

Cloud Nine

Hall Of Fame Inducts Newest Class

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The 38th annual Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame induction banquet was held Monday night at the Lakewood Rod & Gun Club. Above are eight of the nine inductees. Seated, from the left, are Steven Johnston, son of the late Charles Johnston; Terry Kye, daughter of the late Luella Kye; Cheryl Bailey; and Tiffany Decker. Standing are Vince Gullo; Mark Weaver; Mike Lopriore; and Bob Palcic. The ninth inductee is the late Jack Harper. P-J photo by Scott Kindberg.

LAKESWOOD — Vince Gullo is one of six children born to Joseph and Barbara, and athletics have been a common bond connecting the family for decades.

“My father worked hard to support us and still managed to find time to coach us in baseball and soccer,” said Gullo, one of nine people who were inducted into the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame on

Monday night at the Lakewood Rod & Gun Club. “When it came to anything, my father never had a negative thing to say. He always complimented us.”

In fact, riding home from games, Joe always praised his son’s performance, using examples to back it up.

“It never mattered if I went 4-for-4 or 0-for-4, or if we won or lost,” Gullo said.

The Gullo Fan Club also included Barbara.

“My mother never would miss a game, often times packing up the three little kids and heading to the game, no matter the weather.”

Barbara also believed Vince was a future major leaguer.

“She would watch the Yankees and Mets all the time and told me hundreds of times, ‘Oh, you could do that,’ or that I was better than the first basemen, who at the time were Don Mattingly and Keith Hernandez.”

While Gullo never reached the on-field success of those two Big Apple icons, he certainly has made quite a name for himself as the varsity baseball coach at Fredonia Central School, his alma mater. Since 2002, Gullo has posted a 305-106-1 record; won nine Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Athletic Association titles; 10 Section VI crowns; and two New York State Public High School Athletic Association championships.

“I’m not here because I am great,” he said last night. “I am here because of great people. I don’t play individual sports, run track, wrestle or swim. I play and coach team sports. Everything that I have accomplished in life is with the help and support of others.”

That was a common theme that was heard by a gathering of more than 400 at the 38th annual CSHOF banquet last night. Joining Gullo in the Class of 2019 are Cheryl Bailey, Tiffany Decker, the late Jack Harper, the late Chuck Johnston, the late Luella Kye, Mike Lopriore, Bob Palcic and Mark Weaver.

Following are snapshots of their acceptance remarks:

– Bailey: A Southwestern Central School graduate, Bailey rose in the ranks from a track and field athlete with the Trojans and in college, to head coach in women’s soccer and women’s track and field at Denison University and, finally, to one of the top athletic administrators in the country.

In a professional career that stretched from 1979 to 2015, Bailey’s resume includes the following: athletic director at Denison University; senior associate AD at the University of Wisconsin; chairman of NCAA women’s soccer; chairman of NCAA women’s basketball; general manager of the United States women’s national soccer team; and executive director of the National Women’s Professional Soccer League.

“I have several individuals to thank for flaming that great passion, starting with Daphne Thurnau, who was my middle school (physical education) teacher, and continuing with Naomi Berg and Tom Priestler, my high school physical education teachers at Southwestern Central High School (who are both CSHOF inductees),” she said. “Tom opened a door (with the assistance of Title IX) for me to fully participate as a female athlete and I will be forever grateful for his support and total acceptance of girls running on the boys’ track team at Southwestern. The confidence and pure joy that comes from success in sports provided a platform for me to begin and finish a career in athletics.”

– Decker: Once housed at the Chautauqua Mall, the CSHOF was the preferred destination for Decker when she visited the Lakewood establishment when she was a teenager.

“I would look for George Hale’s induction picture,” Decker said. “George and his wife, Marilyn, who

is also an inductee, are family friends. My dad worked for George and Marilyn. I heard stories growing up about George's horseshoe championships and Marilyn's rifle shooting championships. ... It was no wonder when I was introduced to trapshooting in 1990 that I was hooked. I had never shot a gun before, but I was determined to learn."

Decker was clearly a special "student" of the sport.

Over the course of the last 30 years, she has competed and won trapshooting meets in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, North Carolina and Florida; claimed championships in singles, doubles, handicap, high all-around and high-overall events; was a 10-time Amateur Trapshooting Association All-New York state team member from 2009-18, including multiple team captaincies; and was a seven-time member of the Amateur Trapshooting Association All-American team from 2013-19.

"To stand here today and be recognized by such a great group by being inducted into the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame is an honor that I will always cherish," she said. "I want to thank Dad and Mom for all the years of support. I am blessed to have my dad here tonight. Mom is watching from heaven. I want to thank all of my family. I wouldn't be here today without your support."

— Harper: Starting his pro career in 1898, the Franklin, Pennsylvania native made his Major League debut on Sept. 18, 1889 and stayed in the "big" for eight seasons, pitching for the Cleveland Spiders (later the Indians) in 1899, the St. Louis Cardinals (1900-01), the St. Louis Browns (1902), the Cincinnati Reds (1903-06) and the Chicago Cubs (1906).

Along the way, Harper, who later moved to Jamestown, posted an 80-64 record that included 115 complete games, 10 shutouts, one save, 466 strikeouts and a 3.55 earned run average. His best season was in 1904 when he was 23-9 with a 2.30 ERA as member of the Reds. Among the batters he faced during his career were Honus Wagner, Frank Chance, Johnny Evers, Joe Tinker, Willie Keeler, Hugh Jennings and Nap LaJoie, among others. He even broke in Branch Rickey Sr. as a catcher.

"My toughest game was a 10-inning affair with Joe McGinnity furnishing the opposition," Harper told Post-Journal sports editor Frank Hyde in 1946. "That was in 1904. I had won my first nine games with the Cincinnati and Joe had won his first 10 for the Giants. We were slated at the old Polo Grounds and the newspapers gave it a terrific play, booming up the fact two pitchers with 19 wins and no losses between them were to meet. The game drew 50,000 paid admissions, a record in New York up to that time."

— Johnston: When Steve Johnston was putting together his father's CSHOF nomination portfolio, he asked his mother, Kay, if she could assemble any records, awards or letters that she might have to include in it.

Of course there was plenty to choose from.

After all, Chuck coached tennis at Fredonia Central School from 1962-89, posting a 374-47 record that included seven undefeated seasons. He also directed the Hillbillies to 17 Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Athletic Association titles, 13 Section VI championships, was named the New York State Coach of the Year in 1982, and was selected the National Coaches Association Northeast Coach of the Year in 1983.

"I was surprised when she handed me a large pile of newspaper clippings and letters from his coaching career," said Steve, who accepted the induction for his late father. "The letters that he received came from all walks of life."

They included missives from, among others:

School board members, thanking him for his service when he served on the Brocton Central School board.

The Fredonia Central School superintendent congratulating him on his tennis career and thanking him for his years working and negotiating in good faith when he was president of the Fredonia Teachers Union.

Coaches, including Anne Smith of Southwestern — also a CSHOF inductee. While they were competitive, Steve said, they also shared a bond of respect.

“But the letters that really stood out came unsolicited from his former football and tennis players,” Steve said. “The overarching theme of these letters was not how good a tactician he was in football or how proficient he was in doubles strategy in tennis ... but in every case their letter was sent with the express purpose of letting him know, in many instances decades after having him as a coach, that much of their success later in life, both in their careers and family life, stemmed from my father’s innate ability to get the most out of every person on the team. My father was a teacher, a leader and a role model for the young men on his team. His lessons went far beyond the years that he had them on his team.”

— Kye: The first female umpire east of the Mississippi — the Cassadaga Valley Central School graduate gained that distinction in 1961 — Kye umpired baseball and softball for 20 years; was an inductee of the Chautauqua County Umpires Association Hall of Fame and the Western New York Softball Hall of Fame; and was instrumental in introducing Babe Ruth League softball in Chautauqua County.

“After her playing days were over and she retired from umpiring, she put her time and energy into coaching and promoting girls softball,” said Terry Kye, Luella’s daughter. “She could be tough as nails at times, but always used her voice and experience to encourage players and other coaches to work hard to be the best they could be while at the same time respecting the game. Mom knew life could be hard and full of challenges, but all that could be dealt with when doing something you loved, and she definitely loved her sports.”

— Lopriore: To suggest that Lopriore’s athletic training resume is impressive would be a huge understatement. In fact, the Jamestown native’s list of accomplishments during a career that spanned nearly four decades puts him in the company of some of the biggest names and most iconic programs in professional and collegiate sports.

“This is one of the greatest honors I have ever received,” said Lopriore, who gave special thanks to several people who helped him “achieve my success,” including fellow Jamestown native and CSHOF inductee Dan Lunetta and, most importantly, his parents.

“My father always told me to be proud of who I am and where I come from,” Lopriore said. “I just hope my father and mother would be proud of me.”

— Palcic: Since graduating from Cardinal Mindszenty in Dunkirk in 1966 where he played for CSHOF inductee Bob Muscato, Palcic has had an amazing football odyssey that has included coaching stops at some of the highest profile college programs in the country, which led to a distinguished career calling the shots in the National Football League.

“But the coach that laid the groundwork for my success is here tonight, Coach Bob Muscato,” Palcic said. “When you play for Bob Muscato, you are in a great physical condition, you are totally prepared and enter the game with tremendous confidence.”

Along the way, Palcic has mentored three Outland Trophy winners, including Joe Thomas, the former All-Pro tackle with the Cleveland Browns, and watched another tackle he had coached, Jonathan Ogden, be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. Toss in NFL stops in New Orleans, Detroit, Cleveland and Atlanta and it’s clear that Palcic is well-respected within the game.

“To all the young athletes here tonight, don’t let anyone ever discourage you,” he said. “Chase your

dreams. Set your goals high and work hard to achieve them. Shoot for the moon, and even if you miss, you will land amongst the stars.”

– Weaver: A martial artist of great renown, Weaver is member of multiple halls of fame for his accomplishments in the sport.

His introduction to it as a youngster was almost out of necessity.

“I remember while growing up and going to middle school, I was a small, insecure child who was dealing with being bullied for many reasons,” he said. “I was small, I wore glasses, and my right leg was about half an inch shorter than my left leg. This resulted in me walking funny, hence why the kids picked on me.

“I was also diagnosed with a seizure disorder that would make me miss weeks of school at a time. It was at this point in my life that my parents wanted me to get involved with something that would improve my self-esteem. They remember me spending countless hours on the sofa watching Kung-Fu theater and Bruce Lee movies on Saturdays. So, they enrolled me into a martial arts class. That’s when my obsession began, and the difference it made in my life was incredible.”

Weaver said he tries to live his life by five rules: trust yourself; don’t be afraid to fail; don’t listen to doubters; work your butt off; and always give back.

Those rules could likely apply to all nine inductees as they chased excellence in their respective sports-related activities.

NOTES: CSHOF board member and banquet chairman Chip Johnson provided the welcome; members of the Jamestown High School marching band — the 2018 New York State Field Band Large School champions — performed the national anthem; the Rev. Mel McGinnis, pastor of the Kiantone Congregational Church and 2009 CSHOF inductee, delivered the invocation and the benediction; CSHOF president Randy Anderson provided remarks; and Johnson and Anderson presented plaques and rings to the inductees, and recognized teams, athletes, coaches and legacy award recipients.