



# NJSIAA Hall of Fame inducts seven individuals

**March 26, 2024**

New Jersey has produced an extraordinary number of nationally and globally celebrated athletes throughout 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 24 at The Westin Princeton at Forrestal Village.

The seven-member group includes history-making athletes in track & field, baseball, football and basketball, an accomplished coach and a trailblazing administrator.

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

The following individuals comprised the 26th induction class into the NJSIAA Hall of Fame:

## **Ben Candelino, St. Mary of the Assumption HS/Elizabeth HS (Coach)**

A 1970 graduate of St. Mary's High School in his hometown of Elizabeth, where he was a standout in basketball and baseball, he began his teaching and coaching career there, leading the basketball team to a 109-56 record and the baseball team to a state title. Upon moving to Elizabeth High School in 1984, his basketball teams went 348-46 through 1997, winning five Group 4 state titles, one Tournament of Champions, 12 Watchung Conference titles and nine Union County Tournaments. He is now in the midst of his 49th year in education as the Director of Athletics at Elizabeth.

## **Kim DeGraw-Cole, NJSIAA Administrator**

A three-sport athlete at Dover High School, where she graduated 1972, she was one of the first post-Title IX athletes at Rutgers University, where she played softball. She became a teacher and coach at Southern Regional in Ocean County in 1976, and in 1984 became the school's athletic director - one of the few in New Jersey at the time and the first in the Shore Conference. She joined the NJSIAA in 2010, becoming the third woman to serve in a director capacity in its history. An extremely valued part of the organization, she retired in 2022 as the association's first Chief Compliance Officer.

## **Mark DeRosa, Bergen Catholic HS (Baseball and Football)**

A 1993 graduate of the Oradell school, he was quarterback of an undefeated state-championship winning football team and a shortstop on the baseball team. He was a standout in both sports at the University of Pennsylvania, before being drafted by the Atlanta Braves in 1996. Two years later, he began a 16-year career in the major leagues.



### **Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone, Union Catholic HS (Track & Field)**

One of the most decorated athletes in the history of New Jersey high sports, the 2017 graduate won 13 national championships and 11 individual NJSIAA Meet of Champions titles. She set seven state records, four national records and a junior world record in high school. She also competed for the United States in the 2016 Olympics while still in high school. After setting a world junior record while winning the NCAA 400 hurdles championship at the University of Kentucky, she won two gold medals at the 2021 Olympics, including the 400 hurdles in a world record time.

### **Michael O’Koren, Hudson Catholic HS (Basketball)**

A 1976 graduate of the Jersey City school, he left as the its all-time leading scorer and rebounder, and the No. 2 all-time scorer in Hudson County. He was a two-time All-America at North Carolina, where he was only the second freshman to start for coach Dean Smith. He was a first-round draft choice by the New Jersey Nets, and played eight years in the NBA.

### **Greg Olsen, Wayne Hills HS (Football/Track & Field)**

An All-American football player as a two-way end at Wayne Hills, he was an also a champion shot putter there as well leading into his graduation in 2003. In college, he was a star tight end at University of Miami, which led to him being a first-round draft choice by the Chicago Bears. He played 14 years in the NFL, as is now a top game analyst for FOX Sports, including his calling of Super Bowl LVII.

### **Keturah Orji, Mount Olive HS (Track & Field)**

Considered the best horizontal female jumper to ever hail from New Jersey, the 2014 graduate won the triple jump and long jump three times apiece at the Meet of Champions. Her state record in the triple jump also ranks No. 2 in United States history. She also won seven national championships in high school. At the University of Georgia, she became the first woman to win eight NCAA championships in field events, and was also the 2018 winner of the Bowerman Award, the most prestigious honor in collegiate track & field. She is also a two-time Olympian and 10-time national champion.

The inductees were proud to join a prestigious group in a Hall of Fame loaded with legendary athletes in all of the major sports, who got their start as high school competitors in New Jersey.

“This is awesome,” Olsen. “I’m honored to be recognized. I have a lot of pride in Jersey and what we were able to do at Wayne Hills. This is such a great honor.”

DeRosa is now an analyst for MLB Network, and was the manager of Team USA at the 2023 World Baseball Championships.

Like Olsen, he got to expand well beyond his local roots in becoming a national figure. But in a similar way, the Carlstadt native not only cherishes his home state, he credits it for catapulting him to success.

“New Jersey is a special place,” DeRosa said. “Obviously for me, the culture and the people and the coaches and



***NJSIAA Hall of Fame inductee Greg Olsen***

my teammates that I met in high school shaped me going forward. I really believe some of my greatest accomplishments were made on the fields at Bergen Catholic, and I took those with me. I truly believe that is one of the biggest reasons I was able to succeed and get through the minor leagues and accomplish some of the things that I was able to do.”

The others recognized at the luncheon were Howie O’Neil, the NJSIAA Wrestling Tournament Director, who received the Award of Honor, and Ken Margolin, Anthony Brito, Sister Percylee Hart and Maria Nolan, who received service awards.

O’Neil, whose wrestling roots date back to his days competing for Edgewood High School in the 1960s, had a distinguished career as a coach and official, and also served many years on the NJSIAA Wrestling Committee before becoming tournament director in 2009, where he oversees the team and individual tournaments, culminating with the three-day extravaganza at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City where the boys and girls individual championships are decided.

Margolin is the athletic director and Brito is the assistant AD at Franklin High School, which has become a frequent host of NJSIAA championship events. Their organizational efforts have enabled the association to hold tournament events in football, boys and girls soccer, girls volleyball, wrestling, basketball and track & field.

Sister Percylee has been the principal at Union Catholic for over 40 years, after previously serving as the principal of Red Bank Catholic for a decade. An advocate for the growth of girls high school sports, her distinguished career also includes more than 40 years of service on the NJSIAA advisory and controversies committees.

Nolan, who coached 30 state-championship winning girls volleyball teams during a 46-year career spent at Secaucus High School and Immaculate Heart Academy, was honored for her more than 30 years of service on the New Jersey Scholastic Coaches Association Board of Coaches, as well as serving on the NJSIAA Hall of Fame selection committee. She has also served on numerous other NJSIAA and national committees.