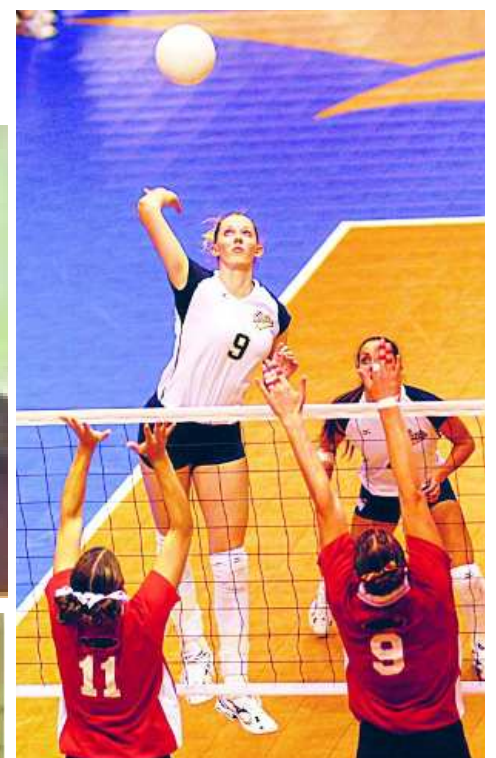
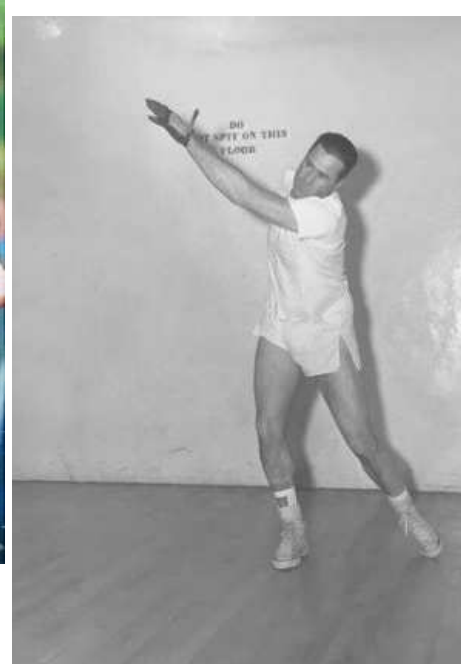
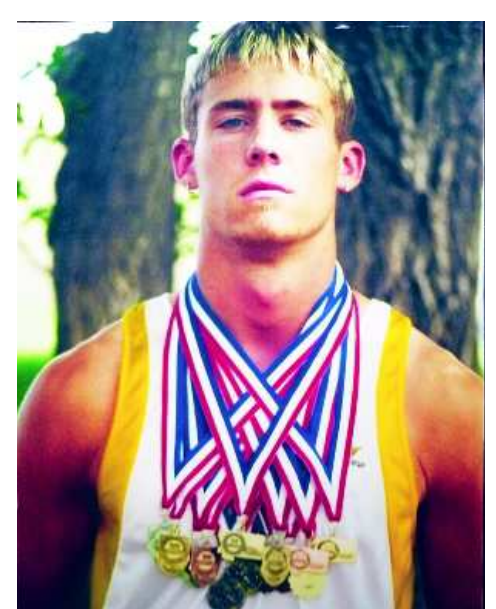




presents the
2017
Inductees



The Helena Sports Hall of Fame Class of 2017 includes 13 individuals in five categories, six Golden teams, and six Contemporary teams. Individuals were selected from a pool of over 115 nominations, by an anonymous 20-person selection committee on a points system. Teams are inducted based on a formula by the year their State or National championship was achieved.

The Hall of Fame induction ceremony and banquet will take place July 13, at the Best Western Great Northern Hotel. This is the HSHOF's ninth class of inductees, dating back to 2003, and there are now 109 individuals and 45 teams enshrined in the Hall.

The banquet is sold out.

The Independent Record is a proud sponsor of the Helena Sports Hall of Fame.

Golden Athletes

- ▶ Leo "Dutch" Schneider
- ▶ Bob Chilton
- ▶ Charlotte Sanddal
- ▶ Dick Muffick

Contemporary Athletes

- ▶ Lonnie Brt
- ▶ Christina (Smetana) Eichler
- ▶ Matt Larson
- ▶ Nate Boyd
- ▶ Megan (Zanto) Handl

Coaches

- ▶ Rick Thompson
- ▶ Mark Samson

Officials

- ▶ Brian Knight

Golden Teams

- ▶ 1940 Helena Boosters womens softball
- ▶ 1953-56-57 Days Plasterers womens softball
- ▶ 1966, 1968 Helena Trail Riders, national champions

Contemporary Teams

- ▶ 1982 Helena High boys cross country
- ▶ 1986-87 Capital High boys golf
- ▶ 1987 Helena High boys gymnastics
- ▶ 1983, 1988 Capital High boys gymnastics

Leo “Dutch” Schneider Golden Athlete

By Curt Synness



The late Leo “Dutch” Schneider (1910-83), had been a standout basketball player at Helena High in the 1920s, before a 20-year career in the semi-pro City and State Baseball Leagues. One of the state’s best all-around players, he won a pair of league batting titles and pitched several no-hitters.

An avid golfer, Schneider won nine of the local “Big Three” tournaments; six Bill Roberts club championships (1943-47, 1966), two Green Meadow CC titles (1954, 1958), and one City crown (1963).

He was also a member of a State championship bowling team.

Schneider’s official baseball career began in 1926, when he played for the very first Helena Junior Legion team.

In 1931, while pitching for the Orange Crush in the City semi-pro league, the 21-year old fire-balling Schneider beat the Y.M.C.A. 7-1 on a 3-hitter, while striking out 20 of a possible 21 batsmen in a seven inning game. Dutch actually made every single out, catching an infield pop-up for the other out.

“Schneider deserves credit for pitching one of the most remarkable games on record, and the 20 strikeouts for seven innings is a league record,” the Helena Daily Independent reported.

The 5-foot-10, 185-pounder also went 3 for 4 at the plate, belting a 2-run home run.

Schneider’s teams captured several City titles, highlighted by the 1934 Sheehan’s Highlanders. In a one-game playoff to reach the chipper, he twirled a 5-hit, 7-1 victory over Capital Motors, fanning 10 and not allowing a base on balls.

The championship tilt versus East Helena was a brilliant pitchers’ duel between Highlander Bobby Kelley and big John “Scrip” Screnar, as the Beermen edged the Smelterites 3-2.

“A desperate steal of home by Dutch Schneider in the third inning provided the winning margin in an otherwise even game,” the paper reported. “So even, that it had the spectators at Smelterite Park in an uproar from start to finish.”

Schneider went 2 for 3 with a triple and an RBI. Kelley – who tried out with the Boston Red Sox – Screnar and Schneider, were generally regarded as three of the best players in the state.

At the age of 40, Schneider could still bring it, shutting out the House of David traveling team for the five innings that he pitched.

On the golf course, Dutch captured five consecutive Last Chance (now Bill Roberts) club championships, from 1943-47.

For his first title, the Helena Daily reported that, “Leo ‘Dutch’ Schneider, one of the long hitters of Helena golf, clicked off” a 3-over par 112, “and breezed home in the 36 hole final against Porter Corby to win the Last Chance club championship, 11 and 10.”

For 1954’s Green Meadow tourney, the paper’s title read: “Papa Schneider and Son Play for Club Title.”

It read that ‘Dutch’ and his 21-year old son Larry Schneider would match strokes when they teed off for the last half of their 36-hole title match at GMCC.

When the senior Schneider prevailed for the crown, the paper noted, “Papa Leo Schneider set down his brilliant young son, Larry, 4 and 3 to become the Green Meadow club champion with a display of golf that delighted a large gallery.”

In 1963, Schneider captured his one and only City Tournament crown, on the first hole of a three-way playoff against Tom Kuntz, Sr. and Murray Willis. The threesome had tied at 147s to force the playoff at Bill Roberts.

Schneider’s final Big 3 championship came in 1966, when at 53 years of age he won the 1966 BR club tourney. He became the oldest Bill Roberts champ when he defeated Lincoln School principle John Wenger three up with two holes to go, 20 years after his last course title.

On the bowling alleys, Schneider’s 1952 team, Elks No. 4, broke both the single game (1,101 pins) and series (3,108) records at the old Capital Lanes. In 1959, his team captured the State championship at the State Bowling Tournament.

Lonnie Burt Contemporary Athlete

By Curt Synness

Lonnie Burt was a great multi-sport high school and college athlete for Capital High and Montana State University in the 1980s.

At Capital, Burt was a State champion wrestler, and a State runner-up in track and field with a school shot put record, while garnering All-State status in three different sports his senior year in 1980-81.

He later became an All-American football player for National champion MSU, and was a three-time All-Big Sky heavyweight grappling runner-up with the Bobcats. Burt then played professional football, with the Canadian Football League’s BC Lions.

Burt earned eight letters at Capital. On the gridiron he was a 6-foot-1, 225-pound honorable mention All-State defensive lineman for the Bruins his senior year. He was also selected to the 1980 Centenary Prep All-American football team.

On the mats, as a junior heavyweight he went 23-8, and placed fourth at the State Tournament.

His senior year, Lonnie pulled off one of the state’s biggest upsets of the decade. He entered the AA Tournament in Helena High’s gym with just two losses, those coming at the hands of defending champion Gary Albright of Billings West. In the finals, the 270-pound Albright put his 52-match win streak on the line against Burt.

The CHS heavy fell behind 5-4 on an Albright reversal with 54 seconds to go in the match. West’s grappler – outweighing Burt by nearly 50 pounds – appeared content to ride Lonnie out the rest of the way. But with tremendous determination and just 38 seconds on the clock, Burt pulled a reversal and then held on for the 6-5 victory.

Burt finished the year at 24-2, and went 47-10 over his final two seasons.

The late Gary Albright went on to garner championships in World Jr. Greco Roman Elite (1981), and National Jr. Open Freestyle (1982), and was an NCAA finals runner-up for the University of Nebraska; before turning to a career in professional wrestling.

“Lonnie was my first State champion,” related former CHS coach Pat Hurley. “Albright was very mad, he tried to get a rematch years later, but Lonnie told him ‘Hey, I won the one that counts.’”

CHS teammate Rick Nordahl commented that Burt “shocked the state” when he beat Albright for the title.

“Lonnie spent a lot of time training in the martial arts, which gave him great balance and leverage,” Nordahl said.



With the Bruin track team, Burt finished fifth in the shot put at the State Track Meet as a junior, before placing State runner-up his senior year. He left with a school-record toss of 56’6½”, which lasted for 36 years, before being broken Justin Jenks this past spring.

At Montana State, Lonnie was a three-time Conference runner-up wrestler, joining Mike Meyer (1969-71) as the only two native Helenans with three top-2 Big Sky mat placings.

His sophomore and junior years, Lonnie met Arnie Bagley of Idaho State in the chipper both times, losing 6-0 and 3-0. Bagley, who posted a top-10 finish at the NCAA finals, was the only heavyweight in Big Sky history to win four crowns.

As a senior, Burt just missed his conference championship, being shaded in the finals in overtime to ISU’s Jim Nielsen, 5-1. Lonnie was also a two-time Regional runner-up, was ranked as high as eighth in the nation’s Division I rankings, and compiled a fine collegiate career record of 82-17.

On the gridiron for the ‘Cats, Burt started three years at nose guard, earning All-Conference selections his final two seasons, while amassing 14 tackles for loss. Now buffed up to 6’2”, 245-pounds, in 1984, he posted 74 tackles, two quarterback sacks and two blocked punts. After MSU defeated Louisiana Tech 19-6 for the National Division I-AA title, Lonnie was named second team NCAA All-American.

Burt then played one season for the BC Lions, and is believed to be one of only three former Bruin gridirers to play in the CFL.

Joe Bignell, another All-American on the ’84 ‘Cats, said that Burt was a tremendous athlete, and one of the “naturally strongest men” he’s ever known.

“I saw two of the strongest guys on our team gang up on Lonnie once, and he destroyed both of them; threw them around like they were rag dolls,” Bignell related. “He was just so powerful and he had great leverage, but his natural strength was amazing.”

“Lonnie was quite a football player, and a good teammate.”

Christina (Smetana) Eichler Contemporary Athlete

By Jim Molloy

Christina Smetana made Capital High history when she graduated in 2006, by becoming the first Lady Bruin ever to garner 12 varsity letters: four each in volleyball, basketball and softball.

Christina compiled seven total All-State selections, and as a senior, she was just the second CHS girl to garner All-State citations in each sport in the same school year. She then went on to a collegiate All-American volleyball career for Carroll College.

Smetana began participating in athletics at a very young age, first gaining recognition in Babe Ruth baseball, competing with the boys. As a catcher for both Godfather’s Pizza and then County Market, she helped the Helena 11-12 Babe Ruth All-Stars capture the Wtate championship, which advanced them to the regional tournament in Wenatchee, Wash.

At Capital High as a freshman, Smetana was a member of the State champion volleyball team her freshman year. She was chosen second team All-State spiker as a junior. Her senior season she led the Lady Bruins in three categories, with 268 kills, 74 blocks and 49 aces, and was second on the team with 204 digs, and was selected first team All-State.

Smetana left the CHS volleyball program ranked in the top five in eight categories, including career records of 672 kills and 195 blocks.

Christina’s prep volleyball coach, Sarah Urban, describes Smetana as “a leader on and off the court,” who was extremely hard-working with a visible love for the game.

“Christina was athletic, smart and very coachable, which can be a rare combination,” Urban related.

“Because she hit the ball so hard and with such accuracy, I could tell her where the hole in the defense was, and she would just crush it to that spot.”

On the hard court, Christina led the Lady Bruin basketball team in rebounding three times and in scoring twice.

As a sophomore, she averaged 6.9 boards per game, and was the no. 2 scorer, with a 10.1 points average. In 2005, Smetana topped the club and was seventh in the state in both categories, with an 11.9 points scoring average and 6.6 rebounds per game.

She was named second team all-conference both years. Her senior season, Smetana was selected first team All-State, while averaging over 12 points per game.

“Christina was an extremely versatile player,” former CHS girls hoops coach Tim Kelly said. “She was tall and strong enough to play inside, and had a nice shooting touch away from the basket, which made her a difficult match-up.”

On the diamond, Smetana compiled a career batting average of .346, while finishing No. 2 on the school’s all-time lists in five categories; innings played, at bats, hits, extra base hits and runs scored.

Her sophomore year she was named second team all-conference outfielder, before garnering All-State



citations both of her final two seasons at shortstop. Her senior season, Smetana batted .359, with 12 extra-base hits, 21 runs, 16 RBIs, and a .551 slugging percentage.

Capital softball coach Mike Miller stated that Smetana is arguably the best all-around athlete he’s ever coached.

“And, she is one of the most competitive athletes I’ve ever known,” Miller said. “I believe Christina’s competitive drive has led her to being successful at everything she does. Despite the fact that an injury unfortunately prevented her from competing in our 2004 title game, without Christina, we would not have won our first State championship that year.” Smetana, who clean-lifted 160 pounds in the weight room, graduated CHS with a 3.74 GPA. She was awarded Capital’s Jude Gleason Award, and was nominated for the 2005-06 Wendy’s High School Heisman Award.

At Carroll College with the Lady Saints spikers, Smetana was a three-time All-Frontier Conference selection. As a senior, she led the conference in kills, blocks and hitting percentage, and was named the Frontier Player of the Year.

Smetana was ranked in the top 20 nationally in kills and hitting percentage, and the top 25 in blocks, and was named a 2009 NAIA second team All-American.

“Christina was so undersized, and yet such a dominating force in the middle,” CC coach Moe Boyle recounted. “She was 5-9 playing middle hitter against 6-foot or better on every team. But despite this, she was a dominating force. Her athleticism and competitive drive were, and continue to be, Christina’s greatest strengths. “I could give you a book on ‘Smet,’” Boyle grinned.

Matt Larson Contemporary Athlete

By Curt Synness

Matt Larson garnered six All-State citations at Capital High from 2001-2003 – three in football and three in track and field. Larson was part of two Bruins State grid championships, in addition to claiming a pair of AA 110-meter hurdles titles, prior to a standout track career at the University of Montana.

But arguably his most shining achievement, was his 2002 all-class record in the high hurdles of 14.21 seconds, which still stands, 13 years later.

Larson did not lose a regular season 110 hurdles race his final three seasons of track for the Bruins. He ran a 14.45 PR as a sophomore and finished third at the 2001 State Meet for the fourth-place Bruins.

Next, he captured two divisional titles, registering times of 14.45 in 2002, and 14.44 his senior year.

Larson also ran on the CHS 400 relay unit, and at the State Meet in Butte in 2002 – along with Kyle Samson, Narles Layne and Todd Larson – the Bruin foursome placed runners-up, getting the stick around in 43.07. His all-class record in the 110 hurdles, erasing Flathead's Jamie Banna's 1988 mark of 14.29, helped Capital to a fifth-place showing.

Larson then capped his prep track career by successfully defending his State 110 hurdles crown in 2003, with a 14.42 clocking.

And today, reflecting on his days wearing the brown and gold, Larson is quick to attribute “very much” of his success to longtime Capital track coach Lon Carter.

“Coach Carter was an integral part of building a foundation for myself that would help me continue that success throughout my collegiate and professional careers,” wrote Larson, from his home in Kalispell. “Aside from the wealth of technical knowledge I gained, some of the most important things I learned from coach Carter were the mental and moral aspects of athletic competition and how to apply those off the field, in life and in my own development as a person.

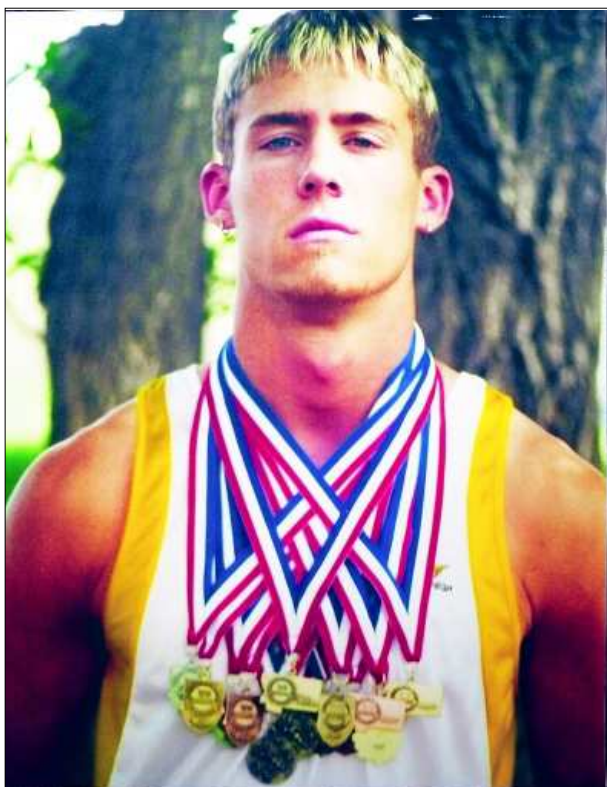
“He taught me discipline, work ethic and humility. But most of all, coach Carter helped me find something within myself that I didn't know was there, and for that, I will be forever thankful.”

The 6-foot-1, 190-pound Larson earned seven letters for CHS; four in track and three in football.

After helping the Bru-crew to an undefeated State title as a soph in 2000, he garnered an honorable mention All-State selection at safety in 2001.

His senior year, Larson helped Capital to another unbeaten grid crown. During the 28-21 victory over CM Russell in the chipper, Matt batted down CMR's final pass attempt in the end zone to secure the victory, and an unblemished 13-0 campaign.

He was named Western Conference Defensive Co-MVP, along with first team All-State selections



at both safety and kickoff returner. Larson set two Bruin records, averaging 31.3 yards per KOR (12-375) for the season, along with a career mark of 14 interceptions.

“Watching Matt compete, from Small Fry Football through his football and track participation at Capital, provided (his mother) Karen and I with more fun, excitement and anticipation than words can express,” wrote his dad, John Larson. “We knew our son had the talent and drive to exceed at (sports), but it took State champion caliber competitions before we realized how athletically talented Matt really was.

“Watching him set the all-class 110 hurdles record was our most exciting moment, and later when he signed the letter of intent for the U of M, along with a full scholarship, was our proudest moment.”

Larson continued his track legacy in college, running the high hurdles and short relay for the Montana Grizzlies. He captured three Big Sky hurdles crowns, winning two Indoor Conference 55 hurdles championships, in 2005 and 2007, and the 2007 Big Sky Outdoors 110 title.

Larson graduated UM with a teaching degree, and currently teaches Business and Information Technology Information at Kalispell Middle School. He has coached track and football at Florence, Missoula Sentinel and Flathead High, carrying always the lessons learned from his prep hurdles mentor.

“It was coach Carter's inspiration that drove me to become a teacher and a coach,” Larson concluded. “I'm just hoping that I can one day be as good of a coach as him and make an impact on a student-athlete the same way he has for so many before and after me.”

Rick Thompson Coach

By Curt Synness



When Rick Thompson retired as head coach of the Capital High girls soccer team after the 2014 season, Helena Schools activities director Jim Opitz stated, “Rick really was the face of girls in soccer in Montana for many years. In his unassuming ways, he led the Capital girls to always play at the highest level.”

During Thompson's 22 seasons as the Lady Bruins coach from 1993-2014, his teams established numerous state records, highlighted by his eight Class AA championships (1996-2000, 2003-05) and 204 career victories.

Included among his state records are five consecutive state titles, four successive undefeated seasons, 68 consecutive victories without a tie, most season points with 119 goals scored, and fewest season points against with only two goals permitted. After back-to-back runner-up finishes in 1994-95, the Lady Bruins (14-1) won their last 10 games of 1996, culminating in a 2-1 win over Bozeman in the 1996 State chipper.

Their next four titles capped off unbeaten seasons, besting Flathead 4-0 in 1997, 2-0 over the Bravettes in 1998, edging Helena High 2-1 in 1999, and again over the Lady Bengals in 2000.

Capital attained its' highest rankings in 2000, reaching 13th in the Western States poll, and 25th nationally. During the 68-match win streak, Thompson's CHS juggernaut outscored the opposition 383-21, while recording 50 shutouts.

His final three titles were achieved in the 2003 finals victory over Great Falls High 1-0, the following season's 5-2 win over Bozeman, and a 1-0 triumph over Lady Hawks in 2005.

All-told, Thompson's squads garnered 12 State trophies; eight championships, two runners-up and a pair of third-places (2001, 2009).

He wound up his career with an overall mark of 204-69-45, and his 20 AA Tournament qualifications – including 18 in a row – were also both state records.

Wendy Stuker, who played on four of Thompson's CHS title teams, said the reason her former coach was so successful was because of his dedication and love for the sport.

“Rick made practices intense and fun,” related Stuker, a three-time All-Stater from 1998-2000. “We knew the work we needed to put in during the week, but still joked around. He instilled teamwork and created an atmosphere of camaraderie, and we all had mutual trust.

“He was typically very quiet during games and used practice or halftime to communicate focuses or improvements. Rick created a legacy and continued it by telling stories of past players to illustrate his points.”

Thompson has served as an assistant coach for the Capital High boys track team since 1994. He has been the Bruins long jump and triple jump coach for 24 seasons, and also served several brief stints working with the high jumpers and sprinters.

He has helped two different Bruin head coaches to State championships; Tom Pederson (twice) in 1998-99, and Lon Carter in 2004.

Thompson has mentored five CHS jumpers to State titles, including Kevin Van Nice in the triple jump (1994), and long jumpers Kevin McCutcheon (2000), Narles Layne (2003), Shawn Holland (2004) and Cory Peterson (2006).

“Rick's background as a high school track standout in Jamaica, and later with the University of Montana, was a huge asset for us,” said Pederson, whose Bruins won back-to-back State championships. “Because of his physical ability, he was able to lead the guys in bounding drills, and there's not very many coaches that can do that.

“But I think his biggest asset is his patience. Rick knows how to bring the kids along at the right pace, they learn proper technique, and he has the right demeanor to get the best of his athletes. He has a calm, relaxing style, and yet he knows how to spark a competitive fire when needed.”

Pederson added among Thompson's attributes are his great sense of humor. Once during a team “carbo loading” dinner, he quipped while eating a hamburger; “I'm meat loading, Tom,” in his Jamaican accent.

“Quite a few of Rick's guys have been cast-offs from other events, but he's been able to take an average kid and turn them into great jumpers,” Pederson concluded. “Rick Thompson's a great role model, and I'm very happy for his induction into the Helena Sports Hall of Fame; he's very deserving.”

Nate Boyd Contemporary Athlete

By Curt Synness

Nate Boyd, a 1999 Helena High grad, ranks among the greatest track and field athletes in the 113-year history of the sport at the school.

Boyd was a seven-time State track champion, with five individual titles and two relay crowns. The only Bengal boy with more is Earle “Pruney” Parsons (1938-40), with eight total titles, six individual and two relays. And all Parsons did was go on to play professional football for the San Francisco 49ers.

At the conclusion of his career, Boyd graduated HHS with no less than eight school records.

“Nate is the most decorated track athlete at Helena High, even running a season with a casted arm,” said Bengal coach, Tony Arntson. “His track teams earned three top-three State trophies – a championship, runner-up, and third – and were State runners-up in football.”

Boyd started out as a football player, a swimmer, and a basketball player. He didn't even go out for track until his freshman year.

By the end of his fourth track season, Boyd tied the then school record – joining Richard Crum (1909) and Parsons (1939-40) – by competing in six events at State.

Nate's sophomore year, coach Bill Gilbert's Bengal tracksters garnered the 1997 AA title in Billings, amassing 80 points. Boyd ran on the winning 400 relay, with Justin Myles, Grady Simpson and Jake Maes.

He also placed State runner-up in the 110 hurdles, clocking a 14.88.

His junior year, he sustained a broken arm during football season, which needed surgery again prior to the 1998 track season. But he learned to adapt running with a cast, and qualified for five events at the 1998 State Meet in Butte.

Boyd scored 22½ of the third-place Bengals' 71 points at State, winning championships in the 100 dash in 11.01, the 110 hurdles in 15.09, and the 400 relay (with Ben Schendel, Tyler Peterson and Jake Maes) in a school-record 42.91.

The tireless Bengal was going for his fourth gold medal, in the 200 dash, when he finally ran out of gas.



“Boyd came around the corner in the middle of the pack, and then he slowed visibly,” the IR reported. “He tried to stretch out his legs, but after a couple of steps he began hobbling” and had to drop out.

As a senior, Boyd entered the 1999 Class AA Meet in Helena in six events, and came away with medals in every race at Vigilante Stadium.

He successfully defended his titles in the 100 in 11.05, and the 110 hurdles at 14.56, while adding the 200 crown in 21.88. He also placed third in the 300 hurdles (39.12), and anchored the runner-up 1,600 relay (with Kevin Flatow, Brett Birmingham and Ty Peterson) in 3:25.73, and the third-place 400 relay (with Peterson, Grady Schendel and Birmingham) in 42.84.

In the long relay, Boyd received the baton in sixth place, before proceeding to pass three runners for the second-place medal.

His times in the high hurdles, 200 and 400 relay were all new school records. And it just so happened the former 1969 hurdles mark – which at the time was HHS' longest-standing record – belonged to his hurdles coach, Joe Epler.

“Nate had two things you can't coach: the God given talent of speed, and the will to compete and win,” explained Epler, whose 120 yard hurdles hand-timed record (converted to 14.83 FAT) lasted 30 years. “As his coach, all I had to do was knock off the rough edges and work on what was going on between his ears.”

His fourth HHS record was a 10.85 in the 100 dash. Boyd - who is also the only local prep athlete to win back-to-back, 100 dash and 110 hurdles titles – holds Bengal records for State Track Meet career points (74) points and medals (13); and State Meet points (34) and medals (six).

On the gridiron, he used his speed for the Bengals at receiver, and his senior year he helped the team to the 1998 State runner-up trophy.

Boyd received collegiate track scholarship to Central Arizona Junior College, where he ran the sprints and high hurdles, and anchored the short relay unit.

“Nate Boyd was an incredible natural athlete and a great competitor,” Arntson concluded. “But mostly, he was a very special young man in our school and community.”

Bob Chilton

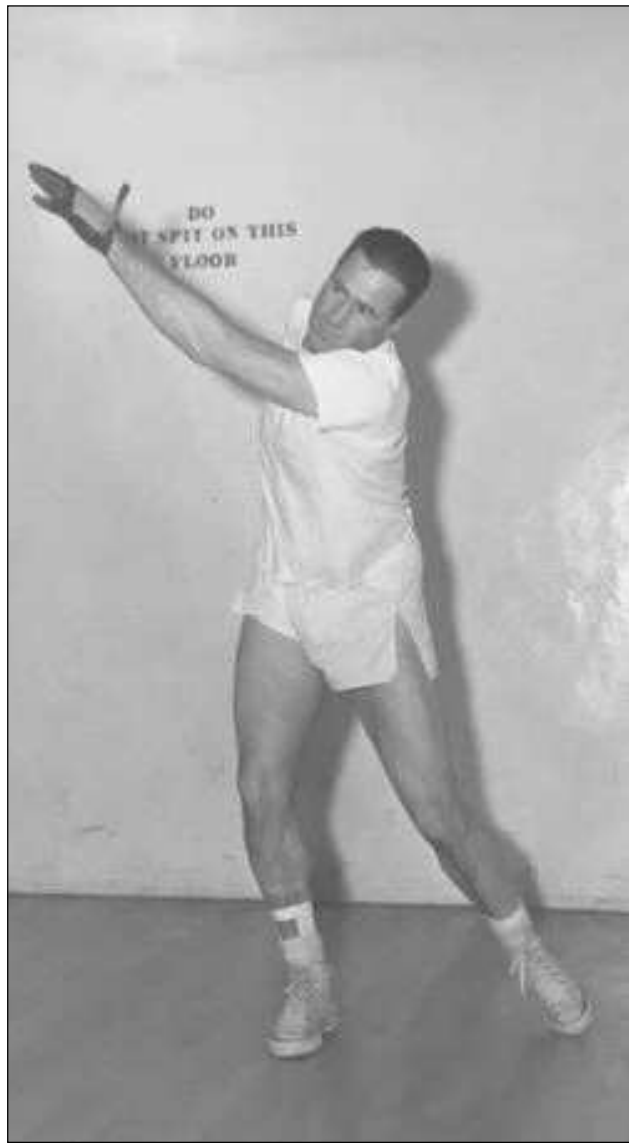
Golden Athlete

By Jim Molloy

Bob Chilton moved with his family from Canada to Helena in the mid-1930's. As young boys in Canada, Bob and his three brothers learned the game of Hockey, and each developed an intense competitive spirit.

Once they arrived in Helena, their father established a skating rink and organized an amateur hockey team, as well as a team for Helena High School.

On the baseball diamond, Bob demonstrated outstanding skills that attracted the attention of professional scouts. He played for a Helena team, competing with teams from East Helena,



Butte, Great Falls and Missoula.

As an outstanding right fielder with a rifle arm, Bob batted third and led the team in all power hitting categories. Though he left baseball behind as a competitor, Bob would later become a nationally-recognized American Legion Baseball Umpire.

Bob also was an outstanding football player for Helena High School. As a junior, he primarily served as a blocking back for Earle "Pruney" Parsons, Helena's all-state running back.

The following year, though, Chilton established himself as a premier running back, achieving all-state honors. Again, while he did not pursue football as a player, Bob later became a hall of fame college and high school football official.

While Bob excelled at every sport he pursued, hockey was his favorite. In 1940 at Helena High, Bob and two of his brothers, coached by their father, led the Bengals to the State prep championship.

While playing for an AAU team in Great Falls from 1940-1942, Bob gained recognition as an outstanding goal tender – playing without a mask – with the talent to potentially pursue a professional career.

In one game he blocked 42 shots, and another time he posted 40 blocks.

Chilton's athletic pursuits were interrupted with the arrival of World War II. He joined the U.S. Army Air Corp, and became a pilot. While serving as an instructor pilot for B-24s, he suffered an injury that ultimately led to the amputation of his right arm and shoulder. For many people, this would have been the end of their athletic career, with the loss of their dominant hand and arm. Not so for Bob Chilton.

After recovering from his illness, Bob took up handball and became one of the most dominant players in the State – playing with only one hand. Bob won 11 Helena City Doubles Handball Championships, and took second twice. In 1955, Bob won the City Singles Title.

He was a three-time State Open Doubles champion, and was runner-up in 1962. Chilton partnered with Great Falls' George Ballou for titles in 1954-55, and captured the 1959 crown with Helena's Jack Hollowell.

It is said that at a handball tournament in Butte, a competitor threw a fit in the locker room and, when asked why, he shouted, "Because I just lost to a one-armed handball player."

The others in the room responded, "Join the club."

Bob's brother-in-law, Bill Cooney, states that Bob's athletic career might be described as "What Might Have Been," but that description would do a disservice to his accomplishments in the field of competition and in life.

Charlotte Sanddal

Golden Athlete

By Curt Synness and Roberta Clinton

Charlotte Sanddal, at 94 years young, has accumulated enough swimming medals -- although she's given most of them away -- to last two or three lifetimes, and she didn't even start competing until she was 75.

Sanddal started out winning senior championships at the 2002 Big Sky State Games in Billings, before advancing to the 2007 Worlds Masters Championships in Christ Church, New Zealand. She then went on to capture age-group, national and world championships (and records) in places like Sydney, Australia; Torino, Italy; Gresham, Oregon; and just this year, Auckland, New Zealand.

Charlotte grew up in Chicago, where she enjoyed swimming in the chilly waters of Lake Michigan. During WWII, she joined the Navy WAVES and was stationed at a flight training facility in Oklahoma.

Although there wasn't a whole lot of water there, Sanddal began pool lap-swimming in a "Swim to Tokyo" program. Each mile the women swam over a 5-week period signified 50-miles between the U.S. and Japan. Charlotte was the lone WAVE to make it all the way, swimming three straight hours a day the last week.

After retirement, Sanddal took to the water again at the age of 72, and, one lap after another she swam herself back into shape. She then entered the 2002 Big Sky State Games in six events, in the 75-79 age group. Sanddal proceeded to win gold in all six – 220m freestyle, individual medley, backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly and 800 free.

Following her 80th birthday, she packed her bags and headed out for her first try in the Masters World Championships in Christ Church, New Zealand. Entered in the 80-84 division, Sanddal placed third in the 200 backstroke, fourth in the 400 free and 200 free, and sixth in the 200 breast.

In 2009, Sanddal returned from the World Masters Games in Sydney, Australia, with four gold medals, a silver and a bronze. While at the games, Charlotte swam on a special relay team with three Aussies in their 90s. She competed in as many as three races a day, made friends with seniors from around the world, and enjoyed visiting a new country.

After collecting multiple victories at the 2013 Worlds in Torino Italy, two years later Sanddal, then 92, completed a mile swim in 58:35, at the 2015 State U.S. Masters Swimming event in Polson. This particular achievement garnered Sanddal the Most Inspirational Swimmer trophy from the Mon-



tana U.S. Masters Swimmers association.

This past spring, she attended the U.S. Masters Swim Nationals in Auckland, New Zealand, where she claimed five gold medals. Sanddal established four new world 90-94 records there, including the 100 breast, 200 breast, 100 fly and 200 IM.

Outside the pool, Sanddal snowshoes in the winter, and in the summer she kayaks.

Daughter, Vanessa Sanddal, related that her mother hardly ever misses a day of training, every morning doing her laps at the Capital City Health Club.

"She never complains, even with a steel rod in her leg from a broken hip in 2010," wrote Vanessa. "Charlotte came back from that long and hard recovery, even stronger. She is humble and she never complains about any pain."

Vanessa related how this spring in New Zealand, that Charlotte mother had never attempted her very first 100 butterfly in competition.

"It was the hardest thing she has ever done, but she finished to a crowd of cheers and as her daughter, I know for sure, that 100 butterfly was one of her greatest achievements," Vanessa wrote. "This particular race is extremely difficult to complete for a 20-year old, much less a 94 year old, that had already done race after race that week after flying over an ocean."

Brian Knight

Official

By Curt Synness

To say that Major League Baseball umpire Brian Knight of Helena, overcame the odds, might be an understatement.

Consider this: The odds of a high school baseball player being drafted by a Major League team are 1 in 200, or 0.5-percent. And the odds of that 0.5-percent actually playing MLB is only 7-percent.

There are 750 players at one time in MLB, and since there are just 99 full-time Big League umpires per season, the odds are at least 7½-times greater for a guy to make the Show as an umpire than a player.

Or, as his father, Jim Knight puts it simply, "The odds are against anyone making it to the bigs as a player or an umpire."

But Brian Knight beat those odds.

In 1987, Brian was a member of the Helena Capital Bambino 11-12 All-Star team, that captured State and Regional championships, before placing fourth at the national Bambino World Series in Oakland, California.

"Brian was one of those guys that just loved baseball," wrote former teammate Jason Grovom. "I think he basically grew up at the ball park with his father (Jim) being an umpire. We had many great memories playing baseball starting when we were 12 years old going to the Bambino World Series through our Legion baseball days."

"Brian was a very good hitter and could play any position. He was a smart player and really knew the game of baseball."

Kevin Tenney, another teammate, recalled a memory of the City League title with Brian.

"Brian's dad Jim coached us to the City championship – he was catching and I was pitching – and I still remember jumping into his arms when we won," Tenney recounted. "He was a very passionate player, and a great teammate and friend."

As a utility player and pitcher for the Helena Reps and Senators, Knight was a member of the 1993 Senators that placed third at the State AA Tournament. He posted an unbeaten 4-0 record on the mound in relief.

After attending the Brinkman-Froemming Umpire School in 1995, Knight was assigned to work the Class A Pioneer League. Subsequently, he officiated in the Midwest League, Class AA Florida State League, and AA Southern League.

Knight moved up to the Class AAA in 2000, and over the next 10 years with Triple A and as a reserve MLB umpire, he was called up to work more than 700 big league games.

In 2005, Knight was the home plate umpire when Pedro Martinez just missed throwing a no-hitter for the Mets. He was also behind the plate in 2008, when Jon Lester pitched a no-hitter for the Boston



Red Sox. And later that year, Knight made the safe call at first base when Seattle's Ichiro tied the record of eight consecutive 200-hit seasons.

He also umpired the inaugural World Baseball Classic, Tokyo, Japan Round, in 2006. During a Spring Training game in 2006, between the Royals and Astros, Brian had a chance to speak a few personal words with former president George HW Bush.

In 2011, Knight was promoted to full-time Major League Umpire status in 2011, becoming just the second local area native – along with Herb Plews, who played for the Washington Senators and Boston Red Sox – to reach "The Show."

Since then, Knight has worked the 2012 All-Star Game; the 2013 American League Wild Card Game; two National League Division Series, in 2014-15; and the 2016 American League Division Series.

In 2014, he called his second no-hitter, by L.A. Dodger Josh Beckett, and 2016 he worked retiring Dodger broadcaster Vin Scully's last game.

So how was Knight able to beat those incredible odds and reach the Majors? His father believes there were multiple factors involved in his son's success.

"Brian had several things that helped," Jim Knight explained. "He started very young, he was a good learner and he worked hard every day. He also had several guys in the game give him good advice and he tried to learn from everyone."

"Brian understood that he could only control some things and he didn't concern himself with things he had no control over. And he tried to never get high on his success, but instead stayed humble and grounded."

Mark Samson Coach

By Joe Menden

Mark Samson's tenure as Capital High football coach lasted only seven years, but Samson's Bruins packed a lot of glory into that short time span.

Samson led the team to playoff appearances in six of his seven years (1997-2003) at the Bruins' helm, bringing home three state championships along the way. He compiled a 67-12 record, for an .848 winning percentage that still stands as the best in the powerhouse program's storied history.

A Capital High football and track standout, Samson is the son-in-law of NAIA Hall-of-Fame football coach Bob Petrino, for whom he worked seven years as an assistant at Carroll College, including five as offensive coordinator.

From 1999 to early 2001, Samson's CHS teams reeled off 26 consecutive victories, setting a Class AA record. All three of his championships put together perfect seasons, including a new AA mark of 13-0 for the 2002 campaign.

Samson's first title came in 1999, led by junior quarterback Tyler Emmett and state defensive MVP Greg Carothers, finished the year as the highest scoring team in AA with 452 points, while a stingy defense held opponent to 121 points, with five shutouts. They closed the year by dominating Billings West 53-24 in the championship game.

Samson's 2000 Bruins were equally dominant. Led by Emmert and running back Don Saisbury, Capital rolled to back-to-back titles, capped by a 35-6 victory over Kalispell.

"Coach Samson is an exceptionally talented coach, when I played for Capital it always felt like we were more prepared than our opponents," said Emmert, a two-time NAIA Player of the Year for Carroll College. "He was directly responsible for that preparation and a lot of individual's success at CHS. "He cared about the kids that played for him and the players knew it; he was able to get the most out of his players," Emmert continued. "I'll be forever thankful for the things Coach Samson did for me at Capital High."

Samson's third title didn't come quite as easy. C.M. Russell entered the season as the defending state champion and favored to repeat. When the two met in the regular season, the Bruins needed a late comeback for a 31-30 win in OT, ending CMR's 20-game win streak.

Russell looked like it might avenge that loss in the title game, leading 21-7 midway through the third quarter. But the Bruins rallied again, scoring 21 straight points, including a Todd Nelson TD run with 48 seconds left, for a 28-21 triumph.

"Those two teams in 1999-2000 were very good football teams," Samson said. "We had a lot of talent. I don't think it's fair to compare teams, but I can say I am more proud of this team than any other I've coached."



"I guess a state title always means a little bit more when your son (quarterback Kyle) is part of it," Mark admitted after the win.

After leaving Capital, Samson spent 10 years coaching Montana State-Northern. In 2006, he guided the Lights to an NAIA playoff appearance and a 9-3 record, and was selected the Frontier's Coach of the Year.

After a year out of coaching, Samson directed Class A Havre for one season, leading the Blue Ponies to their first playoff appearance in four years. He then returned to the AA ranks in 2016 as head coach for Great Falls High.

Kyle Samson, who later became a NAIA All-American under his dad at MSU-Northern, thinks "the most important reason" Mark has been successful is because his work ethic is second to none.

"My dad works extremely hard and always has his teams prepared to win, and he always builds relationships with all his coaches and players," explained Kyle, who is entering his fifth season as Flathead's head coach. "Players will run through a wall for him because they know that he cares about them and loves them."

"He always told me that you might not be the biggest or most talented player on the field, but you better always be the hardest worker. He modeled that as a coach and as a father and I know that I wouldn't be the person I am today without him and all the character and values he has taught me."

Megan (Zanto) Handl Contemporary Athlete

By Joe Menden

Megan (Zanto) Handl was a two-sport star for the Capital Bruins who went on to a Montana State volleyball career that saw her become one of the elite collegiate middle blockers in the nation.

Megan finished her career at MSU in 2005 with 592 total blocks and 511 block assists, setting school records that still stand in both categories.

While volleyball was where she excelled as a collegiate athlete, the 6-foot-3 Zanto was a two-sport star in high school, a three-year starter in volleyball and basketball, and she earned six varsity letters.

She holds the pre-2002 capital record for kills in a season (394) and Capital's overall career kills record (925). Twice she earned all-state volleyball honors, including a first-team selection as a senior.

"Megan was one of Capital's best learners of the game, from the beginning to end of her high school career, and a very active middle blocker," said Mike Burk, former Capital High School volleyball coach. "Her great height and athleticism, coupled with our program's history and development of middle blockers, helped her along the way."

"More importantly than her great athletic career, is the fact that Megan was a great person both on and off the court. And she still is."

In her senior year playing hoops, she averaged double figures in rebounds and points, leading the Class AA in rebounds per game.

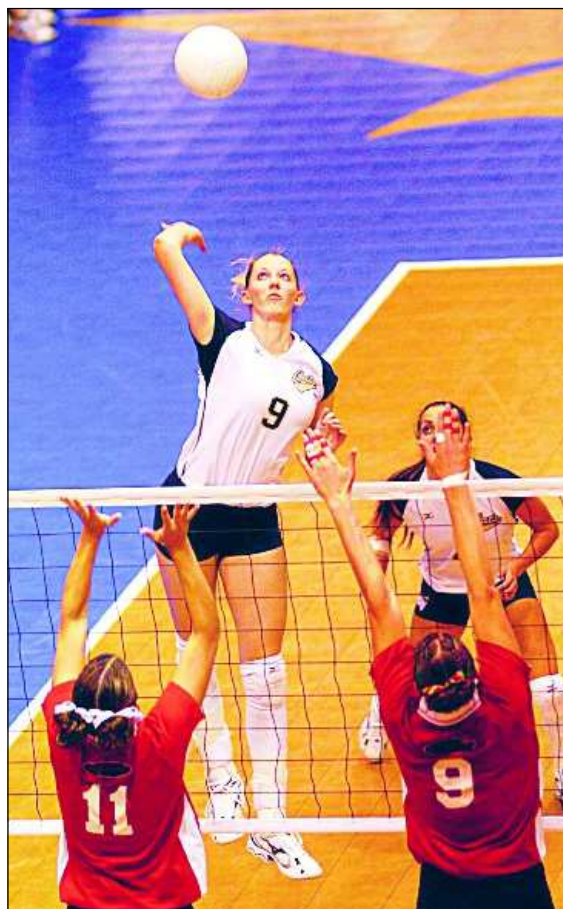
She also had one of her most memorable moments as a high school athlete on the basketball court, scoring 18 points and grabbing 19 rebounds on her 18th birthday.

Collegiately, Zanto was a four-year starter for the Lady Bobcats, earning All-Big Sky Conference honors three times, including a first-team all-conference selection in 2004. She also garnered conference player of the week honors four times in her career.

Megan's name is still all over the MSU and Big Sky record books. She became the second player in Montana State history to reach 500 career kills and 1,000 career blocks. She also ranks fifth in school history in career hitting percentage (.291), fifth in career solo blocks (81) and eighth in career kills (1,128).

Zanto started her college career with a bang as a frosh against Moorehead State with a triple double; 14 kills, 12 digs and 11 blocks.

As a sophomore, her 1.52 blocks-per-game average rated 10th in the NCAA. Zanto capped off



her 2003 campaign with a career-high 26 kills in the semi-finals of the league tournament. She also averaged 2.91 kills per game, and finished with 28 service aces.

Her junior year with the Lady 'Cats, she led the Big Sky for the second straight year with 1.49 blocks per outing. Zanto recorded 16 double-figure kill matches, including a season-high 21 spikes versus Northern Arizona. She also recorded a career-high 13 blocks against Charleston.

At the time, Zanto's career average of 1.48 stops-per-game ranked No. 2 in Big Sky Conference history.

Megan was not only a star athlete, she was also a standout in the classroom, both in high school and college. Three times she earned academic all-state honors in high school and she was named Academic All-Big Sky Conference honors all four of her years at Montana State.

"Megan came to the MSU program smart, tall and gangly. Bambi on ice if you will," said former Montana State head volleyball coach Dave Gantt. "She proved to be an excellent student in the classroom and on the court, and graduated from the program as one of the best middle blocker's in MSU history."

"Megan Zanto is clearly one of the best female middles I've ever coached collegiately." the Helena community.

Dick Muffick Golden Athlete

By Jim Molloy



The late Dick Muffick was an All-State trackster for Helena High, and a standout Helena Legion and Carroll College baseball catcher. At the 1949 State Track and Field Meet, he set the school-record in the javelin throw of 167-feet-9.

Dick learned how to play baseball on the sandlots of East Helena, and became the Helena American Legion catcher from 1947 to 1949. After high school, he continued his baseball career at Carroll College, before enlisting in the U.S. Air Force.

Dick's Warren Air Force Base team won two Western Air Force titles in 1954 and 1955, and also captured the 1955 World Wide Air Force championship.

Larry Schneider, who pitched Legion baseball with, and then City League against Muffick, remembered him as "being a catching phenom" even when they were little kids.

"When it wasn't going well, Dick threw the ball back harder at me than I could pitch it," related Schneider. "I had to learn to catch the ball in the webbing of my glove. He was a good hitter, but I don't remember much concern (for his power) when I pitched against him."

Schneider said he didn't remember Muffick throwing many runners out "because he was so into showing off his amazing arm" that nobody dared steal on him.

"Even I had to duck when he threw the ball on a rope to second base after my warm-ups," Schneider said. "He threw the ball harder than anybody ... I always thought he might have been better suited to be a pitcher than a catcher."

After leaving the Air Force in 1956, Muffick returned home and was the player/coach for the semi-pro East Helena Smelterites, which captured several Copper and State League championships.

In 1957, he was signed by the New York Yankees, serving in their farm system for two years and rising to the equivalent of Double-A minor league level.

Muffick played his first season in the minors for the Greenville Majors in the Class D Sooner State League. In 107 games, he batted .238, with 12 doubles and one home run.

During the off season, he stayed in shape by officiating basketball.

Muffick spent his last minor league season with the Class C Modesto Reds in the California League, where he batted .261 in 126 games, with a .363 on base percentage. He cracked 18 doubles, scored 63 runs and posted 45 RBIs.

Behind the plate, Muffick set two defensive records for the league as he threw out 48 base runners attempting to steal, and made 957 putouts. Muffick led the league's catchers with a .988 fielding percentage as well, for the third-place Reds.

When Dick came to the realization that his path to the majors was blocked by Yankee stalwarts Yogi Berra and Elston Howard, he returned home to again play and coach for the East Helena Smelterites, until 1963, when he took over as head coach for the Helena (Senators) Legion.

One of his teammates on the Smelterites was a then-little-known guy by the name of Charley Pride.

Another teammate was fellow East Helenan Terry Screnar, who recalled Muffick's "accurate, bullet arm" which made him very difficult to steal on.

"Dick was a decent hitter who was very adept at hitting to all fields, and he was excellent in a 'hit and run' situation," said Screnar, who also spent two years in the minors. "But his main strength (was as) an intelligent thinker who was always on top of the game. Strategic capabilities in this area served him well in the many years he was manager of the legion team."

"And, like his father, John, Dick was a great story teller particularly when talking about his athletic endeavors."

Muffick went on to coach the Senators for 17 years, highlighted by the team's first State championship in 1968.

"Dick was a very good defensive catcher, a smart signal caller with a good arm, and an average hitter," said teammate, assistant coach, and longtime friend Keith Sell. "He was also very good at training catchers for the legion baseball team; he made sure they learned to do things right."

"Dick Muffick was a great guy, and one of my best friends."

1982 Helena High Boys Cross Country Contemporary Team

By Curt Synness

In the fall of 1982, the Helena High boys cross country team entered the State AA Meet in Billings with an unblemished dual and invitational record, and was favored to come out of the post season finale the same way.

Helena coach Bill Gilbert, never one to brag, told the IR before the meet, “I guess we would have to be considered the favorite, since we’ve beaten all of the other AA opponents.”

The soft-spoken Gilbert added that he “would just as soon go in the favorite,” rather than an underdog, and he didn’t think the pressure of expectation would affect his team.

The Bengals were led by three top-five placers at the Missoula Invitational – seniors Jerry Mangan and Steve Simpson, and junior Tony Poirier. Either Mangan or Simpson won all but one of the season meets, and between them they broke course records five times.

At the Lake Hills Golf Course, HHS not only met their expectations, but actually exceeded them, capturing the title with a state record. Their 38 points was a new low for Class AA, easily outpointing runner-up Billings Senior’s 83, by a whopping 45 points.

The Bengal juggernaut put four in the top-10, with Mangan (15:26), Simpson (15:41) and Poirier (15:49) placing 3-4-5. Dan Chrichton (16:07) was also part of the red-and-white’s pack, finishing seventh, while frosh Brink Kuchenbrod (16:27) took 19th.

Hellgate’s Bill Kelly garnered individualist honors, with a 15:06 clocking.

Rounding out Helena’s roster were Chris Chrichton in 24th, and future governor Steve Bullock in 90th. The late J.J. Coggeshall, who served as team motivator, was the team’s alternate.

“Though our main goal was a team title, each of our top three runners had beaten Kelly during the season, and were considered contenders,” coach Gilbert said.



1986-87 Capital High Boys Golf Contemporary Teams

By Curt Synness

The Capital High boys golf team captured back-to-back State championships in 1986-87.

Prior to the 1986 AA Tournament at Fairmont Hot Springs, the Bruins were considered the favorites to bring home their first State title, having won four out of five invitational tourneys during the season.

Two years earlier, coach Dan Dietzen’s CHS linksters had tied for the 1984 title on the same course, only to lose and settle for runner-up after the second playoff hole with Billings Senior.

Their lone defeat during the ’86 season was to Bozeman, after blowing a first-round, 8-stroke lead. Dietzen felt his

guys were “too conservative” the second round, and assured the IR State would be different.

“Everyone is expected to play as hard as they can, and not play to protect a lead – we have the lead,” said Dietzen,

a former football player for Helena High back in the day.

The Bruins, with a combined stroke average of 78.5, were led by senior Chet Bozdog, who was considered among the favorites for an individual title.

After the first day of play, the Bru-crew held a slim 1-stroke lead over Billings West, 307-308.

All five Capital linksters scored under 80, led by Bozdog and Parker Heller, with a pair of 75s.

Defending State champion Todd Kernhagen (Great Falls High) had a 4-stroke cushion at 71.

On Day 2, the Bruins made their lead hold up, carding a 310 for a 617 total, and 5-stroke victory over runner-up West, at 622. State champion CHS was also just two shots away from the AA record of 315.

Steady Chet Bozdog matched his opening round 75, for a 150 score, and a third-place medal. Kernhagen retained his title with a 144.

Bozdog was followed by Steve Hill (79-75) and freshman Rob Logsdon (78-76), who shared a 4-way tie for sixth-place with 154s. Heller was their fourth scorer, just missing All-State at 159, while fifth-man Mike Roberts came in at 163.

“This is a smile that we won’t wipe off our faces for a long time,” Dietzen said.

And then the next year, the brown-and-gold linksters and their skipper wore even bigger smiles.

Capital entered the 1987 State Tournament at Butte’s Country Club as a co-favorite with crosstown Helena High. Of the six season invites contested, the Bruins won four, and HHS captured the other two.

Among the individual favorites were Hill, Roberts, Logsdon and Helena’s Tim Garden.

“I think we have as good a chance as anybody,” coach Dietzen predicted before the competition.

And after the first day, the defending champs were sitting in a great position, just two strokes behind leader Butte, 307-309.

Hill was tied for fifth at 75, two shots off the pace of leader Garden’s 73. All four Bruin scorers were 79 or better, with Roberts also in the top-15 with a 77.

The next day, the issue was still in doubt until the final hole, when Steve Hill’s sank a 5-foot pressure putt to clinch CHS’ repeat crown. Hill’s putt in the rain broke a tie with Missoula Sentinel, giving the Bru-crew a 1-stroke victory over the Spartans, 624-625.

Teammate Jay Skoog had been counting team scores in the clubhouse, and advised Hill of the situation as he approached the 18th green.

“I wanted to know, and I was (still) a little nervous (later in the clubhouse),” Hill related after his clutch performance, “but then I saw all the guys smiling...”

Hill shot identical rounds of 75, for a 150, and a tie for second with HHS’ Garden. He then captured the runner-up medal in a playoff to break the tie.

West’s Drake Webbinger (74-73—147) took individualist honors.

Sentinel suffered a blow after the first round when their Jackson Beighle and his 77 were disqualified for an incorrect scorecard.

Logsdon (78-77—155) – a soph who would later win CHS’ first individual championship – finished eighth, while Mike Roberts (77-79—156) tied for 10th. Skoog was the fourth scorer at 163, and fifth-man Dan Roberts carded a 173.

“Steve likes to play in the rain, and Rob and Mike do all right in it, too,” Dietzen told the IR, with a grin.



1987 Helena High Boys Gymnastics Contemporary Team

By Curt Synness

Prior to the 1987 State Gymnastics meet at Missoula, the Helena High boys had never won an AA championship, dating back over 25 years to the inception of the MHSA sanctioned event.

But the Bengals entered the chipper in Big Sky’s gym as heavy favorites, having never been challenged in four season meets – easily winning two invitationals which included all five schools that still had boys teams, and both duals versus Capital.

HHS was led by senior Tim Fromm, who was the defending champ in the all-around, rings, parallel bars and pommel horse. He also finished in the top-5 in 1986’s other three events, and coach Bill Kaiser predicted before the meet that Fromm “had a shot” at winning all six events, “unless one of his teammates beats him out.”

Which is exactly what happened.

Fromm led the Bengals to their first (and only) State title, amassing a school record 271.9 points to runner-up Capital’s 249.45, while capturing the all-around plus five individual events.

Fromm won the all-around with 100.9 points, with victories in the floor exercise (17.77 points), pommel horse (14.4), rings (16.22), parallel bars (14.92) and horizontal bar (15.32).

HHS teammate Greg Smith prevented Fromm from becoming the second boy from sweeping all six events. Smith edged the all-around champ in the vault, 17.55-17.45.

“Greg really stuck his vault, while Tim had a good vault, but he took a step on the landing and that may have cost him,” coach Kaiser told the IR.

Fromm did have to come from behind to win the pommel horse, edging CHS’ Shane Maharg in the finals, by a ½-point.

Helena’s Dan Dean placed runner-up in the all-around with 88.3, while also placing second in the high bar (15.1). Another Bengal runner-up was Smith, in the floor (17.07).

Rounding HHS’ top-5 placers were Smith, third in the all-around; Dean, third on parallel bars, fourth in the vault and fifth on pommel horse; and Todd Foster, third on rings and fourth on the high bar.

“We had a lot of red shirts up there on the awards stands ... I am proud that this is the first team to take State for Helena High,” Kaiser said afterwards.



1983, 1988 Capital High Boys Gymnastics Contemporary Teams

By Curt Synness

As a Carroll College football player, longtime Capital teacher and administrator Walt Chancy had earned a tryout with the NFL Dallas Cowboys in 1975, and his exploits on the gridiron culminated in enshrinement into the Saints Hall of Fame.

So it was no surprise when Chancy parlayed his expertise in that venue into coaching two State football championships for the CHS Bruins, in 1993 as co-coach, and an undefeated title as head man in 1996.

But what was perhaps unexpected was the previous decade, when Chancy guided the brown and gold to a couple AA titles in a sport he'd never actually participated in – gymnastics.

Twice in the 1980s, Chancy's Capital boys won State Gymnastics championships, the latter coming in the final year of sanctioned prep gymnastics in Montana.

In 1983, the Bruins captured the program's first-ever Western Divisional crown, edging runner-up crosstown Helena High, 227-221, in the HHS gym.

Capital attained the victory with their great depth, as Ward Yuhas won their only individual championship, in the vault with a score of 17.75 points. Bruins placing runner-up were Yuhas (parallel bars, all-around), Duane Frederick (rings, high bar), and Bill Thiel (pommel horse).

CHS won despite the absence of standout Dave LaTour to injury, and a banged up Frederick, who had been sidelined for three weeks and was competing hurt.

At State in Billings, the Bruins tallied 116.75 and were in second-place after the first day of optional round, 2½ points behind leader Great Falls High (119.15) in the 6-team meet.

But the second, again on the strength of their solid depth – CHS did not crown an individual titlist – Capital garnered the program's first State championship, shading second-place Helena (again by six points), 252-246.

The Bruins top individual finish belonged to Fredericks, who placed runner-up in the rings with a score of 14.90 points. Teammates Rich Christian (14.35) and Sven Brown (12.25) finished third and sixth in the event.

Frederick took fourth in the all-around, with 82.55 points, on the basis of a sixth in the vault, seventh on high bar and ninth in the floor exercise.

Other top-8 placings by the brown and gold were Brown (12.975), fourth on parallel bars; Thiel (13.35), fifth on pommel horse; Don Joppa, seventh on pommel horse; and Yuhas, eighth on floor and vault.

"I figured if we were to do it, it would take two days of hard work and consistency, and we did just that," the classy Chancy told the IR afterwards. "They never lost sight of their goals, even with the unfortunate experiences we had this season.

"They just kept on plugging and they paid the price; I would just like to offer my thanks and congratulations to these guys."

Five years later, there were only two teams left in the state, and the championship finals turned out to be a crosstown match with the Bengals.

But Chancy would not allow the 2-team meet to be diminished.

"This is as good a team as I've ever had," he said. "Just because there are two teams, that is not taking away from their drive or competitive spirit."

Again held in The Jungle, the Bruins beat HHS for the fifth time that season, 263-236 for the crown.

Capital's individual champs included Dan Roberts, all-around (86.75) and rings (15.925); Chris Harrel on floor (16.6); Jeff Craig on pommel horse (14.375); and Adam Chovanak on parallel bars (16.875).

Placing runner-up were Roberts, on pommel horse, high bar and parallel bars; Joe Olsen on vault; and Tom Adams on rings.

"Teamwise we shattered our school record for compulsory score today," Chancy told the IR. And he was confident "these guys could compete with any of the teams around the last 10 years. We had depth on all the events ... and they worked as hard as any team I've ever had."



1940 Helena Boosters Womens Softball Golden Team

By Curt Synness

In 1940, the Helena Boosters all-star fastpitch softball team entered the state playoffs in Bozeman as huge underdogs.

But "the Boosters were the surprise of the tournament, and came through with a straight run of victories to walk away with the state championship," reported the Helena Daily Independent. "Byllee Moore pitched the opening game 16-13 win over Glasgow. Jo McMekin relieved with one out in the last inning, and pitched six straight strikes to retire the last two batters and pull the game out of the fire."

In the semifinals against Bozeman Hot Springs, Moore fired a two-hitter for a 16-1 victory and a berth in the title game. And then it was the 15-year-old McMekin who pitched the Boosters to the state title, 16-0 over the Bozeman Merrills-Bridger, firing a one-hit shutout. Facing only 23 hitters in the seven-inning contest, she fanned 15.

Winning the state crown qualified the local all-stars to compete in the national fastpitch tournament in Detroit.

The gals and two coaches drove out together to Michigan in five vehicles. They attached a big banner across one side of the lead car, reading "Helena Boosters, 1940 Montana State Women's Softball Champions!"

The late Sis Sparing once told this reporter, "We slept on school lawns at night."

Helena All-Star Virginia Dare recalled how they got lost in Chicago and obtained a police escort out of town in the right direction.

The journey took "about four days," and unfortunately the Boosters arrived in Detroit late and were disqualified from the tournament. But they were permitted to play an exhibition with a South Carolina team, and "caused quite a stir in their uniforms of plaid shirts and blue jeans."

"When we first checked into our hotel," Dare related, "a bellboy was walking through the lobby shouting, 'Paging Virginia Dare! Paging Virginia Dare! I thought now who in the heck would be trying to get a hold of me in Detroit? It turned he was looking for one the teams, that was from Virginia — Dare,



Virginia."

The Boosters' roster consisted of Dare, McMekin, Moore, Sparing, Joanna and Helen Shoemaker, Phyllis Kelly, Elaine Phillips (Power), Katherine "Kay" Nute, Nadine Pierce, Goldie Shell, Roberta Kissinger, Mollie Rowland, Lillian Myhr, Edith Yetter, Dolores Liston and Lorraine Tomcheck. Marco Mayer and Dutch Hartman were the coaches.

"It was an incredibly exciting experience," Dare once said in a telephone interview from her home in Moses Lake, Wash. "There was one team there from California that arrived in their own private train. And we got to see a Tigers game in Briggs Stadium."

McMekin, arguably one of the best pitchers in the state, could not make the trip as school had started and she was still just a sophomore at Helena High. Jo McMekin (Porter) played in an era before the windmill delivery — but she managed to record at least one no-hitter and led the city league in strikeouts every year until she retired at just 19.

Several years ago Dare, Elaine Power and Sis Sparing, were introduced at the ASA Capital City Classic Girls Softball Tournament at Batch Field. And the following year, Power, Joanna Lieberg and Sparing visited a float full of girls representing the 1940 Boosters. The high schoolers were decked out in their national uniforms of plaid shirts and blue jeans.

After Lieberg, Sparing, Lillian Christiansen Myhr, and Dare, passed away, now there is only one surviving member of the 1940 Helena Boosters; 96-year old Elaine Phillips Cooper Power.

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1953-56-57 Days Plasterers Womens Softball

Golden Teams

By Curt Synness

Back in the 1950s, Helena's Days Plasterers womens fastpitch softball team came as close as you can get to being a dynasty, capturing three State titles in five years – 1953, 1956 and 1957. But they also placed runner-up in 1950, 1954 and 1955, having reached the finals in six out of eight years.

Perhaps not a dynasty, but at least a juggernaut, eh.

During the 1953 season, the Plasterers finished second in the 6-team City League to their perennial rival, undefeated Helena's Freezers (10-0), who had also beaten them for the State title in 1950.

But at the State tourney in East Helena, Day's finally kicked down the door they'd been knocking on for three years.

In the semifinals, they advanced to the chipper with an 11-8 win over the Missoula Merchants, behind a 12-hit attack and the pitching of 6-foot-1 Elaine "Vacuum Cleaner" Hoover.

"Day's Plasterers shaded the Freezers, 11-10, before more than 600 fans at East Helena's Smelterite Park to win the State Women's Softball championship," according to the Independent Record. "It was sweet revenge for Day's, who failed to defeat the Freezers in City Powder Puff League play during the regular season ... Pitcher Lora Hartz mastered the Freezers for the victory. She fanned (the side in order) in the seventh and final inning to hold on to their one-run victory."

Hartz, who retired after the game, also helped her cause with a three-run homer in the third inning. At least two of the participants were pregnant – the Freezers' Jewel Hurley and Days' Darlene O'Leary. "But I didn't tell coach (Kay) Nute, because I knew she wouldn't let me play had she known," O'Leary said during the team's 50th reunion in 2003.

The rest of Days' 1953 roster consisted of Mary Craig, Phyllis Carson Dagenais, Bonnie Fergus, Bessie Mergenthaler, Ramona Day, Hazel Mergenthaler, Rowena Day, Shirley Hininger Watne, Barbara Babcock, bat-girl Karyn Wolf and coach Lloyd Mergenthaler.

Dagenais, who played left field and shortstop, had been a standout grade school athlete growing up in Butte.

"I signed up for every sport at Franklin Grade School, because I loved to play," related Dagenais, who placed runner-up in the City Ping Pong tournament. "We played indoor softball with a big spongy ball and hardwood bats, and we had half-court basketball.

"I was one of only 10 girls chosen for a city-wide duck-pin bowling tournament, against 10 boys; we beat them, but it was handicapped."

Dagenais recounted how later, playing for Days, the men and womens State tourneys ran in conjunction with each other.

"When we lost to Freezers in Havre, the mens championship was first, and we didn't start until 11 o'clock on Sunday night," she recalled. "And we all had jobs, so we had to drive all night to get back to work on Monday morning."

And the highlight of her career?

"Beating Freezers for the championship," Dagenais said with a grin.

In 1956, Days, with only about one-third of their championship team from three years earlier left, opened the State tourney in Billings on Saturday night with an 18-7 triumph over Deer Lodge.

On Sunday morning, the Plasterers routed the Anaconda Merchants in the semi-finals 9-2, advancing to the finals in the cat-bird seat. Next, Anaconda won the consolation semis to reach the chipper against Days, but needed to beat the Helena club twice since it was double elimination.

The championship game scheduled for 5:30 p.m. was rain-delayed until 7, which the Merchants won 11-8. Hoover, who pitched the first two wins, was saddled with the loss.

The final title contest started at 9, and this time Days shutout Anaconda 13-0 in five innings under the lights for the championship. Bonnie Fergus, the team's stalwart catcher, moved to the rubber and pitched a shutout for the title.

Day's received a large Coca Cola trophy for winning the title, according to the newspaper.

Rounding out the rest of the team were Ramona Cuplin, Hazel Mergenthaler, Fern Siewert, Betty Liddell, Marge Hamer, Barbara Babcock, Joan McGuinn, Barbara Mueller and Pauline Super.

The Plasterers successfully defended their title in 1957, defeating the Anaconda Merchants 11-10 in the finals held at Warm Springs. The roster consisted of Hoover, Cuplin, Hazel Mergenthaler, Mary Ann Verbanac, Janice Hamer, Babcock, Fern Siewert, Jeanne Johnson, Fergus, Elaine Siewert, Janice Calder, Marg Hamer and Liddell.

Hoover, Cuplin and Hazel played on all three Days Plasterers championships, in 1953, 1956 and 1957.

Bamby Beaumont related that at just 15 years old, she was the youngest, and "easily the worst," player on the team.

"I played a little outfield and kept a lot of score," Beaumont recounted. "But it certainly was a lovely and wonderful group of older sisters for me."

The State Womens Fastpitch Softball tournaments – which had dwindled to just five teams – were discontinued the following year.

"By 1957, we were the only team in Helena, so we had to travel out of town to get a game; but we still practiced three times a week," Marge Hamer recalled. "I went nuts when they quit the State tourneys the next year. So that's when we got together a few years later and formed the womens City League slowpitch softball. "And it's so neat to see it's still carried on, all these years later."



1966, 1968 Helena Trail Riders, National O-Mok-See Champions

Golden Teams

By Curt Synness

Spearheaded by who many consider the country's "First Family of O-Mok-See" – the Herrins – the Helena Trail Riders captured two of the first three National Saddle Club Association O-Mok-See championships, in 1966 and 1968.

At the very first NSCA meet in 1966 in Billings, HTR handily outdistanced the Billings Saddle Club by 270 points for the championship, 570-300.

Mary Herrin, daughter of NSCA founder and president Keith Herrin, won a pair of Under-12 overall titles, in pole bending in 24.10 seconds, and the barrel and stake race in 39.13 seconds. Mary also placed runner-up in the cloverleaf barrel race, and third in the flag race.

Sister Carol Herrin garnered the 12-15 Key Race in 12.21. Their father, who was a charter HTR member and competed at the first State O-Mok-See meet in 1947, placed second in the men's key race.

Helena's other national champions were Chuck Hart and Roxie Score, who captured the 12-15 rescue race; and Bill and Bobbie McGowan in the 12-15 pair sack race in 13.02.

Also placing in the top three for the local club were Keith and his wife Molly Herrin in the adult pair sack race; Dan O'Leary in mens key race; Bonnie Allen in the women's 300 race; Ben White in mens pole bending; Donna Wall in womens barrel and stake; team captain Pat McGowan in mens 300 yard race; and another sister, Laura Herrin in U-12 pole bending.

In the 12-15 rock and roll race, Bobbie McGowan and Bill McGowan, Linda Freer and Gary Larson took third.

HTR members finishing in the top-5 were another sister, Kitty Herrin (12-15 key race); Wall (womens 200-yard race); Kitty and her twin, Carol (12-15 rescue race); Candy Score (womens reigning); and Karyn Hamilton (womens barrel and stake).

National titlists representing Boulder were Bill McGowan, Bobbie McGowan, Jim McGowan and Donna Wall.

The competitive spirit of O-Mok-See participants was exemplified by 18-year old Diane Connick of East Helena. Competing for Deer Lodge's Mount Powell Saddle Club, on Friday, the Billings Gazette reported that Connick suffered an appendicitis attack, and went into hiding in a barn at the Billings Fairgrounds.

After being located the next day and rushed to the hospital for an emergency operation, the young cowgirl insisted on returning to the competition, although unsuccessfully.

"These O-Mok-See people take their business seriously," the Gazette stated.

The Helena Trail Riders' second NSCA national crown was a much closer affair, with HTR coming from behind on the final day to edge the Burns Creek Riders of Savage by a mere 10 points, 470-460.

And again, it was the Herrins that earned the Lion's Share of hardware in the competition, competing in the rain and the mud.

Capital City riders garnered six titles at the Lewis and Clark County Fairgrounds, including Keith Herrin in the men's key race with a national record 10.88; Susan Swanberg in the women's Western Pleasure Class; and Ben White in the mens flag race in 10.68.

Laura netted the high-point award for U-12, with 120 points. She also finished third in the key race, and fourth in the flag race and cloverleaf barrels.

Keith placed runner-up in the barrel and stake, while Carol Herrin was second in the 12-15 key race, and fifth in the flag race and pole bending.

Kitty Herrin took third in the 12-15 pole bending, and Mary Herrin was fifth in the 12-15 barrel and stake race, and sixth in the princess contest. Marcia Herrin was sixth in the womens barrel and stake race.

Those placing in the top three for the local club were White in the men's flag race, Bobbie McGowan in the women's 300-yard race, her dad Jim McGowan in the men's 300, and Carrel Thompson in the womens barrel and stake.

The HTR foursome of Kitty, Carol and Mary Herrin, and Dale Smithson, took runner-up in the 12-15 rock and roll race. Kitty and Dale also finished second in the pair sack race, ahead of teammates Peggy and brother Bill McGowan (fourth).

And the quartets of Lloyd and Mike Casey, Keith Herrin and Ben White, and Steve and Bud Teel, Dan O'Leary and Mike Wall, finished 2-3 in the pony express race. Joyce Noel and O'Leary had a pair of thirds, in the adult pair sack race and saddle and rescue.

Rounding out the top-six placers were O'Leary (mens barrel and stake, key race), White (mens pole bending), Peggy McGowan (12-15 pole bending), Jim McGowan (mens flag race), and L.M. Toresdahl (mens western pleasure).

"Almost the entire record book was rewritten," stated IR sports writer Roy Pace afterwards, "despite very adverse conditions as rain fell during three of the four days of competition."

