Marge Dolan,
Banquet MC

Sue Crisafi,
Secretary

Tracey Finer,
Creative Writer/Newsletter
Editor

Tina Gonyea,
Co-Banquet Coordinator

Pamela Moffo,
Program Editor

Tamra Gonyea,
Social Media

Shari Barnhart,
Webmaster

Tracey Flynn,
Special Projects

Just in case you missed it!



4.85 million viewers watched the 2022 South Carolina vs. UConn women's national championship making it the most-watched college basketball game on ESPN, men's or women's, since 2008.



The Landmark Connecticut Lawsuit: Title IX and Title VII "Lea Dickson, Barbara Hall, and The Stratford Education Association vs. The Stratford Board of Education, et al can be found on the CWBHOF website.



Sue Bird retired in 2022 after 549 career starts (WNBA all time leader), all with the Seattle Storm. Bird was the 1st overall draft pick in 2002 and won four WNBA Championships, played in 12 All Star games, and won four consecutive Olympic gold medals for U.S. women's basketball.



Joe Frager, Head Coach of the Fairfield University Women's Basketball team, retired at the end of the 2021-2022 season. Frager ended his career with 454 wins over 24 seasons, at both Fairfield University and Southern Connecticut (where he won a Division II National Championship.)



CWBHOF Inductees Honored



Six past Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Famers were honored by the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame at the 29th Annual Induction Ceremony and Celebration Women in Sports on October 20, 2022. The 2022 Spotlight Recipients were Kara Wolters (2008, College Player), Carol Stiff (2005, Honorary), Lauren Anderson (2012, Honorary), Maria Conlon (2006, High School Player), and Heather Buck (2018, High School Player). Jennifer Rizzotti (2001, College Player) was honored as a hall of fame inductee.



Tina Gonyea (2004, High School Player), Platt High School Girls' Basketball Coach and member of CWBHOF Board of Directors, was selected to receive the Saint Clare Award, the most prestigious female award presented by the Franciscan Life Center. Gonyea was the first female 1,000-point scorer in Platt girls' basketball history and was a 13-year

Panthers' assistant coach before assuming head coach responsibilities in 2011. Gonyea graduated from Platt in 1986 where she played three sports — soccer, basketball and softball — and earned All-State honors in all three. She was the first Platt athlete to earn that distinction.

Gonyea played college basketball at Keene State where she eclipsed 1,000 points and helped the Division II program win ECAC championships in 1988 and 1989. By graduation in 1990, Gonyea was Keene State's all-time career assists and steals leader. She is a member of Keene State's Hall of Fame individually and as a part of a team.

Gonyea has also been inducted into the Platt Hall of Fame and the Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, the New Haven Tap Off Club Hall of Fame and the New England Basketball Hall of Fame. Of the Saint Clare Award, Sister Barbara Johnson, of the Franciscan Order, indicated that Tina's concern for developing her student-athletes was one of the primary reasons for her receiving the award. Tina "was so clear that this is why she coaches. She wants to build them up and then build a good team." Tina indicated that it was because of her strong family unit and "their support that I was able to accomplish this, as well as having great coaches in high school and college. This is all happening because of them. It's about having a great support system."



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 **Notre Dame of Fairfield High School Girls' Basketball Team** was awarded the 2023 Brenda Reilly High School Basketball Award.



SCSU Celebrates 50 years of Title IX with three Hall of Famers

Southern CT State University celebrated 50 years of Title IX with a panel presentation which featured three CWBHOF inductees: Carolyn Vanacore was the honorary host of the event; panelists included Donna Lopiano and Lauren Anderson. Other panelists included Linda Wooster, CWBHOF Executive Director; Felice Duffy, Title IX Attorney; Kelly Frasinelli, SCSU Senior Woman Administrator.

"All in the Family"

Three Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Famers kick off Quinnipiac Women's Basketball Season:

- Quinnipiac Head Coach Tricia Fabbri
- National Hall of Famer Jennifer Rizzotti (guest speaker) - Jen's husband is the Quinnipiac Women's Assistant Coach
- Dianne Nolan - Radio announcer for Quinnipiac games and Tricia's college coach

IN MEMORIUM

By Linda Wooster

The question is not whether we will die, but how we will live. – Joan Borysenko

HEATHER CONWAY SMITH

Heather Conway Liberman Smith, a member of the Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame and its Board of Directors, passed in May, 2022.

Heather grew up in Orange, CT, and attended Amity High School, Duke University and Georgetown University. As a young girl, Heather was introduced to basketball through her father, who coached her recreation team. In high school, she set a school record of 723 rebounds in her two years as a varsity center, tallied 862 career points, and was one of the captains of the Connecticut Junior Olympic Team in New Orleans. In the Class LL State Championship, she scored the basket that sent the game into overtime and ended the game with 24 points, 15 rebounds, 5 blocked shots, and a state title. She was named MVP for the tournament. When she graduated from Amity she earned a full scholarship to Duke University -- the first time such an offer had been made to a female athlete.

In 1983, she married Ken Liberman and raised Ken's son, Ari, and their children Sarah and Kyle in Trumbull, CT. Heather stayed active in sports through her children. She co-founded the Trumbull Recreation Girls' Basketball League and the Trumbull Travel Basketball program. Heather was never happier than when she was with her kids doing the activities that they loved.

She worked for Yale University as a Communications Coordinator at Yale Health until her retirement. Aside from her job at Yale, Heather was a talented photographer and ran her own business as a photographer. Heather loved the ocean and never missed a summer at the beach. She was an excellent gardener and cook and hosted many joyful gatherings throughout the years. She was a lifelong Giants and Yankees fan. She was the first and last one on the dance floor and had a fantastic sense of humor. Heather loved to laugh.

Heather loved fiercely, laughed loudly, smiled often, marched proudly, and swore elegantly. She brought her joy for life and wonderful writing skills to our CWBHOF Board of Directors where she served as our webmaster. She is sorely missed.



LOUISE O'NEAL

Louise O'Neal, one of the most prominent figures in women's basketball in Connecticut, passed in September, 2022. O'Neal led both Southern Connecticut and Yale to prominence in the 1970s before embarking on a successful career in athletic administration.



O'Neal developed Southern Connecticut Women's Basketball program into a national power in the 1960s and 70s with a pressing style of defense and fast break offense ahead of its time. She led the Owls to a 144-37 record from 1962 to 1976 and eight straight appearances in the National women's collegiate championships. She then coached the Yale women's basketball team to its only Ivy League championship in 1979.

At Southern Connecticut, O'Neal's teams advanced to all six national collegiate championships in the AIAW, advancing to four final fours and finishing third nationally among all divisions in 1971, 73 and 74. Two of her players at Southern, Mary Anne O'Connor and Sue Rojcewicz, competed for the 1976 U.S. Olympic team.

O'Neal was a member of the National Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, the New England Basketball Hall of Fame, the Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, and several others.

JOAN JOYCE

Joan Joyce is recognized as one of the most incredible female athletes of all time and leaves behind an indelible mark on women's athletics -- creating a legacy that was instrumental in bringing women's athletics into the public spotlight.

In basketball, Joyce was a four time Women's Basketball Association (WBA) All-American and a three time AAU All-American. In 1964, she set a national tournament single-game scoring record (67 points) and played on the 1965 U.S. National Team. Joyce was a highly regarded basketball official from 1958-1972. She officiated several CIAC State Tournament games and three AIAAW national championship games.

Joan was probably better known for her accomplishments on the softball field. She was Head Coach at Florida Atlantic University for 28 years and played for the Raybestos Brakettes for 19 seasons. Joyce was an 8-time National Tournament MVP and was inducted into the National Softball Hall of Fame in 1983.

Joyce was also a 19-year member of the LPGA Tour from 1977-1995. She was the player/coach for the U.S. Volleyball Assoc. CT Clippers and competed in four National Tournaments. She finished 3rd in the balloting for Athletes of the Millennium in Connecticut.





MARK YOUR CALENDARS

2023 Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame Ceremony

Inductees:

Angela Mele Craig	Roger Gautrau
DaShena Stevens	Sandra Hamm
Dave Shea	Symone Roberts

When: April 23, 2023
 Where: CASCADE (Hamden, CT)
 Reception: 12:00 p.m.
 Luncheon: 1:00 p.m.

Contribution to the CauseThe CWBHOFF 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. CWBHOFF is a Section 501C (3) TAX ORGANIZATION FOR FEDERAL INCOME TAX PURPOSES. Certain Contributions to CWBHOFF MAY BE deductible to the person making the contribution. The CWBHOFF 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.



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

The Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame has instituted a new team recognition award named in honor of Lee Franzman, chair of the CWBHOFF nominating committee, who 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.)

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 thrilled to announce that the **1976 Shelton High School Girls' Basketball Team** coached by Bernice Nicolari is the recipient of the 1st Lee Franzman Team Recognition Award. The team will be honored at the 2023 induction ceremony being held on April 23, 2023.

In 1976, the Shelton High School Girls' Basketball team earned the CIAC LL State Championship with a victory over Lee High School of New Haven, which was the first state basketball championship won by any Shelton Gaelettes' basketball team. The team finished the season with 23 wins and 1 loss, earning their eighth straight Housatonic League Championship. On the 40th anniversary of their state championship in 2016, the team was honored by the mayor of Shelton, Mark Lauretti, who said of the players and coaches, "they were pioneers for women's sports and helped to lead the way for future women athletes in Shelton." When expressing her deep appreciation for being honored by the town, Bernice Nicolari, team's head coach from 1962 to 1979, stated, "her 1976 team took home the state title thanks to good players who had work ethics to match their talents."

Nomination forms are on the website and can be sent to David Strong, 15 Old Middle Road Turnpike, Woodbury, CT, 06798.



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.