



Honoring the Past to Inspire the Future

Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame
Foundation Newsletter – Summer 2018

The exhibit hall's summer, June 1 to Sept. 1, are:
10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesdays and Fridays



The track and cross country exhibit, like all of our exhibits, is constantly being updated and improved. Visitors can gain an appreciation for the state-record efforts of Nebraska's high school students as well as the changes and improvements in equipment used throughout the history of the events.



Our website: www.nebhalloffame.org

Nomination forms
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Hall selects 25th induction class

LINCOLN -- Major League All-Star Alex Gordon highlights the 25th induction class of the Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame Foundation.

The Lincoln Southeast graduate, along with 11 other athletes, five coaches, two contributors and one official will be inducted Sept. 23 at Lincoln East High School.

This year's inductees are:

■ ATHLETES

Rik Bonness, Bellevue East (1973): He was a two-time all-state selection in football for the Chieftains, and a two-time All-American at center for the Nebraska Cornhuskers. He played five years in the NFL.

Richard Brown, Omaha South (1958): A four-time finalist and three-time state wrestling champion, he played halfback and cornerback on the Packers' mythical state champions of 1957.

Alex Gordon, Lincoln Southeast (2002): The Prep Athlete of the Year as a senior, the future major league all-star was a three-year all-state and the Gatorade Player of the Year in baseball and all-class all-state in football. At NU, he led the Huskers to their first College World Series appearance and was the consensus Player of the Year in 2005.

Tom Heller, Kearney High (1967): The 1967 Athlete of the Year, he was the first Kearney High football player to rush for 1,000 yards, earning all-state honors. He also earned all-state honors in basketball and qualified for the state track meet. At Nebraska, he was a part-time starter as a sophomore before joining the navy.

Christina (Houghtelling) Hudson, Cambridge (2003): A four-year letterwinner in volleyball, basketball and track, she achieved all-class all-state honors in volleyball and basketball and won three all-class gold medals in track. She lettered four times for the NU volleyball team and was the National Player of the Year in 2005.

Trevor Johnson, Lincoln Northeast (1999): All-state in

football and basketball and an all-class gold medalist in the discus, he helped the Rockets to three straight basketball championships then went on to play football at Nebraska, where he was a four-year letterman. He played four years in the NFL.

Keith Jones, Omaha Central (1984): Breaking records set by Gale Sayers, Jones ran for 1,700 yards and 18 touchdowns as a senior. He helped Central to back-to-back state track titles, winning the 200 in 1984. As a Husker, "End Zone" Jones rushed for 32 touchdowns and nearly 2,500 yards.

Janet (Kruse) Sellon, Blair (1987): A four-year letterman in volleyball, a three-year starter in basketball and four-year state qualifier in track, she became a three-year starter and a four-time letterwinner for the Cornhusker volleyball team. She was Nebraska's first three-time All-American.

Jack McCartney, North Platte (1944): A track standout, winning all-class gold medals in the broad jump and 220-yard dash, "Bullet Jack" earned all-state honors in football and a three-year basketball letterman.

Ben Plucknett, Beatrice (1972): The American record holder in the discus, "Big Ben" won the all-class gold medal in the shot put and discus at the state meet in 1972. At the University of Missouri, he won three Big Eight discus championships.

Danis (Richards) Willett, Benkelman (1975): A four-time Class C gold medalist in the 440-yard dash, she won the all-class gold medal in 1974 and 1975. At Kearney State College, she ranked in the top 25 of all collegiate runners in the 400.

Katie (Robinette) Kock, South Sioux City (2001): A four-time all-state basketball player, she led the Cardinals to a 102-5 record and three state championships

during her career. She played collegiately at Nebraska and Iowa State, earning All-Big 12 second-team honors as a senior for the Cyclones.

■ COACHES

Max Kurz

Millard West: During his 47-year tenure at Millard, Millard South and Millard West, his cross country teams won three state champion-

ships and finished in the top 21 top-four finishes. His boys track team claimed one title and seven top-four finishes. He was named the Metro Conference track and cross country coach of the year 14 times.

Duane Mendlik, Wisner-Pilger: He has compiled 650 victories coaching boys basketball at West Point Central Catholic and Wisner-Pilger high schools. His West Point CC teams won back-to-back state titles in 1998 and 1999.

Russ Ninemire, Sandy Creek: The architect of the Cougars' dynasty that includes a 95-game win streak and 10 state championships, Ninemire departed from the program with 583 coaching victories.

Rochelle Rohfs, Omaha Marian: Her run as volleyball coach of the Crusaders has included four state championships, four other state finals appearances and 718 victories. Her teams have qualified for the state tournament in 21 of 26 years.

Diane Rouzee, Grand Island Northwest: Her 30 years as head coach of the Vikings produced three state championships, six runner-up finishes, 23 trips to the state tournament and 768 victories.

■ CONTRIBUTORS

Don "Tot" Holmes, Gothenburg: As the sports editor of the Tri-City Tribune, Holmes developed the paper into the center of attention for the Southwest and Hi-Line Conferences. An avid

sports fan and historian, he has written books covering 100-year histories of Gothenburg football and track.

Bob Whitehouse, Omaha: Recently inducted into the National High School Athletic Directors Hall of Fame, Whitehouse has been a coach and administrator since 1967. He has served on the Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame Foundation since 1995, serving as President for six years.

■ OFFICIAL

Dick Morrissey, Omaha: Officiating from 1972-2013, Morrissey worked approximately 300 football and 1,300 basketball games. He refereed five state championship basketball games and was selected to work playoff games in 20 years.

■ HONOREES

In addition to the inductees, the all honors people, teams and programs for exceptional performances in and around high school sports. This year's honorees are:

Great Moments in Sports: Friend High School football, 1933, completed a 6-0 record playing 11-man football with only 11 players on the roster.

Dominant Dynasty: Spencer-Naper boys basketball team, 1999-2007, compiled a 216-19 record including a 56-game winning streak, two state championships and three runner-up finishes.

Ron Gustafson Inspiration Award: Sam Schukei, a senior at Kenesaw High School who lost his lower left leg in a lawn mower accident at age six, but is a four-year letterman in football, played basketball and qualified for the state track meet in the discus.

Fischer Family Award: Del and Marilyn Stracke Family of Stuart.

Golden Anniversary Team: Aurora football, of 1968.

Golden Anniversary Team: Valentine wrestling of 1968-69.

Silver Anniversary Team: Deshler Girls Basketball of 1993-94.

Silver Anniversary Team: Hastings Football, 1993.

NU's first 3-time volleyball All-American credits prep roots

When Janet (Kruse) Sellon reflects back on her high school and collegiate athletic experiences, she sees a common theme that echoes throughout both.

As a student athlete at Blair High School and then at the University of Nebraska, "I had many unique opportunities," said Sellon, who became Nebraska Volleyball's first 3-time All-American.

"Playing on successful teams at both levels allowed me to have life experiences that many don't always get," Sellon said without hesitating to point out the most important part of her success.

"The relationships and friendships that I made along the way helped me continue throughout my life," Sellon said, pointing out that her favorite high school volleyball memory was playing in the 1987 Class B championship match with her sister, Jodi.

Janet was a middle blocker and her sister was the setter. "We had a natural connection because of our relationship off the court," Janet said. "That bond made it especially rewarding to be able to play with Jodi and get to experience both the wins and the losses together.

"That's something I will always cherish," Janet said. "Being in a class B school, I was able to play volleyball and basketball and run track. I thoroughly enjoyed the transition from one sport to the next, and



Janet (Kruse) Sellon

I know that each sport made me a better competitor and a better athlete.

"The town of Blair has such a great support of their high school teams, and I feel fortunate to have had the teachers, coaches, and mentors to help guide me through that stage in life," Sellon said.

When she decided to play volleyball at Nebraska "I was able to experience college with an instant group of friends," she said. "We spent countless hours training and playing together, so you would think we would want to avoid each other outside the Coliseum, but it was actually quite the opposite. Being able to travel throughout the country playing volleyball was amazing. My favorite college memory is when we played in the Final

Four in Hawaii. That year was unusual because Hawaii was always so strong, but they ended up not making it to the final four. So when we arrived, the locals adopted us as their home team, called us the "Wahine Huskers" and even had shirts made up for us. They had huge crowds at their volleyball matches, and so it was awesome to compete in front of such a large crowd cheering for us! We ended up beating UCLA in the semifinals, but eventually lost to Long Beach in the Championship match. But overall, that experience was one of my favorites. I was fortunate to have great mentors throughout college, training under Terry Pettit and current husker coach John Cook who was then our assistant coach. I'd have to say the friendships made during those years as a Husker were strong, and that is what I cherish the most as I go through life. It really is the people you meet along the way that make life special, and I am extremely thankful I had the opportunity to compete and study at such a great University. I went on to study medicine at UNMC and then completed my residency in Family Medicine at Lincoln Medical Education Foundation. I now currently live and practice medicine here in Lincoln with my husband Dan, my daughter Addy who will be a junior at UNL, and my twins Barrett and Braden who will be seniors at Lincoln East this fall.

From the President ...

Remembering: Johnny Goodman

This year's U.S. Open Golf Tournament, held in June at the Shinnecock Hills Golf Club in Southampton, N.Y., will mark the 85th anniversary of Johnny Goodman's victory in the U.S. Open. At the time of his victory, the 24-year-old Goodman was an amateur golfer.



Johnny Goodman

Four other golfers had won the U.S. Open as amateurs before Johnny's win, but no amateur has won the U.S. Open since Johnny won the title at the North Shore Golf Club near Chicago in 1933.

Johnny was born in 1909 in South Omaha, (its own city at that time until being annexed by Omaha in 1916).

Johnny attended South High School, graduating in 1927. During his years at South, Johnny caddied at the Field Club, played amateur golf, and won the amateur City Championship in 1925 at the age of 16.

Beginning in 1929, at the age of 19, he won three consecutive Nebraska Amateur titles and the Trans-Mississippi Amateur title three times. Johnny served in the Army during WWII and turned pro in 1960.

Johnny died in South Gate, Calif., in 1970, at the age of 61.

This Nebraska athlete and Hall of Famer's major golf accomplishment was winning the U.S. Open as an amateur, an achievement that has not been matched for 85 years.

— HOF Foundation President Pat Salerno
Reference Source: Wikipedia

**Hall of Fame Induction ceremony, Sunday, Sept. 23, at Lincoln East
Social Hour begins at noon.
Ceremony starts at 1:30 p.m.**



Informative wraps help guide visitors through the Hall of Fame.

From the Executive Director ...

You can help us in many ways

Many NHSSHOFF patrons are familiar with the Uncle Sam "I WANT YOU" posters which originated as a way to recruit U.S. for both World War I and World War II. At the Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame today, "WE WANT YOU"! Many opportunities exist for your participation, and among them are the following:

1. WE WANT YOU to host meetings at the HOF. We are available to host breakfasts, brunches or luncheons. In the past year, we have hosted such groups as the Lincoln Executive Club, Sowers Club, Chamber of Commerce Young Professionals, NU Foundation and the University of Nebraska Board of Regents. We would love to add your group to the list of those that we have hosted for informative and enter-

taining meetings at our exhibit hall!

2. WE WANT YOU to visit the hall of fame with friends and family. In addition to numerous inductees, the NHSSHOFF exhibit hall has seen a large increase in people from all around the state coming to see what we have to offer. When you are visiting Lincoln (or live in close proximity), please make time to stop by and see our progress, while learning about the great stories from our state's sports history!

3. WE WANT YOU to visit our new website. Just go to www.nebhall-offame.org to check out all of the great things that are happening at the Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame. Also, if you are a teacher (or know a teacher) and want some great ideas for lesson plans that are

aligned with state standards, make sure to look at the link to curriculum on our website.

4. WE WANT YOU to help us spread the new goods about the Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame Foundation. Word of mouth has proven to be one of the best ways for us to attract visitors to our exhibit hall. Let the folks in your community (including school groups) know what a great opportunity they have by coming to spend some time in our interactive and educational venue!

Our exhibit hall is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., or by appointment. You can contact us via email at nhshoff@gmail.com or by phone at 402-476-4767.

We look forward to hearing from you soon!



D. Graham of Kearney (No. 148) is pictured playing against Lincoln High in the 1930 state basketball tournament. Players were issued individual numbers like today's track meets.

From the Assistant Ex. Director ...

Hall of Fame home of many of sports' forgotten treasures

Somewhere out there...

The history of high school sports in Nebraska is an ongoing story that grows each and every season. No matter the size of the school you attended, all those who participated have contributed in ways large or small to that continuing story.

One of the great events in high school sports history was the evolution of the state boys' basketball tournament. Beginning in 1911 and consisting of 20 teams, the tournament grew in size and format. Its peak years were 1926-1928 and earned the title of "The World's Largest Basketball Tournament." Tracing participation numbers from the first year of 20 teams, the tournament peaked at 339 teams divided into 22 classes in 1926. Each of the 22 classes consisted of a 16-team bracket and meant that a total of 15 games were needed to determine a champion. If you multiply the number of games in a bracket times the 22 classes, the result is a total of 330 games were on tap for the three-day tournament. That is a lot of jump balls, a rule which was implemented after every made basket.

Of interest in looking at rosters from past programs is that, unlike today, jersey numbers were not listed for each of the participants. Based on early programs, participants were assigned a number that was to be displayed on the back of the player's pants. As an example, in 1926

#1 was assigned to H. Whyman of Adams, and #2911 was assigned to G. Randall of Gering. It appears that by 1934 the practice of consecutive numbers for all teams involved was altered so that each team would receive numbers, for example 1-10 or 32-38. The practice of using actual jersey numbers appears in the 1935 program.

This method of identifying players in the tournament is just one of many memories that lend to the evolution of basketball history. Our hope is that somewhere out there one of these numbers still exists - - maybe in the bottom of a chest or dusty box. It is a true reminder of the thrill a young man experienced playing in "The World's Largest Basketball Tournament."

- Mike Rasmussen

NSAA enabled Hall to honor past, inspire future

Two decades ago, an unexpected driving force helped make the Nebraska High School Sports Foundation Hall of Fame a reality.

"We were thinking about building something on or near Nebraska Fairgrounds, but didn't have any money, so everything was put on hold," Dick Beechner recalled.

A Lincoln native and former college football coach, Beechner was the first executive director of the Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame, so he spearheaded the effort to find the initial headquarters.

Four pioneering teammates collaborated with Beechner on a collective decision:

1) the late Wally McNaught, high school basketball coach at Lincoln Southeast.

2) Dennis Smith, Papillion administrator who managed the Hall-of-Fame's finances.

3) Bob Whitehouse, who served two terms as the Hall's president and is the chairman of the university's Board of Regents.

4) Steve Johnsen, then executive director of the Nebraska Coaches Association.

Beechner and fellow founders sought the perfect place to showcase their vision that would enable the Hall of Fame to honor the past and inspire the future and connect with the Nebraska School Activities Association.

"One of the greatest things that happened was the NSAA was building its headquarters across the street from Nebraska's basketball and softball stadiums," Beechner said.

Fortunately, NSAA Executive Director Jim Tenopir had a timely solution: Why not put both high school-related organizations under the same roof?

"Jim offered us 7,000 square feet of the building . . . We thought it was a great idea and eventually it became the perfect



The Hall of Fame will soon have an interactive volleyball game for young and old alike. Participants can measure their volleyball skills in a quick and fun contest.

place for us," Beechner said.

Unfortunately, those square feet were vacant for several years before the Hall found the funds to build something that would attract sports fans from across the state.

In analyzing the six states that surround Nebraska, Beechner realized that no border state set its sights exclusively on high school sports.

McNaught spearheaded a specific sports spotlight approach because Nebraska fans are unique in their support of all sports.

"Wally definitely had a dream," Beechner said. "Wally's vision got everyone going and spearheaded what we really wanted to do."

McNaught's vision was to walk into a football, basketball or other exhibit and immediately say WOW, simply because the experience was fun and interactive.

The dream did not become reality until an anonymous donor gave the Hall of Fame \$300,000. The idea reinforced credibility and helped McNaught's vision become the Hall-of-Fame standard.

"Everyone respected Wally

as a coach and as an athletic director," Beechner said. "What he did to showcase everything we have means so much to so many."

"I've been to the NCAA Hall of Fame in Indianapolis and to the Texas Hall of Fame in Waco, and I don't see our Hall of Fame as second to anyone," Beechner said. "We are as good, if not better than all of the Halls of Fames I've visited."

Let the record show that it has not been easy to reach that high standard.

Receiving funds to meet high standards requires rigor, passion and generosity.

"We are unique for several reasons, and one of the best, if not the best, is doing everything The Nebraska Way," Beechner said. "That's what this state stands for, and we are very appreciative that our football exhibit honors Tom Osborne."

"Tom was a great athlete, coach and athletic director. He's a Hall of Famer in every sense and an iconic figure in our Hall of Fame."

Osborne embraced rural Nebraska student-athletes and the Hall has the same conviction.

"At one time, Nebraska had

nearly a thousand schools. Now we have less than 300," Beechner said. "Every school in this state has a history and our kiosk recognizes every single high school before and after they were consolidated."

Another highlight of anyone's visit to the Hall of Fame is the timeline, which Assistant Executive Director Mike Rassmusen calls the "crown jewel" of the exhibits.

"Mike was a history teacher, and he's done a great job bringing Nebraska high school sports history to life," Beechner said.

The Hall "depicts everything that's gone on through the years, decade after decade," Beechner said. "From Day 1, we knew how important the NSAA is, and we were honored when they invited us to be tenants in their new building."

"We're the facilitators for the Hall of Fame," Beechner added. "It's not our Hall of Fame. It's the state of Nebraska's Hall of Fame. Every coach thinks his or her sport is major, and we try to approach it the same way. We do not want to shortchange anyone. It's all important."

The Hall's next major milestone will showcase high school volleyball, another iconic state-wide program.

"Volleyball has so much prestige in Nebraska. . . . Our state is unique nationally in the way we watch, keep track of and compete at volleyball's highest level," Beechner said. "Everyone is very proud about Nebraska's prestige in a very popular and powerful sport. We need help from all our donors to help showcase Nebraska's incredible success in volleyball."

While we have yet to see the final product, one thing is for certain.

When Nebraska fans check it out, they will say one very simple word when they become part of the experience.

WOW!

High School volleyball, basketball jamborees benefit our Hall of Fame



Step onto the wrestling mat, or better yet the medals podium, that are part of the wrestling exhibit at our Hall of Fame.

Who we induct:

The Hall of Fame inductees are selected from the following categories:

- Athletes who enjoyed outstanding high school careers in Nebraska.

- Pioneering athletes of Nebraska high school athletics.

- Athletes who have made significant impact on their chosen field or society after completion of their high school career.

- Administrators, coaches, officials and community members who have made significant contributions to high school athletics.

Nomination forms are available at our website: www.nebhalloffame.org.

Our annual induction ceremony is in late September.

Please feel free to share this newsletter with as many high school sports fans as possible by placing it in an accessible area.

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