



Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame Foundation

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A MANN FOR EVERY SEASON:

Les Mann played 16 seasons in major-league baseball while coaching college basketball and football in his off-season. **PAGE 3**



2018 HALL OF FAME INDUCTION CEREMONY

‘This is really about the memories as much as the honor’

BY CHUCK JOHNSTON

Executive Director

The NHSSHOFF recently celebrated its 25th induction ceremony anniversary, as it now has 513 individuals who have been honored as athletes, coaches, officials and contributors. Among the common themes of the Class of 2018 during their acceptance speeches were the following:

FAMILY

Every honoree talked about the importance of their immediate family and relatives, and several referred to their high school teammates as family. Christina (Houghtelling) Hudson’s reference of many late night frozen pizzas with her family after games showed the sacrifices and joy that families experience as they go through their journey together. Trevor Johnson’s personal story about having a learning disability and a father who told him that “Only special people have these kinds of weaknesses so they can become strengths.” was impactful, as it should be noted that he later became Academic All Conference at NU.

COACH

Max Kurz and Russ Ninemire specifically discussed how important it was to them to be called that simple word. As they grew into their roles as mentors to thousands of young people over the course of their careers, nothing meant more to them than just the title of being called “coach.” Duane Mendlik is currently in the midst of his FORTY EIGHTH year as a teacher/coach. To put that into perspective, a “rookie” teacher/coach this year would still be working in the 2066-67 school year in order to match his longevity!

Ninemire and Diane Rouzee spoke

about combining family and coaching, as they talked about coaching their own sons and daughters. Diane also put into words what many have seen during their high school years, as she said “I am a good teacher, so I’m a good coach.”

In addition, Alex Gordon (via video) stressed the importance of all of his coaches at Lincoln Southeast, including his assistant/position coaches. He mentioned family, as well – saying how important it was to be able to play with his brother during part of his high school career.

HUMOR

Most of the inductees had at least some humorous recollections of their high school careers, and brought to light the fact that we all sometimes take ourselves too seriously. Of particular note was Aurora coach Rollie Carter (from the 1968 honored Golden Anniversary team) receiving a game ball from quarterback Skip Tredway. His response was “thanks Skip - first time we had you with a football when you didn’t fumble it.” Contributor Tot Holmes’ comment that “If my mom and dad were here, my dad would have loved this if my mom would have believed it.” also brought a chuckle to many in the audience.

Among other highlights were: Rik Bonness reminiscing about his dreams of just playing under the lights at Bellevue High on a crisp autumn evening, Richard Brown talking about the importance of fundamentals taught at Omaha South, Keith Jones speaking about the importance of support – but more importantly having people to challenge you, Janet Kruse discussing small towns and that connection to athletics, Katie Robinette and her



Alex Gordon’s Lincoln Southeast High School uniform on display at the hall.

story about not just being willing but also able to reach your goals, and former Valentine High wrestling coach Mo Tehrani detailing his personal journey from Iran to the US and ultimately coaching the Valentine High honored 1968 state championship wrestling team.

NHSSHOFF induction ceremonies are always filled with stories that not only have impacted the honorees, but also are meaningful to those in attendance. As Bob Siegel (induction class of 1996 honoree) once said while visiting the exhibit hall “You know, this is really about the memories as much as the honor.” The 2018 induction ceremony certainly reflected that sentiment, and the board of directors is appreciative of all who helped to further our mission of “Honoring the Past to Inspire the Future.”

Les Mann played in baseball's major leagues, then coached college sports in his spare time



Les Mann (with ball) shows off the football skills that made an admirer of the legendary Jim Thorpe.

BY CHUCK JOHNSTON

Executive Director

Imagine playing a major league baseball season and following that up with coaching college football and/or basketball at the same time! That's exactly what 2002 NHSSHOFF inductee Les Mann did in the early 1900s.

NHSSHOFF assistant director Mike Rasmussen often comments that "every day around here seems like Christmas" when we are honored to receive various memorabilia items. This was never more evident than when a recent visit by the grandson of 2002 inductee Les Mann brought several "presents" to be highlighted in the exhibit hall.

Mann, a 1912 Lincoln High graduate, is certainly one of the all-time great athletes that Nebraska has ever produced. Les competed in football (a standout before there were all-state teams), basketball (starred on three straight conference title

teams), and track (state champion in the 220), but his most notable accomplishments occurred in baseball.

In a time when rules about professional athletes were different, Les was able to attend Springfield (Massachusetts) College and compete in football (nominated for All-American) while also playing professional baseball. In a game against Carlisle and the great Jim Thorpe, Mann excelled enough that Thorpe said of Mann "You changed the whole outcome of our game offensively and defensively. We were lucky to win."

Mann began his professional baseball career with the Boston Braves in 1913, and was one of the heroes of their 1914 world championship season. Eventually playing almost 1,500 games from 1913 to 1928 for several major league teams, he compiled a career batting average of .282 with more than 500 RBI's.

His baseball accomplishments alone are noteworthy. However, what is even more eye-opening is that during that professional career, he was head basketball coach at Rice (1919-20 season), Indiana (1922-24) and Springfield College (1924-25). He was also an assistant football coach at Indiana and Springfield during his tenure at those two schools! Remember, this is while he was playing at the highest professional level during the spring through early fall seasons.

Les' grandson brought various photos and a scrapbook from the early 1900s to our hall of fame for safekeeping at the exhibit hall. We are honored to be able to display much of this in an exhibit that will honor one of the most highly decorated athletes our state has ever produced. His eclectic career, in fact, will likely never be replicated in today's era of specialization in athletics.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

NHSSHOFF thanks Steve Roth



Pat Salerno and Steve Roth

After serving as the Master of Ceremonies for our Induction and Awards Ceremony for the past 21 years, Steve Roth has decided to step down. Throughout the years, Steve's inductee and honoree summaries, coupled with his congenial personality, provided a very special welcome to all those being honored. The Board of Directors and staff of the Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame Foundation send a sincere thank you to Steve for the special service that he provided for every ceremony in every one of those 21 years.

PAT SALERNO
NHSSHOFF President



YOU RUN HOW FAR?

BY MIKE RASMUSSEN
Assistant Director

The evolution of cross country in Nebraska high schools is one of increasing distances, varied courses, challenging fall weather and the beginning of a new girls sport. Like most state championships, cross country began under the auspices of the University of Nebraska.

The first statewide meet was held on the UNL campus on Oct. 30, 1954, which Nebraska track coach Jerry Lee conducted. The 1 ½-mile race was on campus, and 10 boys medaled in only one class – there was no team champion. George Porter of Lincoln High won. The 26 schools that entered were limited to four entries, and all contestants received “knothole” tickets to the Huskers’ afternoon football game.

The same format was used the following three years, with Husker track coach Frank Sevigne in charge. NSAA rules regarding eligibility were to be followed in all cases. Starting in 1958 at Pioneers Golf Course, schools were allowed five entries, with the first four used to determine a team championship. That year, 10 medals and a

team trophy were awarded.

The NSAA's first sanctioned state meet was in 1960. The race was on the university course at Pioneers and was in two classes. Schools with 200 or more boys were in Class A, with the remainder in Class B. Entry fee was .50 per boy. In Class A, there were 52 boys from 12 schools. Individual champion Joe Perez led Scottsbluff to the team with 14 points (a 1-2-5-6 finish) that is still the record for count-four scoring. In Class B, there were 71 runners from 20 schools, and Crofton was the champion. Class C was added in 1961, Class D in 1994.

The meet moved around in its early years. In 1963, Thunder Ridge Golf Course in east Lincoln was the site of the two-mile race. Seacrest Park held the meet in 1964, which was the first year for district qualifying. From 1965 to 1970, the meet was back at Pioneers Park, where instructions were to proceed to “the start ... near the old railroad engine north of the wooded area.” The long hill that is a part of the current Pioneers course is still known affectionately as “Choo-Choo Hill.”

Longtime observers tell of many varieties of weather to affect the state meet, but none could top what happened in 1971. Hall of Famer Bob Whitehouse was the athletic director at Omaha South, which hosted the meet at Spring Lake Golf Course. Whitehouse remembers that it seemed to rain non-stop for several days preceding the meet. Attempting to "paint a line", they met with futility because as soon as they finished, the line washed away. On the following day, a new attempt to mark the course with a "chalk substance" resulted in the same scenario.

The next option was going to a nearby lumberyard to purchase four-foot wooden stakes to mark the course. Starting at 5:30 a.m. the day of the meet, they marked the course on a soggy day with an ongoing mist. During what could be deemed a 1.9-mile mud run, runners had no option but to slide down an eight-to-10-foot hill, and traverse any bare spot which had turned to pure mud. Class B individual champion Dan Jones from Holdrege recalled that walking the course prior to the meet was not possible, and that "we started in ankle-deep water and finished in the same -- in between was mud." After the first several runners, it was hard to identify any individual or team.

In 1972, the state meet moved to the Kearney Country Club, where it is now in its 47th year. It was the first time that all runners could vie for individual honors. Since the advent of districts, only the top six from each district had been eligible for medal consideration.

In 1973, the distance increased to 2.5 miles. In 1975, Class A began running seven and scoring five while Classes B and C continued to run five and score four. Class B added a sixth runner in 1985, with Class C following in 1990.

In 1980, the meet went metric -- 5,000 meters for the boys and 4,000 for the first girls state competition. There were no district qualifying meets for the 59 schools with teams. Inaugural Class B girls team winner McCook had a 2-3-5-8 finish for a record 18 points, which still stands. The girls ran after the boys meet concluded.

In 1993, the meet awarded its first gold medals to the winners of the time comparisons among class champions. The last significant change in the sport came in 2013 when girls began racing at 5,000 meters (3.1 miles).

A sport that started with low numbers on the campus of UNL has evolved into one of the more colorful and participatory offerings in our high schools, as this year 223 schools fielded teams. The mosaic of uniforms set against the fall foliage at the beautiful Kearney Country Club has become one of Nebraska's great settings for high school sports.



The Jet: The Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame Foundation played host to Johnny Rodgers this fall.

IN MEMORIAM

A tribute to Hall of Fame members who recently passed away.



Ken Fischer



Swede Hawkins



Ed Husmann



Jim Puetz



Reuben Schleifer



Don Watchorn



Catching up with Hall-of-Famer Amy Stephens

BY RANDY YORK

Board Member

Q: What have you been doing since you left high school?

A: I graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a degree in Education. I also graduated with a degree in Educational Administration from the University of Nebraska-Kearney, which gave me my first opportunity as a head coach. I spent the vast majority of my time in collegiate athletics as a women's basketball coach. I served as a head coach for 17 years, including nine at Drake and eight at UNK. I am now in my eighth year as an assistant coach (associate head coach at Memphis) after spending three at Nebraska, two each at Iowa State and Memphis and one at St. Louis.

Q: What are your most lasting memories competing in high school?

A: My lasting memories are my experiences playing high school in both volleyball and basketball. I played for two great coaches in both sports. They taught me life lessons of discipline, accountability, hard work and having fun while competing. I also have very fond memories of great teammates like Lori (Bearden) Brennan and Brigit (Boness) Harris, plus many others who supported and inspired me.

Q: Who was your biggest rival and who was your toughest opponent?

A: When I was in high school, Sidney was a key rival because they had such strong girl athletes in both volleyball and basketball. I remember finally beating them three times my senior year. The last time we beat Sidney was in Scottsbluff at the district tourney. It was especially rewarding because the gym was standing room-only. Making it to the girls state tourney with my teammates and coaches was an incredibly rewarding experience.

Q: What were your favorite places to play in high school and why?

A: Without a doubt, my favorite place to play was at home in Alliance at our own gym because the community came out to support our girls team. We often had more fans at our games than the boys' team had. Going to high school in the 80s was incredibly special, especially when I look back. At the time, I am not sure that I could fully grasp what that meant. I just know how incredible it was to see so many in Alliance coming to support girls athletics. My second favorite memory was competing in Scottsbluff because it meant we were playing for an opportunity to go to the state tournament. Scottsbluff always drew big crowds that would come out to watch us play.

Q: What did it mean when you were inducted into the Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame, which now has enshrined more than 500 athletes, coaches, officials and contributors?

A: Growing up in the state of Nebraska and living in places like Springfield Platteview was fun and memorable. I will always remember my dad taking me as a second-grader to watch Chris Leigh, who went on to play at Nebraska. I also spent four years in Lyons where our boys basketball team always went to the state tournament. Jerry Mathers was part of that dominance because he held the gym open for all us. We practiced as middle school kids and high school kids. Then we went to Alliance, where my mom and dad grew up. Alliance was a true sports community. It was extremely impactful in developing my pride for the state of Nebraska. My adult coaching experiences were even more meaningful. It was a privilege to spend eight years in Kearney and three years coaching at the University of Nebraska. Being in the Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame is one of the most meaningful honors I have received in my life. It is truly a reflective honor because of the amount of time that my parents spent feeding my basketball passion. They recognized something in me at a young age. They knew how much I loved basketball so they sacrificed and fed my passion while keeping me grounded. I am extremely honored to be an inductee of the Nebraska High School Sports Hall of Fame.



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You can help us in many ways

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Hall of Fame, I would like to thank all of you who have made contributions to the Foundation. We feel that we have made tremendous progress in the last several years thanks to the leadership of Chuck Johnston and Mike Rasmussen.

We have a ways to go and we will get there, but not without your help. There are many different avenues that can be appealing to individuals. Some of these avenues follow:



Beechner

1. Cash
2. Personal check
3. Securities (such as stocks, bonds, or mutual funds),
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5. Grain, coins and other tangible property
6. Life insurance/planned gifts through a will, trust, or retirement accounts.

You may direct your gift to any area of the Exhibit Hall that you desire. Naming rights are available for certain exhibits. We are a 501(c)(3) registered with the IRS. You may want to contact your financial advisor to seek out your best avenue for contributing. We will be glad to answer any questions that you may have about the Foundation. Our email address is nhshoff@gmail.com and our website is nebhallowfame.org. You can contact us directly by phone at 402-476-4767. Thank you!

Dick Beechner, past president, NHSSHOFF

