



# Six special individuals are inducted into NJSIAA Hall of Fame

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A group of six individuals with different backgrounds, yet similar legacies, became the latest to be inducted into the NJSIAA Hall of Fame at a luncheon event on March 29 at the Westin Princeton at Forrestal Village.

The 28th annual Hall of Fame class was accompanied by the 48th annual presentation of the NJSIAA Award of Honor. In addition, three individuals were presented service awards for their contributions to the association.

The latest Hall of Fame athletes are Jack Cust Jr. (Immaculata HS, baseball), Audrey Gomez (St. John Vianney HS, basketball), Janet Smith-Leet (J.P. Stevens HS, cross country/track) and Lisa Sweeney Van Ackeren (Rancocas Valley HS, softball). Inducted as a coach was Tara Madigan (Northern Highlands HS, girls soccer), as was former NJSIAA assistant director Bill Bruno, who was a long-time coach and athletic director before joining the association staff in 2015.

Gomez, Smith-Leet and Bruno were honored posthumously.

The Award of Honor was presented to Steve Shohfi, a long-time NJSIAA Executive Committee member and President, and teacher, coach and athletic director, most of which was at his alma mater, A.L. Johnson HS in Clark.

Service awards were presented to Christine Dziczek, former AD at Highland Regional and long-time NJSIAA Eligibility Committee chairperson, George Janto, former NJSIAA Fencing Tournament Director, and Debbie Stein, the League and Tournament Director and Operations Manager at Lucky Strike North Brunswick, the host facility for the NJSIAA bowling finals. She is also a member of the NJSIAA State Bowling Tournament Committee.

In what's become a tradition at the event, each Hall of Famer was introduced by a NJSIAA Student Ambassador. Handling those remarks were Sianni Wynn of Pennsauken High School, Olivia Domski of Bergen County Tech and Duncan Felch of Morris County Tech.

The Student Ambassadors had plenty of very notable accomplishments to mention in their speeches.

Cust was a power-hitting baseball star at Immaculata, where he was picked in the first round of the 1997 Major League Baseball Draft by the Arizona Diamondbacks after a spectacular senior season in which he was Gatorade State Player of the Year and selected to several All-American teams. He was the 13th New Jersey player to ever be selected in the first round, and wound up playing 10 years in the big leagues.

Despite his professional success, he regards those early years as truly special.

"The high school years are the best," he said. "You're with your best friends, you're playing, I dated my high school sweetheart who I married... everything is perfect. It's a great part of your life, and Immaculata was a great school to go to."

Gomez was a ground-breaking player at St. John Vianney, where she graduated in 1991. She scored 2,231 career points, which at the time made her the 14th leading scorer in state history. Her guard play helped revolutionize the sport in the state. St. John Vianney is also New Jersey's girls basketball leader with 17 state championships, and the first two happened during Audrey's junior and senior seasons.

Among those attending on her behalf was Bill Bulman, who was her coach at St. John Vianney.

"Before she came to the school, her father gave me a video of her ball handling on roller skates, and we knew right away that we never had a player with that kind of talent," he said. "She was a different player all together than what else was out there. But every single year, she also came back as our most improved player."

Smith-Leet, who graduated from J.P. Stevens in 1984, was and remains the greatest cross country runner in state history. She won the Meet of Champions three times, including a her senior season in 17:36 to set a Holmdel Park record that held for 27 years. Later that month, she became the only New Jersey girl to ever win the Kinney National Championship race in San Diego. She also won four MOC events in track.

Seeney was the most dominant pitcher in state history over the final two years of her career. She set a state single-season record with 424 strikeouts as a junior 2004, broke that record with 520 as a senior in 2005, and finished with a state career-record of 1,263. She was 29-1 with 27 shutouts as a senior, when RV won the Group 4 state championship. She closed out her career with 85 consecutive scoreless innings, capped by a no-hitter in the state final.

Madigan compiled a 384-55-12 record coaching Northern Highlands girls soccer from 2003 through 2018, and again from 2021 through 2024.

Her teams won 11 Bergen County championships and seven state titles. Her teams also set a state record with 65 straight victories beginning in 2021. After a tie, the unbeaten streak stretched to 88 games, which was also a state record.

"I'm very humbled and very honored," Madigan said. "Listening to some of the other inductees, it's really inspiring to be included in such an incredible group. I credit my athletes, my coaches and my family. It takes a village, and I don't think any of us are here without the support of others."

After a distinguished teaching, coaching and administrative career at several Shore Conference schools, Bruno became a beloved figure at the NJSIAA office, where among many duties he was in charge of cross country and track, bowling, gymnastics and wrestling. He also led the New Jersey Scholastic Coaches Association programs, and was instrumental in the introduction of girls wrestling as a sanctioned sport. He passed away in 2021.

