

# NJSIAA Hall of Fame inducts seven new members



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New Jersey has produced an extraordinary number of nationally and globally celebrated athletes in its history, and that point was made clear once again when the NJSIAA inducted its latest Hall of Fame class at a luncheon on March 19 at Westin Princeton at Forrestal Village.

The seven-member group featured history-making athletes in lacrosse, football, wrestling, and track, and also included two retired administrators with decades of accomplishments working in high school athletics.

The program also recognized the latest recipient of the very prestigious NJSIAA Award of Honor, and three others who received service awards.

The following individuals comprised the 25th induction class into the NJSIAA Hall of Fame:

## **Bob Bianchi, Columbia HS (Lacrosse)**

The 1979 graduate of the Maplewood school was a three-time All-State and two-time All-America selection who was later a charter inductee into the New Jersey Lacrosse Hall of Fame. He was selected the boys lacrosse Player of the Century by The Star-Ledger and became the first ex-player to have one

of New Jersey's high school boys lacrosse divisions named in his honor.

## **Lou Creekmur, Woodbridge HS (Football)**

The 1944 graduate developed from an undersized but outstanding lineman in high school into a Pro Football Hall of Fame member after an outstanding career throughout the 1950s with the Detroit Lions.

## **Mike Grey, Delbarton School (Wrestling)**

The 2006 graduate is one of the most successful wrestlers in state history, having gone 158-2 during a career that saw him become the first to win four individual state championships, each coming in a different weight class.

## **Frank Tripucka, Bloomfield HS (Football)**

A 1945 graduate of the Essex County school, he was a legendary athlete in his own right as well as a patriarch of one of the state's great sports families. He was an All-State quarterback (as well as an All-State first baseman in baseball) before becoming QB at Notre Dame and then in the pros, most notably with the Denver Broncos, who retired his No. 18.



## **Ajee Wilson, Neptune HS**

A three-time NJSIAA Meet of Champions winner and two-time national champion while in high school, the 2012 graduate is still very much active on the international scene. She's the American indoor record holder in the 800 meters, is a two-time Olympian, and in 2022 won the World Indoor championship.

## **Jack DuBois, NJSIAA Administrator**

DuBois spent a total of 52 years in high school athletics as a coach, athletic director and official, as well as NJSIAA assistant director. He spent 16 years with the NJSIAA, until his retirement in 2021. Among many accomplishments with the NJSIAA, he was a guiding force in the expansion of the football playoffs to include a statewide champion in each group.

## **Larry White, NJSIAA Administrator**

White culminated a long career in high school education and athletics by serving as Executive Director of the NJSIAA from 2018 through his retirement in 2020. He was the eighth to hold that position since the formation of the association and first African-American to serve in the role. He previously served as an assistant director, beginning in 2005.

Several of the inductees were represented by proud family members, including Bob Bianchi's brothers, Jim and Rich, who were joined by Bob Curcio, the man who coached the lacrosse-playing family at Columbia.

Bob Bianchi, who was also an All-American at the United States Naval Academy, died in helicopter crash in 1987 while serving as a Navy Flight Commander.

The Bianchi's were grateful to see their brother and his legacy recognized.

"It's a remarkable honor," Jim Bianchi said. "He's the first lacrosse player to be inducted, and to be included here with people like a pro football Hall of Famer, a football player who had his number retired, a world record holder and a great wrestler, it's about as elite a company as there is."

Adding to the special nature of the event, the Bianchi's got to meet members of the Tripucka family they watched compete in the 1970s.

While Frank Tripucka passed away in 2013, his family (which includes seven children, six of them Division 1 athletes) realized at the luncheon that their father and Lou Creekmur would have likely been teammates on the 1950 Detroit Lions.

"This is great, and it was a lot fun," said T.K. Tripucka, one of Frank's children who played basketball at Fordham. Another son, Kelly, was chosen Boys Basketball Player of the Century by The Star-Ledger and was inducted into the NJSIAA Hall of Fame in 2006. "It's amazing how many great athletes come out of New Jersey. I was here when Kelly was inducted, and that group included people like Carl Lewis and Bobby Hurley. And seeing someone like Ajee who is still active, the amount of Olympic athletes who have come out of this state is just incredible. It's great for my dad to now be a part of this."

Speaking of Ajee, her induction makes her the latest New Jersey track superstar to be recognized. She was joined by a table full of family members, ex-teammates and coaches.

"I want to thank them for all the support and guidance they've given me since I started running," she said. "I still have a lot of running to do, but I am honored and grateful to be inducted into this Hall of Fame."

Grey could not be in attendance at the luncheon, but for a very good reason. He is the head wrestling coach at Cornell University, and was coaching his team at the NCAA championships in Oklahoma City. Two of his wrestlers won national titles over the weekend, his team finished third and Grey himself was named National Coach of the Year. Accepting the Hall of Fame award in his honor was his 4-year old son, Declan, as well as his brother, Mark.

The others recognized at the luncheon were Mary Liz Ivins, past president of the NJSIAA, who received the Award of Honor, and Jen Fleury, Chris Faytok and Dr. Chris Mendler, who received service awards.

Ivins has spent 43-year career in education, including 17 years as principal of her alma mater, Notre Dame High School in Lawrence Township. She was NJSIAA President during the 2019-20 school year, which was upended by the Covid-19 outbreak that winter and spring. She then steered the NJSIAA Covid-19 Medical Advisory Task Force which was assembled to oversee the return of high school sports.

Fleury has been athletic director at Villa Walsh Academy in Morris Township since 2006, where she's overseen a growth of the school's athletic facilities, including construction of a new athletic center/gym. She's been involved in numerous conference, county and NJSIAA committees, and the school has never had a player, coach or staff member ejected from a contest during her years at the school.

Faytok is the High School Sports Director at New Jersey Advance Media (NJAM), and oversees high school sports in The Star-Ledger on NJ.com. He's also led the development of njschoolsports.com, which is the database that statewide coaches use to log team and player data for every game played. The reported data is used to celebrate athletes' performances, track team records and generate the power points standings that are used to seed many of the NJSIAA tournaments.

Dr. Mendler, a board-certified sports medicine physician with over 25 years in clinical practice, has been part of the NJSIAA Sports Medicine Advisory Committee for over 15 years, and currently serves as chair of that committee.