



presents the
Class of
2026



The Helena Sports Hall of Fame Class of 2026 consists of 12 individuals in four categories, and eight teams. Individuals were selected for a pool of over 120 nominations, voted on by an anonymous 20-person selection committee on a points system. Teams are inducted in chronological order based on when they won their State, Regional or National championships.

The Hall of Fame induction ceremony will take place Thursday, July 9, at the Best Western Great Northern Hotel Ballroom. This is the HSHOF's 13th class, dating back to 2003. There are now 159 individuals and 85 teams enshrined in the Hall.

For information, visit helenashof@gmail.com

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Golden Athletes

- ▶ Randy Rucker
- ▶ Susan Court
- ▶ Mary (Tucci) Bryson

Modern Era Athletes

- ▶ Steve Bennett
- ▶ Kelsi (Brekke) Rummel
- ▶ Jeff Thomas
- ▶ Lena (Mortensen) Phelps
- ▶ Bill Cockhill
- ▶ McKenzie Johnston

Coaches

- ▶ Steve Keller
- ▶ Mike Miller

Official/Special

- ▶ Jay Scott

Teams

- ▶ 1940 Helena High Hockey
- ▶ 1997 Capital High Boys Soccer
- ▶ 2001 Capital High Boys Soccer
- ▶ 2002 Helena High Girls Soccer
- ▶ 2002 & 2003 Helena High Boys Soccer
- ▶ 2002 Capital High Girls Volleyball
- ▶ 2002 Capital High Boys Football

Randy Rucker

Golden Athlete

By Curt Synness

Randy Rucker is the only local athlete to achieve varsity season averages of over 20 points per game in high school basketball and a .400 batting mark in Legion AA baseball.

His first claim to fame occurred playing Helena Pony League baseball in 1968, with the Exchange Club, under coach Joe Hurley.

Exchange won the American League with a 17-1 record. Future Helena Senators teammate Greg Pusey was the ace of the pitching staff, was sidelined late in the season with a broken ankle. When they met National champs Civitans in the best-of-three City World Series under the lights at Kindrick Legion Field, Randy, who normally played third or first base, was called on to pitch.

Filling in at a new position, he proceeded pitch both of Exchange's wins for the championship, 2 games to 1; batted .500 at the plate (4-for-8); and was selected tournament MVP.

On the hardwood, Randy led the 1969 C.R. Anderson freshman Wildcats to an undefeated 10-0 season, averaging 29 points per game. The next year at Helena High, which was a 3-year school, he was the only sophomore on coach Lanny Fred's junior varsity hoopers.

"Coach Fred taught me more about the fundamentals of basketball than any other coach I had," Dr. Rucker, who attained a PhD in Economics and spent a career as a college professor at North Carolina State and Montana State, emailed from his home in Bozeman.

The Bengal basketball program was loaded, and Randy recalled marveling at the athleticism of those great players who came before him, "especially Kirk Johnson."

Johnson, a phenomenal outside shooter who later played for the University of Montana's frosh, averaged an HHS career record 18.7 points from 1966-68. Four years later, Rucker would surpass that mark.

He posted a high game of 31-points that year, while helping the JVs to a 13-3 record. "Randy had many skills – size, quickness, rebounding, shooting, and was very competitive with a positive attitude," Lanny Fred texted from his home in Billings. "You only had to show him something once and he got it."

The next year on the varsity, the '65' Rucker started every game as one of Helena's triumvirate of long post cagers, alongside seniors Pat Donovan ('65') and Jim Charlton ('66'). Randy soon joined the 30-point fraternity, against Billings Senior. Sportscaster Cato "The Cat" Butler nicknamed Rucker "The Garbage Man," because he collected all the garbage off the backboards.

In the first round of the Class AA Tournament in Bozeman, after top-seed Sentinel was upset by Livingston, HHS advanced with a win over Great Falls High. They then reached the title game vs. Billings West after a 91-55 shellacking of Havre in the semi-finals.

With 4:21 left in the chipper, they lost

they lost their leading scorer and rebounder, when Donovan fouled out. "Things looked bad for the Bengals...trailing 63-61," the IR reported.

At 2:59 left and the score tied at 65s, "Randy Rucker then hit four straight points and Helena went on top 69-65 with two minutes left," the paper stated. Two West field goals knotted things up again, at 69-all at the 1:22 mark. But after both teams missed scoring opportunities in the closing seconds, that's how regulation ended.

"Rucker hit a free throw five seconds into the overtime, and the Bengals were on their way to victory," according to the IR, out-scoring the Bears 7-3 for a 76-72 win and the championship. Randy's finished the season averaging 15.7 points, helping HHS (21-5) set a program scoring record of 78.3 ppg.

Rucker started his senior season on a tear, pouring in 32, 28, 31 and 30 points in the first four games, for a 30.8 average. He then came back to earth, but lit it up again February, firing in 30 points (his career fifth) and spearing 15 rebounds against Bozeman.

Helena placed third at Divisionals for its third successive State qualification. Rucker averaged 20.8 points and 16 rebounds in the four games, making second team All-Tournament.

Randy led the team in scoring and rebounding, averaging a year-end double-double at 22.50 ppg and 12.5 boards per game, and was selected a 1972 All-Stater.

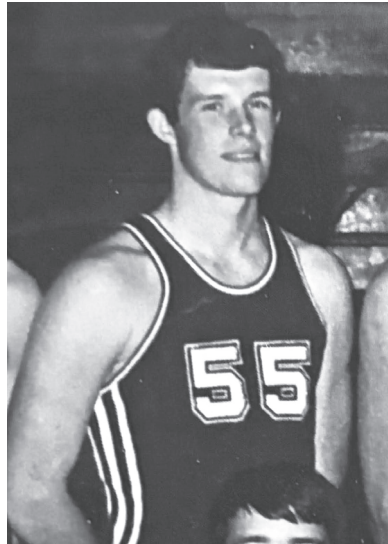
Rucker established two school records – 19.10 ppg career scoring average and 157 season free throws – both of which still stand 53 years later.

He also ranks No. 2 in season points (585) and 30-point games, and is third in season average. He was a 2-year letterman in track & field, in the high jump, discus and shot put. In Legion baseball, Rucker was a 2-year outfielder/pitcher with the Dick Muffick-coached Senators. In 1972 he helped the club to team records for wins (48-7), percentage (87.3%) and batting average (.332), capped off by the State runner-up trophy.

During the year, he posted nine 3-hit games, and three 4-hit contests. During a double header vs. Bozeman in late July, Randy went 8-10, while raising his batting average .443.

He finished the year as the third-leading hitter, with a .407 mark, behind Kim Hurley (.433) and Paul Martello (.407). Randy also ranked No. 3 in hits (79) and triples (4, tie).

Rucker went on to a solid cage career at Montana State University. A 3-year starter,



his best performance was his junior (1974-75) season, when Rucker rededicated himself to go all out, and was the Bobcat's 3rd-leading scorer and No. 4 under the boards, averaging 11.8 ppg and 5.1 rebounds.

He also led the team with a 79% free throw accuracy and shot 53.2% from the floor. His hard work was rewarded when his 'Cat teammates voted him Best Defensive Player and Most Inspirational.

Rucker's senior year was a disappointment, however, when his college career ended prematurely due to several stress fractures. But it didn't affect his studies. In 1976, Rucker was named Academic All-American, a feat attained by only three other Bobcat hoopers.

"Randy Rucker was a key element during our 1971 championship run," wrote Bengal teammate and Dallas Cowboys' 4-time Pro Bowler Pat Donovan. "He was a very difficult match up for opposing teams, (having) the dribbling, ball-handling and shooting ability of a guard, but the height, size and strength of a big man."

Jeff Thomas

Modern Era Athlete

By Curt Synness, Gerald Boland & David Curd

Before he became known as the "King of the Mount Helena Run" and one of the main ambassadors of trail and distance running in Montana, Jeff Thomas was part of two Capital High State cross country championships.

At the 1977 Class AA Cross Country Meet in Great Falls, Thomas placed 10th in a time of 16:57 as the Bruin harriers third finisher – while helping the brown-and-gold successfully defend their title.

Two years later, Jeff returned to his alma mater as an assistant coach, and helped direct the brown-and-gold to another State championship. It was CHS' fourth harrier title in seven years (1974, 1976-77, 1980).

But it was an event several years earlier that would lead to his claim to fame. In 1975, the Mount Helena Run, a reenactment of a 1916 challenge race, was instituted. Jeff, a Capital sophomore then, was among the charter contestants of the 5.6-mile, 1360-foot elevation gain run, to the top and back down.

Five years later, he placed runner-up to Great Falls icon (and 1976 champ) Branch Brady in 1980.

In 1981, Thomas captured his first MHR, in 38:45. He told the IR he'd been training on the mountain that summer. "I love this race, I just wish it was uphill all the way," he laughed.

And he credited his high school coach, Joe Spieker, for making him a successful runner. "I owe it all to Joe," Jeff stated.

After placing second to Brady the next year, Thomas ripped off eight successive Mt. Helena victories, from 1983-91. The race was cancelled during Montana's 1988 "Summer of Fire," and when it resumed the next year, he was able to avenge his last loss on the mountain 7 years earlier, to Brady.

In 1990 he broke the 1978 record with a 36:44 clocking. "I've been chasing it for a long time," Thomas, who by then was running the course 30 times a year, said afterwards, "and I started to wonder if I'd ever notch it down."

His win streak was halted the next year, by Steve Simpson, with a record-setting 36:23. Jeff – who led by 300 yards at the top but was passed by Simpson's blitz back down – finished second at 36:41, three-seconds under his former mark.

Patrick Judge took third with a 36:44. "Any downhill speed they have is better than mine," Thomas admitted.

After missing two years due to Achilles tendinitis, Jeff returned to MHR competition in 1995, placing third behind Judge's new record of 36:10, which still stands.

Thomas claimed his last two Mt. Helena titles in 1998-99. His event records include total (11) and consecutive (8) championships, and overall top-3 placings (16). And he still owns the race's third and fifth (tie) fastest times.

The King of the Mountain has earned his moniker not only as a competitor – having battled his way up and down at the 49th MHR last year for the 32nd time – but as a race director or volunteer in most of the remaining events he didn't run.

Jeff is no One-Trick Pony, either. He also owns six championships each at the Ascent of the Great Divide on MacDonald Pass, the Beartooth Hill Climb at Red Lodge, and the Mining City's 11K Big Butte Challenge. At the Teton Pass Hill Climb in Jackson Hole, he captured four titles. And he's claimed dozens of triumphs in other races at varying distances and formats throughout the state.

Although hill climbs were his specialty, he also completed two Governors Cup marathons (PR 2:37:33 in 1984) and over a dozen half marathons. Thomas was a top triathlete, as well, qualifying for the 1999 Ironman Triathlon in Panama City, Florida.

In addition to his competitive successes, Thomas – who's in his 28th year as a Network Administrator for Legislative Services for the State – has contributed to the sport during an amazing career as advocate and volunteer. He was the results coordinator at every MHSA State Cross Country Meet in Helena for 23 years, from 1988-2011.

He announced, laid the course, and competed in the Governors Cup for decades. Thomas was also the PA announcer for the Big Sky State Games, Spring Meadow Lake Triathlon, Montana Mile and numerous other events around the state.

Jeff has been a Board Member of the Helena Vigilante Runners Club since its formation in 2009, served as VP in 2011, and earned the 2012 HVR Volunteer of the Year award.

A member of the Montana Cup Hall of Fame, Thomas has run with, and against, every big name Treasure State distance athlete over the last forty years. He's been involved in every facet of numerous statewide events, as a runner, team member, announcer, scorer, course layout, course guard, master of ceremonies, commentator, volunteer for youth running activities, and as a knowledgeable advisor.

"Jeff Thomas has always been a winner," former Capital coach Joe Spieker, Thomas' lifelong friend and advocate, said. "He's always set high standards for himself, and has had the discipline to reach his established goals. "Jeff is a living example of humanity's finest."



Steve Bennett Modern Era Athlete

By Curt Synness

Steve Bennett is shined in two sports, basketball and baseball, and is one of only a handful of Helena natives to reach the Class AA level in Minor League Baseball.

Steve's first claim to fame took place in 1989, when he fired a pair of no-hitters with the Helena Bambino All-Stars. The Capital City boys won both the State and Regional championships, -- while running their win streak to 21 games -- and competed in the National Bambino World Series at Delmington, North Carolina, before finishing the year at 22-3.

As a pitcher/first baseman for the Helena Legion, after earning the Class A Reps MVP in 1992, Bennett moved up to the Senators for the State Tournament at Kindrick Legion Field. In a 12-10 comeback win over Lethbridge in loser-out action, the 15-year old right-hander relieved the final 5.2 innings of scoreless 2-hit ball, striking out three and walking one, while stroking an RBI-triple.

Helena went on to place as AA runners-up -- although the Billings Royals had to beat them twice in the finals -- for its highest State finish in 10 years.

The next year, a few of Steve's better performances came in a 6-2 win over Laurel, when he fired a 5-hitter and struck out 16 batsmen, with two walks and an earned run; a 4-for-5 effort at the plate with a pair of RBIs in a 12-10 win over Miles City; and an 11-5 complete game win over Laurel, whiffing 13.

In the 1993 State Tournament, Bennett hurled the second-round triumph over Western Division champion Missoula, a 10-0 complete game 4-hitter. It was the first time the Mavericks had been shut-out all year. As Conference runner-ups, they were the first Senators' club to win 20 league games, and finished at 37-15.

Steve's mound stats consisted of an 8-4 record, and team-bests of a 3.46 earned run average and 97 strikeouts in 96 innings, allowed 81 hits.

In 1994, he garnered his first Ace Kindrick award as the team's top pitcher. He led the club in wins (5-4), while fanning 97 in 78 innings (11 Ks per 9 inn.), and permitting 77 hits. Offensively, Bennett claimed the Senator's home run and RBI titles, with eight dingers and 32 RBIs, while batting .281.

His final season, a few of his best games included a 15 strikeout performance vs. Miles City, a CG 3-hitter against the Royals, and a double, homer and 5 RBIs on offense vs. Bozeman. Helena qualified for State for the third time in four years.

Bennett (5-4, 2 saves) led the staff with a 1.80 ERA and 114 strikeouts in 100 innings, while retaining both the Ace Kindrick award and the club's home run title, launching 9 round-trippers. For his Legion career, he went 18-12, with a 3.59 ERA, and 308 strikeouts in 274 innings, in addition to 19 taters at the plate.

"My biggest influence... was probably my brother Mark and my dad," Bennett told this reporter in 2013. "Not so much for the knowledge, but more about having someone to play catch, as well as learning the simple aspects of the game watching the Braves on TBS.

"Pitching wise... Ken Sargent, Steve Sobonya and John Duffy were my All-Star coaches during Bambino and I learned a lot from them."



Steve was pretty darn good on the hardcourt, as well. A three-year hoops letterman for Capital High from 1992-95, at 6'4" and 220 pounds, "Big Country" Bennett established the school's career rebound record, while earning a pair of All-State selections; second team in 1994 and first team in '95.

His sophomore year, he helped the Bruins to a third-place finish at the 1993 AA Tournament. As a junior, Steve netted 353 counters for 16.8 points per game average, and 197 rebounds, at 9.4 per contest. His final season he averaged a rare double-double. Bennett tossed in 392 points at 17.8 ppg; fourth-highest in Class AA; speared 233 rebounds (10.2 average). No. 2 in the state and ranks fourth on the school's charts; and shot 56.5% from the, which stands sixth on CHS' list. At the 1995 State cage tourney, Steve helped the Bruins to a fourth-place finish and was selected All-Tournament.

For his career, Big Country netted 859 points (13.42 ppg), while scoring 20-plus points eight times, with a high of 26 (twice). He muscled down a program record of 551 lifetime rebounds (8.61 avg) which still stands, and his 20 boards vs. Hellgate ranks second on Capital's list.

At Gonzaga University, Steve was a three-time All-West Coast Conference pitcher -- honorable mention as a freshman, second team his junior year, and first team his final season. In 2000 vs. the University of Washington, he tied the Zags' record of 18 strikeouts in a game (utilizing a 94-mph fastball and hard slider), while posting a 9-4 record, 3.61 ERA and 109 Ks. He left the school ranked No. 3 in career strikeouts, fourth in innings pitched and No. 7 in wins.

He was drafted by the New York Mets and reached the AA Minors with the Binghamton Rumble Ponies of the Eastern League in 2003. For his 4-year pro career, Steve went 10-17, with a 3.86 ERA and 264 strikeouts in 249 innings pitched.

Bennett then returned to his alma mater, serving as GU's pitching coach for 12 years. Next he coached 4 years at the University of Nevada, followed by his current role as the General Manager at Silver State Barricade and Sign, in Sparks, Nevada.

Jay Scott Official/Special

By Curt Synness



Jay Scott spent five decades in dual careers as a sports athletic official and broadcaster. Jay had been a kicker for Northwestern University football in the late 1960s.

His sports casting resume' included stints with the Chicago White Sox, in the booth with Harry Caray; as the Voice of the Chicago Blackhawks hockey team; with various NFL and NBA assignments; and with high school and college sports. Jay's media career took him to seven different states, where his part-time profession became officiating football and baseball at the High School, NIAA and NCAA levels, along with minor league baseball and MLB spring training. This endeavor also included working numerous prep State Tournaments and/or championship games, in football, baseball and girls softball.

After coming to Montana, Scott worked the 1999 Class C Terry versus Power 8-man semi-finals, and Montana Northern's return to football in Havre.

"Jay was a virtual sports encyclopedia of information about the history of the game, the signals the refs used and when they changed," related Shane Shaw, who officiated numerous grid games around the state with Scott. "On the football field, especially in his prime, Jay was a natural leader who put his skills behind the radio microphone to use as the 'white hat' referee. He talked to the crowd over the loud-speaker with ease, and was easy to understand."

Beginning in 2001 and for the next 16 years, Scott was the modern Voice of Capital High Bruins football and basketball, and for Helena Senators baseball from 2003-16 and in 2019. Jay called 12 championship games; five with Capital football, from 2004 to 2008, and in 2011; one for the Senators in 2003; three with CHS girls basketball, in 2007, 2013 and 2015; and Bruin boys hoops, in 2013 and 2014. He also served as the Senators' PA announcer in 2017-18.

"The thing I remember most about Jay was his commitment to high school sports in the Helena area," Guy Almquist, longtime Bruin boys hoops coach, stated, "Very few other AA schools broadcast their games and he was a staunch supporter of our athletes and coaches at Capital High."

Almquist described how Jay and his wife Katherine would both make road trips together to the away games through all sorts of weather.

"He was always courteous of my time and preparation and would give the nod before games and without fail say 'Is this an OK time to talk,' even though we'd been (meeting there) for years," Almquist recounted. "Our community should be very grateful for people like Jay Scott, who put our high school athletes at the forefront and told their stories."

During this same period, Scott continued officiating football and softball on a part-time basis. His assignments on the gridiron were limited to Class B varsity games in August, White Sulphur Springs and occasionally Lincoln on Saturdays, and local area sub-varsity contests on Mondays and Saturdays. His final 15 seasons on the gridiron, he served as the crew chief "Referee" in the white cap.

He retired in the fall of 2020 as a football official after at 40 years in the stripes.

"Travelling with Jay was an adventure as he regaled fellow officials with stories from all over the U.S. of famous and not so famous sports stars, coaches and managers," Shaw said. He also told the story of the time at Vigilante Stadium, when Scott slipped and landed in a mud puddle prior to kickoff. So he worked the entire game in a pair of wet, dirty, muddy white pants.

Another Jay Scott story were his pregame speeches at the coin toss: "The high school association has mandated that we discuss sportsmanship with the captains before the game," Jay would say. "So gentlemen, I just did...now who is calling the toss?"

Kelsi (Brekke) Rummel Modern Era Athlete

By Curt Synness

Kelsi was a four-year letterman in both basketball and softball for Capital, from 2005-09, garnering four All-State selections and establishing a combined 16 school records in the two sports, while playing on one State championship and two runners-up teams.

On the hardcourt, the 5'6" Brekke was the Lady Bruins starting guard for three years, becoming arguably the most prolific scorer in program history. As a sophomore against Missoula Sentinel, she poured in 41 points, breaking Linda Raunig's 32-year old school record of 34. She drained 5 of 8 bombs from 3-point land and swished 16 of 19 free throws. At that time it was third-highest in AA history.

Kelsi could play defense, as well, evidenced by her 8 steals vs. Dillon.

The Lady Bruins captured the 2007 Western AA title and won their first two games at the State Tournament, reaching their first-ever finals appearance. They then collected the runner-up trophy, dropping the chipper to powerful Bozeman High.

Kelsi finished the season averaging 14.5 points per game, 3.0 rebounds and 2.2 steals, and was selected to the All-State squad.

In 2008, CHS qualified for State as the No.3 seed, where they went 1-2, to finish at 14-10. Kelsi scored 10.8 ppg and averaged 2.3 steals, and made second team All-Conference.

Late in her senior season, the Lady Bruins handed eventual State champion Big Sky (and future Stanford great) Casey Britt its only loss of the year, spearheaded by Brekke's 36 points.

Conference runner-up CHS (18-6) set a school record for wins, and Kelsi was selected to the both the All-Tourney and All-State teams. She led the state with 57 3-pointers, 142 free throws and 83.5% FT accuracy, and was No.2 at 19.2 ppg.

Brekke amassed 15 Capital hoops records and produced 5 of its 6 highest scoring games, with 41, 36, 34 and 33 (twice) points.

Among her season program records were

points (437), scoring average, 3-pointers made & accuracy, and free throws made & accuracy. Kelsi's other Lady Bruin marks included game free throws made & accuracy, and career free throws made & accuracy; and game 3-pointers made & accuracy, and career 3-pointers made & accuracy.

"When we talk about Lady Bruin basketball in years to come," CHS coach Bill Pilgeram said in 2009, "we'll ask our girls to emulate everything Kelsi Brekke did."

As a slick-fielding middle infielder with a gun for an arm and a potent bat at the plate, she was the first CHS softball to earn post season selections all four years. Brekke was named honorable mention All-Conference second baseman as a freshman, second-team All-Conference shortstop the next year, and All-State SS each of her final two seasons. The Lady Bruins won three straight Western AA championships (2007-09) and placed as State runner-up in 2007, before capturing the AA title her senior year.

As a freshman, she batted .370 during the regular season, with 15 runs and 13 runs batted in. In 2007, Kelsi hit .439, banged out 12 doubles, scored 25 runs, and batted .571 with runners in scoring position. The 21-6 Lady Bruins finished with a school wins record.

Her junior year, she led the team in 8 categories prior to State, highlighted by 25 hits, 18 RBIs, 25 run, 3 home runs, .527 on base percentage and an .800 slugging. She finished third in CHS' batting race at .413.

In 2009, Brekke missed the first 5 games of the season with a knee injury, but still led the squad with 19 RBIs heading into State. She sported an astronomical .532 batting average (23-42) and .635 OBP.

After dropping their semi-final game to Missoula Hellgate, in part on a controversial interference ruling, the brown-and-gold rallied back and beat the Lady Knights twice in the finals for the first of coach Mike Miller's three State titles.

Brekke struck out only once all season and wound up with a .460 average -- which ranked



fourth on Capital's list -- and .730 slugging percentage.

She left the school with career records of 42 extra base hits and 84 runs scored; ranked No. 2 in lifetime hits, slugging percentage, and season runs; and stood third and fourth in career (.402) and season batting average.

"Kelsi Brekke is, hands down, the best softball player in Montana," coach Miller said. She capped off her prep career with her third Great Falls Tribune Super State selection (basketball 2009, softball 2008-09), Capital's Jude Gleason Award and IR Female Athlete of the Year.

She then played 2 years of hoops for Carroll College, but was forced to hang up her sneakers due to nagging injuries. Kelsi (Brekke) Rummel was a pediatric registered nurse for 10 years, before becoming a stay-at-home Mom with her kids.

Mary (Tucci) Bryson

Golden Athlete

By Curt Synness

Mary (Tucci) Bryson owns the Green Meadow Country Club overall (Open & Senior) record of 12 ladies club championships, and is one of only five Helenans to win the State Womens Senior title.

Mary took up the game at 12 years of age, under the tutelage of her dad, Tom Tucci. Her parents were both golfers and they spent many years enjoying the game.

"Mom and Dad traveled a lot and they always took the time

to find a course to play and people to play with." Mary recalled. "So, my Dad shared that love of the game with me, and also taught me how to hit the ball with every club in the bag."

Tom Tucci — who was known as "Old Smoothie" because his golf swing — emphasized the etiquette of the game to his daughter. "How you treat other players with respect, and how to play with appropriate pace."

And although her dad had the biggest influence on her game, there were several women she drew inspiration from, as well. People like Eleanor Hagler, June Easton and Jewel Lee motivated her to work to improve and to share her love for the game with others.

"Eleanor, June and Jewel were of the generation where limits were placed on women when it came to playing golf," she said. "These women overcame those barriers and taught me to stand firm in my beliefs that golf was a game for everyone."

"They were serious about their game and the competitions, but they also taught me to enjoy and cherish the friendships that golf created, both on and off the course."

As a member of Helena High's golf team, in 1971 she was voted the Lady Bengals "Most Improved Golfer."

Bryson captured her first local major (GMCC, Bill Roberts, City) Open golf championship at the 1986 BRGC Club Tournament, and went on

to win nine more open majors, including 7 Green Meadow titles (1989, 1990, 1992, 1996, 2008, 2010, 2015); and two City Open crowns (1987, 1992).

She also won five (and counting) Green Meadow seniors titles (2019-21, 2023, 2025) for a combined total of 12 overall crowns.

In addition, Mary has placed runner-up 11 times in the local Majors — two GMCC opens, City open six times, two BR opens and one GMCC seniors.

Bryson said that winning her two City open crowns rank among her career highlights. "I believe in competition and I was usually playing against younger players," she recounted, "like Judy Schneider and Joann Roberts, who each went on to successful collegiate careers and still have success in the golf community. So, the opportunity to play and win on a more level playing field was meaningful."

Also, Bryson's ongoing Green Meadow championships are a testament to her staying power — believing in herself and being able to maintain her competitive juices, along with her mental toughness.

In 2016, Mary captured the MSGA State Womens Seniors crown, firing an 80-82-87—249, just one week after her induction into the MSWGA Hall of Fame. Among her other top placings at Seniors were sixth in 2009, and 10th in 2011.

"The MSGA State Women's Senior Amateur championship is a highlight of my career," said Bryson, whose best showing in the Open State-Am division prior to the age switch was ninth-place. "It was a momentous moment for me. I have always been 'in the mix' over the years, but didn't quite 'get it done.'"

A few other championships include the GMCC Member/Member tournament, with her mother Betty and June Briceno, and the GMCC Ladies, BRGC Ladies, and Larchmont Ladies Invitationals. Her career PRs on the links are 35 strokes for 9 holes, and 75 for 18.



Bryson's other sport was softball. She played in the City Slowpitch leagues for 19 years, from 1971-92, and served as treasurer in the late 1980s.

Over the course of five decades, Mary was involved in several capacities and as an officer with both local course's Ladies Associations. And periodically from 1989-2018, she was elected to several positions with the MSWGA Board of Directors.

In 2018, Bryson spearheaded the merger with MSWGA, and the strategic planning process for the organization in 2023-24. She was also appointed to the USGA Regional Affairs Committee in 2012.

"Both golf and competition have brought me many moments of fun and joy, as well as frustrations and disappointments," Bryson, a retired CPA, concluded. "I've met so many wonderful people through the years playing golf and competing, whose friendships I consider priceless."

"Golf is truly a lifetime sport...I get to play with ladies in their 80s and 90s, as well as 20s and 30s."

Steve Keller

Coach

By Curt Synness

Many years ago while on the job at another profession, I encountered one of longtime basketball coach Steve Keller's former assistants. During our conversation, this gentleman described Keller's passion for the game of hoops this way: "If you cut his arm open, it would bleed basketballs."

After a standout prep career at Custer County High and Rocky Mountain College, Keller coached seven years at Ophem, where he won three Class C girls hoops titles.

He took over the Helena High girls program in 1985, and came within 3-points of an undefeated state championship his first year in the Capital City. The Lady Bengals won their first 22 games, before being edged by Sentinel, 49-47 in the State semi-finals. Helena (24-1) then rebounded to take third, 65-58 over Columbia Falls in the consolation finals.

Five years later, HHS captured back-to-back State championships in 1990 and '91, compiling a 2-year record of 43-4. Kellers' Cat cagers were 21-2 and beat Kalispell 57-41 for his first AA crown, and then bested CMR 79-50 for the repeat, going 22-2.

Coach Keller retired as the head gal's coach after the '91 season, choosing to direct the varsity boys and JV girls. But he returned as the Lady Bengals skipper in 1997, and guided HHS to a 20-4 record and another championship in his first year back. His third Class AA girl's crown was a 61-47 triumph over Sentinel.

In 1998, Helena went 21-3 on the way to the state runner-up trophy. They were measured by Bozeman in the finals, 49-33.

The Lady Bengals made it back to the chipper in 2000 but were shaded by the Bravettes in a defensive struggle, 32-29 to finish second.

In Steve's last season with HHS' gals, in 2001, they compiled a 20-7 mark on the way to a third-place showing.

Over 11 years, Helena advanced to the state tourney 10 times, with nine top-3 placings. His compiled a career mark of 213-72 (75.7%) with the girls.

Coach Keller took over the Helen High boys in 1991, and held that position through for 13 seasons, from 1992-2004.

The Bengals won eight Western AA championships, including seven in a row from 1993-2000, and produced four 20-win seasons. They missed only one State AA Tournament. Keller's clubs finished runner-up at State three times, and took third twice.

In 1995, his guys made their initial Class AA chipper under Keller. Helena (13-8) dropped the



title tilt to undefeated Great Falls High, 70-62.

The Bengals entered the 1996 State Tourney at 19-1 with the AA's no. 1 ranking. But after losing the opener to Great Falls High, and a win over Hellgate, they were ousted by Billings West. However, the 20-3 mark ranks among the Bengals' best ever.

The next year, HHS claimed a state runner-up trophy while compiling the school's second-best winning percentage (.913), going 21-2. Both losses were to Big Sky, 68-66 during the season, and 63-58 in overtime in the chipper.

In 2001 coach Keller achieved a third shot at the illustrious boys title, but again the Cats came up short, falling to CMR 63-46 in the finals. In his final season, Helena took fourth at State in 2004.

And although he never bagged the boys championship, Steve did wind up as the third-winningest coach in Helena High history, and his .740 winning percentage (201-73) is the record. In 19 years at Helena High, he amassed a combined B-G record of 414-145.

Keller's lifetime prep accomplishments — six State girls championships, while compiling a career 610-190 career record, 764 winning percentage — were recognized with his induction into the Montana Coaches Hall of Fame.

He then served as a volunteer for Carroll College's men's squad, before taking the head jobs at Montana Western (2007-17) and later University of Providence (2018-23). Steve then retired, after 45 years of coaching basketball.

Susan Court

Golden Athlete

By Curt Synness

Susan Court is a 3-time State-Am Seniors golf champion, and holds Helena's all-city record for the most local major golf titles, combined.

As a shooting guard for Hinsdale High's basketball team, Susan averaged about 16 points per game (high of 40 in one game) her last two years, while garnering All-District and All-Division selections.

In 1979, she was hired by Green Meadow Country Club golf pro Ron Mendocino, to work in the pro shop.

"Ron was an excellent teacher of the rules of golf and etiquette needed to make a round of golf pleasantly enjoyable for everyone you're playing with," Court related. "It has been a lifelong lesson."

She competed in her first Helena City Golf Tournament in 1980, placed third the next year, and in 1982 she finished runner-up to future LPGA pro Judi Schneider. Susan fired a 1-under par on the back 9 and held a 1-stroke lead after Day 1, but on the second day she hit out-of-bounds twice and took a 9 on hole 13 to lose by 3 strokes.

After her second GMCC runners-up in 1983, and a 15-year hiatus from competitive golf (including shoulder surgery), she returned to the links.

In 2004, Court captured both the City and Bill Roberts championships. And it was about this time that a comment inspired her to take her game to the next level.

"I was paired with Bill Roberts golf pro Dale Newell and his playing partner one day," she related, "and after the round he said, 'you know, with a little practice you could win state.' And the seed was planted...practicing became a commitment."

"Golf became (a competition) between me and the course — I never play against any of my playing partners."

Since then Court has amassed a record 19

Bill Roberts titles — 14 Opens (2004-06, 2008-10, 2012-14, 2016-18, 2022, 2025) and 5 Seniors (2019-21, 2023-24). She also captured 7 overall City crowns — 3 Opens (2004, 2006, 2014) and 4 Seniors (2016-19) — for an all-city record of 26 total local major (BR, GMCC and now defunct City) championships.

Her lifetime PRs are 35 strokes for 9 holes and 71 for 18, and she owns 5 career holes-in-one.

And in 2010, the seed that Newell planted a decade earlier came to fruition, when Susan garnered the first of her three State-Am Seniors titles.

In her third year in the age-group, at Bozeman's Valley View Golf Club in 2010, she fired a score of 80-82-84—246, for an 11-stroke victory.

Court claimed her second State championship in 2014, shooting a 80-82-88—250 at Yellowstone Country Club in Billings, 9 strokes ahead of second.

And No. 3 came in 2019 at Billings' Briarwood, when the 62-year old Capital City linkster won by 11 strokes with an 82-87-86—255.

She revealed afterwards that she'd lost 21 pounds through conditioning and diet to get in shape for Briarwood's "Billy goat walk" on the back nine.

"I haven't had a drink since Christmas," she told the Gazette, "so there's gonna be a glass of wine tonight."

But it's interesting to note, that after all her successes, there was no mention championships for a career highlight.

"After learning to play (while at Carroll) college, I introduced the game to my parents," Susan said, when asked for her favorite memories on the links. "We played on the Sleeping Buffalo Golf Course between Malta and Saco...and on Billings area golf courses when they retired."

"I'd give anything to play one more round with my Mom and Dad."

She placed runner-up at State in 2015, while finishing third three times, fourth three times and fifth once, for a total of 11 top-5 finishes in the last 15 years. Actually 12 in 16 years, since she finished runner-up in the Super Seniors



division last year. In 2021, She was enshrined into the MSGA in 2021.

One of her longtime playing partners, Kathy McDonald, described Susan as a "very competitive person," who pushes herself to be the best golfer she can be.

"Susan is dedicated to always improving, which allows her to consistently shoot in the 70s for 18," McDonald wrote. "Even with all the tournaments she's won, she's still a student of the game and is willing to share her knowledge."

As an ambassador for Bill Roberts, she plays "with lots of different members and visitors," foregoing a cart and walking every round regardless of the weather.

"The game of golf has given me so much more than I've given to it," said Court, who spent 43 years in the field of education, as a P.E. teacher and with O.P.I. "My playing partners have included people from all corners of the world, and I recognize that I've been blessed to enjoy this game we call 'golf' as long as I have."

Lena (Mortensen) Phelps

Modern Era Athlete

By Curt Synness



Lena Mortensen was a two-time All-State volleyball player for Helena High; a multiple record-setting track titlist for the State champion Lady Bengal tracksters; and an All-American sprinter at Carroll College.

She garnered nine varsity letters at HHS from 1997-2000 — four in track, three in volleyball and two in basketball, while sporting a 3.81 GPA. A 5'9" middle hitter in volleyball, among Mortensen's best games as a junior were 23 kills, 2 blocks and 11 digs versus Missoula Sentinel; 22 kills against Missoula Big Sky; 19 digs vs. Capital; and 20 digs in the rematch with the Lady Spartans.

Her senior year's highlights included 10 kills and 5 blocks during Helena's first crosstown win in several years; 17 kills vs. Butte; and 14 kills and 2 blocks in the season finale against Kalispell, when Helena rallied back from a 2-0 deficit for three straight set wins.

In the 3-0 playoff win over the Lady Bulldogs, she spiked a team-high 10 kills, with a block, 4 service aces and 10 digs. "Lena does so many different things well," HHS coach Sheila Williams said afterwards, "even though...teams are keying on her and she's always facing a double block."

Mortensen was selected second team All-State in both 1999 and 2000.

As a junior trackster, she helped Helena garner the 1999 Skor-DeKam Invitational championship, with four runners-up (100 and 300 hurdles, both relays) and a third-place (high jump). When the Lady Bengals captured their first intra-city meet since 1993 over CHS, Mortensen won both hurdles races, was part of both winning relays, and took second in the high jump.

Unfortunately she was sidelined with a stress fracture for Divisionals, greatly diminishing Helena's chances for a State trophy. They wound up in sixth place, but were "loaded for bear" the next year, with the return of a healthy and determined Lena "Monster" Mortensen.

Helena retained the DeKam crown her senior year, when she claimed three firsts and a second. At crosstown, Lena won both hurdles events and the 400 relay, and placed runner-up in the 100 dash (12.5 seconds).

At the Western AA Meet in Kalispell, she finished top-3 in all five of her events, claiming the high hurdles title and with the winning 400 relay, while helping Helena to the Divisional crown.

When the red-and-white captured its first-ever girls State track championship the next weekend in Bozeman the next weekend — outscoring runner-up Billings Senior 106-87 — Lena brought home 5 All-State medals, and was part of three winning events and three school records. Her titles came in the 100 high hurdles in 15.05 seconds (HHS record), the 400 relay with Janna Nisbet, Lisa Price and Julie Penner, in 49.58 (HHS record), and 1600 relay with Colleen Ferriter, Price and Penner, in 4:03.43. She also placed third in the 100 dash in 12.76 and was fourth in the 300 hurdles at 46.56 (HHS record).

"When the gun sounded for the 100 hurdles, Lena had a terrible start and was one of the last ones out of the blocks," Helena coach Linda Paull told this reporter. "But because of her determination and drive, she came from way behind and won the championship."

The victory placed her in a unique parent-sibling fraternity of identical championships, by duplicating her father Barry Mortensen's 1969 120-yard high hurdles State title for the Bengals.

Julie Penner and Lena spearheaded Helena's scoring, tallying 33 and 25-points, respectively. Collegately, Mortensen helped Carroll's spikers, under coach Amy (Williams) Heuser, to four successive Frontier Conference crowns.

Her sophomore season on the Hilltop, she posted a couple 19-kill matches, against Montana Western and Lewis-Clark State.

In 2003, Lena compiled 271 kills, and was selected honorable mention All-Regional Tournament and second team All-Conference.

As a senior, she sparked the Lady Saints to the early season 6-team Western Invitational title, and was selected tournament MVP. Mortensen was a 3-time Frontier Player of the Week (Sept. 21, Oct. 14, Oct. 27), compiling 100 kills and 96 digs for 6 games. When the No. 13 ranked Hilltoppers captured the 2004 Frontier Tournament, she posted 20 digs in the 3-2 victory over UGF.

Lena led the team with 412 kills and a .219 hitting percentage, and she ranked No. 2 at 399 digs. After garnering 2004 first team All-Regional Tourny and All-Frontier Conference selections, she was chosen an NAIA honorable mention All-American.

"Lena's a great athlete and a real competitor," CC coach Heuser told the IR. "She works hard and leads by example."

Lena (Mortensen) Phelps is currently employed as a PA with St. Peter's Health.

Bill Cockhill

Modern Era Athlete

By Curt Synness

Bill Cockhill was a two-time first team All-State running back for Capital High in 1987-88, while helping the Bruins to the 1987 State football championship. He went on to a record-setting career at wide receiver and punt returner for the University of Montana from 1990-93.

His junior year at CHS, the 5'8", 155-pounder led the Class AA during the regular season in scoring with 74 points, and was runner-up with 1382 all-purpose yards. In the 1987 season opener, a 24-12 win over Billings West, he scored twice, on an 84-yard touchdown pass from QB Jeff Tuss, and a 41-yard run.

Against Billings Skyview, he rushed for 224 yards on 17 carries and two long TDs, of 71 and 70 yards.

"Bill's a threat whenever he gets the ball," coach Jim Tuss told the IR. "He's shown durability and he's hard to get a solid hit on... (just) an amazing individual." He also credited the blocking of tackles B.J. Cozzie and Mike Mlekush, and the entire O-line.

After sprinting 80 yards to The House versus Hellgate, in the Bruins' first win over CM Russell in nine years, 28-21, Cockhill scored twice, on a 24 yard reception and a 73 yard run.

Against Big Sky, they trailed 27-20 late in the fourth quarter. But with less than a minute remaining, CHS drove 54 yards to the Eagles' 2 on three plays, sparked by two Kam Wrigg receptions. Then Cockhill scored on a pitchout, and caught the winning conversion pass with no time on the clock for the 28-27 triumph.

The Bruins dropped their last two contests, to Kalispell and Helena, entering the post season at 7-2. It was the first time both Capital and HHS made the playoffs the same year.

The brown-and-gold then ran out, beating Kalispell 6-0 to reach the finals, and Butte High 14-12 in the chipper for the program's second State championship.

Cockhill kicked off his senior year with one of the greatest individual efforts in program history. During a 31-14 trouncing of CMR, he tallied all four TDs; with runs of 36 and 92 yards, and 72- and 27-yard receptions from Rob Logsdon. He rushed for 204 yards on 12 carries, gained 181 receiving yards on 8 catches, and posted 36 kick return yards, while amassing 425 all-purpose yards.

His other highlights included a 3-TD game vs. Sentinel (30y and 10y runs, 33y catch); two scores against Billings Senior (76y run, 44y catch); a 47 yard TD run vs. Great Falls High; and the winning TD in the overtime win over Butte.

Bill ranked No. 1 in the state with 1535 all-purpose yards, and was second in points scored at 72. The Bruins went 7-2 in the regular season (2-1 in O.T. contests) before dropping their first-round playoff game.

Cockhill established no less than seven CHS records coming out of the backfield, including: all-purpose and receiving yards in a game, 44 season receptions, 731 season receiving yards, and career marks of 60 receptions, 1305 receiving yards and 3254 all-purpose yards. Of his record

Mike Miller

Coach

By Curt Synness

Mike Miller coached Capital High softball for a combined 32 years, first as an assistant from 1992-94, before serving as head skipper for 30 seasons, from 1995-2024. Mike's teams captured three State championships (2004, 2009, 2024), two State runners-up (2005, 2007) and two third-place trophies (2018, 2022).

During his 30 years at the helm, the Lady Bruins qualified for the State Tournaments every year, while garnering eight Division titles, three of which were undefeated league crowns.

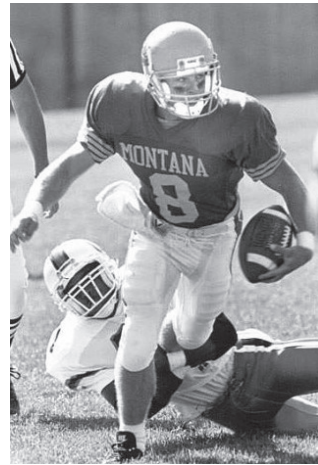
"If I had to describe Mike's greatest strengths as a coach, I would start with his competitiveness," said Ryan Schulte, long-time Helena High softball coach (and friendly crosstown rival). "Mike loves to compete, and that passion showed up in every team he coached. What has always impressed me most, though, is his consistency."

Schulte related that over Miller's long and successful career, his teams were always competitive because he had a unique ability to get the very best out of his players. His Lady Bruins did the little things exceptionally well — they were disciplined, fundamentally sound, and rarely beat themselves.

"If you wanted to beat one of Mike's teams, you had to play your best softball," Schulte said. "That's a big reason why he's so respected. People admire excellence, but they have an even greater appreciation for someone who can sustain that level of excellence year after year."

The Lady Bruins' titles consisted of a 3-1, 3-2 wins over Kalispell in 2004; in 2009, over Missoula Hellgate 2-1, 3-1; and 3-2, 3-2 (8) over Glacier in 2024. Miller skippered four 20-game winners — 21 in 2007, 2025, and 20 in 2004 and 2009.

Shane Shaw, who has been involved with statewide softball for over 35 years, opined that "Mike's skills as a game manager on the field might be unparalleled. All three State title



26 total combined touchdowns, 14 went for 30-yards or more, with longs of 92 rushing and 72 receiving.

Bill capped off his prep grid career with the 1988 Touchdown Club of Atlanta's Bobby Dowd Back of the Year for Montana, and a High School All-USA Today honorable mention selection.

On the track for the Bruins, he was a 3-time Crosstown Meet 100 meter champion, while collecting six All-State medals...two in the 100 (PR 11.17), one in the 200 (PR 22.51) and three in the 400 relay. The relay's (Jami Bugni, Jeff Coleman, Kam Wrigg) best was 43.71.

He finished with seven letters; 4 in track, 2 in football and 1 in basketball. And on the baseball diamond, Cockhill played two years at centerfield with the Helena Reps (1987) and Senators (1988).

At the University Montana, the 162-lb. Cockhill — who ran a 4.43 40 — was a 2-time All-Big Sky conference selectee (second team 1992, honorable mention 1993) and the Terry Dillon Award Outstanding Back/Receiver recipient. He established three career receiving records for the Grizzlies, of 158 catches, 2257 yards and 15 touchdown receptions.

Among his best games was a 157-yard, three-touchdown performance — 43y, 68y, 17y — versus Cal State-Sacramento in his last home appearance for the 1993 Conference champion Griz. Bill's first TD catch broke the school's career yardage mark. "It's great to get the record at home and have this kind of day in my final game," he told the Missoulian.

On Montana's all-time season rankings, he listed No. 3 with 298 punt return yards, and fourth at 870 receiving yards.

Afterwards he served as an assistant coach at the UM and then Wyoming, before returning home, where he helped out with his alma mater's Bruin gridders, serving as consultant (2008-11) and O.C. (2018-21).

Bill Cockhill is currently a mortgage loan officer with Stockman bank.

teams entered the State Tournament as a mid-level seeds... underdogs."

Mike retired as the third-winningest coach in state history, according to the MHSA, with a career record of 409-260. The last 21 years, since 2003, his teams went 338-162 (67.6%) with only one losing season. Miller has coached numerous All-Conference and All-State players, a number which later became standout collegiate softball players.

"Mike's Lady Bruin softball program partnered with parents to build outstanding citizens and future players," Shaw related.

Coach Schulte described how the knowledge he gleaned from his crosstown coach and friend "could fill a notebook with lessons."

"The second call I made after I got HHS' head coaching job in 2014, was to Mike," Schulte recounted, "and to his credit, he never stopped answering. It may be unusual to have a mentor who is also a rival coach, but that's exactly what Mike has been for me."

The Lady Bengals skipper always appreciated Miller's willingness to share his experiences and perspectives, whether it was game situations, practice planning, program development, parent concerns or leadership challenges.

"Mike's impact extends far beyond the wins and championships," he continued. "He's invested in coaches, players, and programs across our community, and I know I'm a much better coach because of the time, wisdom, and generosity he shared with me over the years."

Former CHS girls coach Shirley Chesterfield Stanton related that Miller was instrumental in developing the fields at Northwest Park, "doing the lion's share of the construction of the dugouts and building the fences," leading up to the first game there in April, 2004.

"Since then he has worked tirelessly maintaining and improving the facility," she wrote, prior to the renaming of Northwest Park to "Mike Miller Fields" in 2024.

"I'm just so proud of him," Lynn Miller, Mike's wife and longtime assistant coach said. "He loves the game, he loves the kids. Good things happen to good people."



McKenzie Johnston

Modern Era Athlete

By Curt Synness

McKenzie Johnston left the Capital High campus with 11 varsity letters, five all-state selections, seven all-conference citations and at least eight CHS records, while leading the basketball team to a State champion.

She was a class valedictorian as well, sporting a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. McKenzie then shined for the University of Montana's roundballers, prior to becoming the second woman from to play professional basketball.

On the hardwood, the 5-foot-7 Johnston was an All-Conference guard as a sophomore, and a two-time All-State selection her junior and senior seasons.

She established school records of 328 career rebounds, 184 career steals and nine steals in a game and tied for game free throw accuracy at 100% (11 for 11). McKenzie also ranks No. 2 in game steals (eight), season steals (66), and career assists (343), 3-point field goals (83) and 3-point accuracy (34.2%).

After CHS placed as State runners-up in 2014, as a senior Johnston scored 13.9 points per game over the course of the year for the Conference champion cagers. She then spearheaded the Lady Bruins run to their first-ever State title, 63-55 victory over Bozeman in the finals, to finish at 23-2. Johnston averaged 14.7 points, 4.7 rebounds, 5.0 assists and 4.3 steals in the tournament, and was selected tournament MVP.

On the softball diamond, Johnston earned All-State at utility player (3B) as a sophomore, and her final two years she made All-State and All-Conference, respectively, at shortstop.

In 2013, she batted .391 with 4 home runs and 21 RBIs. As a junior, McKenzie performed one of the greatest seasons in the history of Capital softball. She finished the regular 2014 campaign leading the Lady Bruins in seven offensive categories, including .430 batting average, 10 home runs, 34 hits, 26 RBIs, 35 runs, .489 on base percentage and .962 slugging percentage.

Her final season she batted .314 and led the squad in triples.

Johnston left the program with four records – 15 career homers, and season marks of 10 home runs, 35 runs scored and .907 slugging percentage. She also stood No. 2 in season extra base hits (19), third in career runs (77) and No. 10 in season batting average (.419).

"Kenzie's not a big girl, but she's got great bat speed and she hits the ball hard all the time," coach Mike Miller said. "A lot of those homers came against good pitching. And she's a great defensive shortstop, too."

Johnston was a 2014 second team all-state selection at outside hitter in volleyball, while helping the Capital spikers to a fourth-place finish at State. She paced the team with 238 kills and was No. 2 with 48 service aces and 292 digs.

In 2015, she earned both the CHS Jude Gleason Award, and the IR's Female Athlete of the Year. At a University of Montana from 2016-20, McKenzie became the first women's hoopster to earn the Theresa Rhoads Award four times.

"First 4-time recipient says so much about Kenzi Johnston, just make it a lifetime award," wrote Corban University coach Bill Pilgeram, her former CHS mentor.

Johnston said that winning the Rhodes award four times was "by far" her biggest accomplishment at the UM.

"Being the person that 'Best Represents Lady Griz basketball' is what I am most proud of," related McKenzie. "Being recognized by my teammates and coaches is far more special to me than any other individual award."

Johnston was a 2-time All-Big Sky Conference selection, honorable mention in 2018, and first team her final season.

She garnered a pair of Mary Louise Pope Zimmerman Awards, as the team's MVP, as well, while earning the Grizzly Cup as the UM's Outstanding Female Athlete.



In 2020, McKenzie helped Montana to a 17-win season and its' best record since 2016. She led the Lady Griz in three categories: 13.2 ppg, 5.0 assists per game, and FG accuracy of 46.2%. She also ranked No. 2 in rebounds and steals.

McKenzie finished her college career as the program's fourth all-time assist leader with 515, and No. 7 in scoring at 1398 points. She posted lifetime averages of 11.65 points and 4.3 boards per game.

In 2021, Johnston joined Linda Raunig (CHS, 1976) as our second local female pro hoopster, competing with the Falcons Bad Homburger TG of the Bundesliga, Germany. Over the next three years, she played for England's Leicesters Riders of the Womens' British Basketball and University, and the Southern Tigers in Adelaide, Australia. In England, she was the 2024 MVP of the Premier North Conference, in addition to making the league's South All-Star Team.

McKenzie just recently accepted a coaching position with Utah Tech, in St. George, which is entering the Big Sky Conference this upcoming season.

1997 Capital High Boys Soccer

By Curt Synness

The Capital boys soccer team, under coach John Driscoll, finished the regular season with an undefeated 10-0-1 record. The Eastern Conference champion Bruins' vaunted defense allowed only 2 goals all season, while outscoring the opposition 48-2.

At the State Tournament in Butte, CHS opened with a 4-0 blanking of Columbia Falls, spearheaded by a pair of goals from sophomore forward V.J. Diaz – a header just inside the left post on a crossover pass from Mike McCarvel, and high ball from Brian Literski which he sent flying to the far post. Pat McGrath's header rattled the onion bag on a corner kick from Literski, and Jeff Mazurek received a spinning kick pass from Diaz at midfield and drilled CHS' fourth score.

"Columbia Falls was scrappy, they acquitted themselves very well," coach Driscoll said. "We played good enough to score four goals."

In the semi-finals versus Kalispell, Diaz broke free in the first half for the game's only goal. Alex Gray booted a crossing pass that landed right in front of Vijay, who was 1-on-1 with the Braves' keeper and knocked in the game-winner.

"It was a beautiful pass, and we knew we had that play available," Driscoll related. "But Kalispell is a great program and they had a number of corner kicks and directs in the second half that made me nervous."

Driscoll credited sweeper Sam McGrath for stifling the Braves attack and the midfielders with controlling the ball for the forwards. "And Geoff Curtis played a strong game in goal."

Waiting in the finals was Western Conference runner-up Whitefish. And although Class A, the Bulldogs (11-1-1) were not to be underestimated, after beating HHS 1-0 in the other semi's.

The Bruins' broke the ice early, on a bullet by Mazurek between the pipes at 8-minutes, assisted by Marcus Kelly. Literski tallied an insurance counter from the far left side in the second half, and then the defense – led by Sam McCarthy, Branden Hall, Craig Hutchison and Curtis – helped cement the 2-0 triumph for the Bruins' first title.

"Brian's goal was the turning point," Driscoll stated. "That put them in the position of having to get two goals just to tie, and I didn't think they could do it."

CHS wound up at 13-0-1, while outscoring their opponents 55-2, with 12 shutouts. The team, and keeper Geoff Curtis, still hold the state records for most shutouts and fewest goals allowed in a season.

The scoring leaders were Vijay Diaz with 43 points (18 goals, 2 Hat Tricks, 7 assists), Pat McGrath at 26 points (12 goals, 1 Hat Trick, 2 assist) and Jeff Mazurek's 22 points (9 goals, 4 assists). Literski led the team with 8 assists. The Bruins' 55 season goals currently rank No. 5 in the MHSA record book.

Those selected as 2002 All-Staters were forward Vijay Diaz and midfielders Mike McCarvel and Jeff Mazurek. CHS' All-Conference selectees were sweeper Sam McCarthy and Pat McGrath.



Front row, from left: Cameron Kautzman, Brandon Hall, Nick Brown, Sam McCarthy, Craig Hutchison, Herb Ballou. Middle row; Head coach John Driscoll, Vijay Diaz, Cameron Chambers, Morgan Frasier, Mike McCarvel, Marcus Kelley, Lindsan Elliott, Brian Literski, assist. coach Brooks Morin. Back row: Ryan King, Mike Brennan, Alex Gray, Jeff Mazurek, Geoff Curtis, Patrick McGrath, Ben Hayes, Austin Elliott.

2001 Capital High Boys Soccer

By Curt Synness

The 2001 Capital boys soccer team started out slow, going winless their first three games, and a mediocre 3-3-3 at midseason. But then coach Carl Straub's kickers did not lose again, running the table their final six games.

The Western AA Bruins (6-3-3) opened the State Tournament in the Magic City against Billings West. The game was a defensive battle until the very end. CHS' J.P. McCarvel just missed a shot that caromed off the post, and an indirect kick by Scott Gittens was blocked.

Then in the final moments, Jerrett Grimes broke the scoreless tie when he shook the net from inside the 18 for the game-winner. Keeper Ryan Palmer made a clutch block on a PK in the waning seconds for the 1-0 victory.

In the semi-finals, they took on Eastern Conference champion and undefeated Billings Senior (11-0-2). In the 34th minute, Sean Ward's goal gave the Bruins the lead. The Broncos' tied it up at 1-all in the second half, and it remained so until regulation ended, and thus overtime.

CHS went ahead 2-1 in the first O.T., forcing their way through Senior's defense, with Nick Richards taking a throw-in from Grimes and rifling a ball into the net. But again Senior evened things up.

Next came the Shootout, where Bruin Ryan Palmer put on a goal keeping clinic. After the Broncos' made their first PK, Palmer stonewalled them with two spectacular saves, while teammates Ward, Grimes and Chris Cauble buried their shots for a 3-1 lead. CHS' fourth kick was blocked, but when Senior's next attempt went high, the brown-and-gold were headed for the chipper.

Waiting in the finals was Western champion Helena High. The Bengals (12-2) had swept crosstown, 1-0 both times. But the difficulty of beating a team three times in a season came into play, as the Bruins captured the program's title, by the same intra-city margin, 1-0.

Keepers Palmer and HHS' Cory Bradley shared the spotlight, both making one great save after

another. In an evenly played contest, and a scoreless regulation, in the 3rd minute of overtime, Capital's Peter Hiel cut across the Bengal's backfield unmarked, received a pass from Stuart Phelps, and banged in his own rebound.

"I got a good ball from Stuart and just put it in...it's really nice to beat Helena," Hiel related.

Coach Straub lauded the efforts of Colin Phelps, McCarvel, Grimes, Gittens and Sean Brennan, before concluding, "but Peter Hiel was the man for us."

Capital finished the year 9-3-3, with Ryan Palmer and the defense posting seven shutouts and five 1-goal games. The top scorers were McCarvel with 5 goals & 3 assists, Gittens at 5 goals & 1 assist, and Hiel with 4 goals & 1 assist.

Bruins selected as 2001 All-Staters were sweeper Colin Phelps, midfielder Scott Gittens and forward J.P. McCarvel. Mid Jerrett Grimes was named second team All-Conference, while honorable mention citations went to defenders Ryan Sullivan and Sean Brennan.



Front row, from left: Assist. coach Glen Wall, Aaron Johnson, Nick Richards, Peter Hiel, Stuart Phelps, David Wiegand, Ryan Sullivan, Colin Phelps, JP McCarvel. Back row; Head coach Carl Straub, assist. coach Matt Lyng, Mark Harris, Mitch Lynch, Ryan Palmer, Rick Donohoue, Chris Cauble, Jerrett Grimes, Sean Brennan, Sean Ward, Scott Gittens.

2002 Helena High Girls Soccer

By Curt Synness

After three straight runner-up State finishes, Helena's girls finally reached the mountain-top in 2002. First-year coach Mike Lamb's kickers finished the regular season with a 9-1-2 record, having outscored the opposition 44-9.

In the State Tournament at Helena's Airport (Seibel) Fields, the Conference runners-up Lady Bengals opened play with a 3-0 shutout of Great Falls High, the East's No. 3. HHS fired several near misses and had a couple shots blocked, before cracking the scoreboard at the 69th minute.

Lacey Knoles passed the Lady Bison keeper's fumble block, to Nicole Meyer, who buried a shot for the go-ahead goal.

This opened the flood gates for Helena, adding two goals in four minutes, by Samantha Snyder on a feed from Cassidy Merrick, and Sarah McLaughlin on Knoles second assist.

"We controlled the midfield and we had some fine shots toward the end of the game," coach Lamb said. He also praised the defensive work of Leesa Goodwin, Christina French, Ashley Simac, Kim Harrington, Cailin Gilreath and Lindsay Loraas.

The semi-finals was a rematch of the 2001 championship, against Bozeman, as the red-and-white avenged that loss with a narrow 1-0 victory. The Lady Bengals controlled most of the attacking play – out-shooting the Eastern Conference champs 14-3 – but couldn't penetrate the goal line until there was 11 minutes left.

That's when Meyer crossed a corner kick in front of the net to Cassidy Merrick, who headed the ball past the goalie for the lead. Next the red-and-white's defense held true and secured the program's fourth straight berth in the finals.

The Lady Bengals then avenged their only loss of the year, with a 2-1 overtime victory over Conference champion Kalispell in the chipper.

Lena May-Fraser took part in both scores. After HHS fell behind 1-0, 16 minutes into the second half, Lindsay Thueson's pass found Lena in the middle of a crowd in the Bravettes' box, and the junior forward fired a shot that rattled the onnet bag to get level.

Flathead nearly scored in the first O.T. but the ball trickled

wide of an open net. Then with 5:10 left in the second half, "Fraser lofted a cross into the box and Cassidy Merrick was (right there) and headed the ball past the diving keeper," according to the IR.

"The key was 20 talented athletes working hard and working well together," coach Lamb said. Helena outshot their opponents 21-9, with the closest near-misses coming from Fleming and McLaughlin.

The Bengals finished the year at 12-1-2, while holding a 50-10 scoring advantage over the opposition. Keeper Addy Lord anchored the defense to eight shutouts and six 1-goal games.

Offensive leaders included Merrick with 20 points (9 goals, 2 assists), Meyer (7 goals, 3 assists) and May-Fraser (8 goals, 1 assist) at 17 points.

Forward Cassidy Merrick and sweeper Lindsay Loraas were selected as 2002 All-Staters. Teammates making honorable mention All-Conference were defenders Kim Harrington and Christina French, Addy Lord and striker Kayla Fleming.



Sitting, from left; Lindsay Loraas, Sarah McLaughlin, Cassidy Merrick, Leesa Goodwin, Ashley Wald, Kneeling; Lacey Knoles, Nicole Meyer, Addy Lord, Sam Snyder, Shannon Puckett, Gina Byrnes, Kindra Clark-Sinustad. Standing; assist. coach Jim Dushin, head coach Mike Lamb, Cailin Gilreath, Ashley Simac, Christina French, Kayla Fleming, Lena May-Fraser, Kim Harrington, Lindsay Thueson, Charla Banks, assist. coaches Art Compton, John Johnson.

2002 Helena High Boys Soccer

By Curt Synness

Coach John Hollow's Bengals captured the Western Conference title, with an undefeated 8-0-3 record.

In the opening round of the State Tournament in the Capital City, the Bengals rapped CMR 4-0. They jumped out in front 2-0 by halftime, on a pair Kody Andrew goals, the latter when he took a pass from Andy Mulvaney and chipped the ball over the keeper's head.

After the intermission, Mulvaney tallied his own score, before Chase Dalin's goal completed the rout.

"We were trying to play a complete game where we mixed up our attack, and we did," said coach Hollow, whose Bengals held a 24-3 advantage in shot attempts. "Our defense (only) had one breakdown."

He also credited central defenders Brian Gilreath and Chris Hoang.

In the semi's versus the East's No. 2 Billings Senior (10-0-4) – a physical battle which saw three yellow cards and a direct PK – Helena overcame the Broncos 4-2. HHS trailed 1-0 at halftime, but it could've been worse if not for a couple of valiant saves by keeper Kyle Mahoney.

Matt Nottingham's goal tied things up at 48:00 and then seconds later Brian Gilreath was fouled in the box. His successful boot pushed the red-and-white in front 2-1.

The Bengals added two more scores to pull ahead by three. In the 54th minute, Nottingham lofted the ball to the back of the onnet bag for deciding marker. Four minutes later, a bullet by Kody gave his club an insurance tally at 4-1.

Senior scored once again at 65:00, and the Bengals were on their way to the chipper.

In a battle of unbeaten, the red-and-white took on Eastern champion Bozeman (11-0-3) in the finals, where they trailed the Hawks 1-0 at halftime. Matt Nottingham tied the game up at 1s in the 47th minute, and neither team could score the rest of regulation, although most of the offensive action took place in front of Bozeman's goal.

After a scoreless 18 minutes of overtime, Kody Andrew won the thriller, when Micah Crowley put a cross into the box and Kody's header rattled the net for the victory.

"(It was) perfect, right to my head and it went into the corner," Andrew said about the title-winner. He added that Chris Hoang pulled defenders away and gave him space to score. Just moments earlier, Hoang's own shot was tipped over the bar.

The Bengals – who outshot their counterparts 18-7 – finished the year 11-0-3, tallying 49 goals to their opponent's 14. The defense posted four shutouts and seven 1-goal games.

HHS' offense was paced by Andrew's 24 points (10 goals, 4 assists), Mulvaney at 20 points (8 goals, 4 assists) and Nottingham with 17 points (8 goals, 1 assist).

Their 2002 All-Staters consisted of seniors Andy Mulvaney and Matt Nottingham, and juniors Kody Andrew and Chris Hoang. Those making All-Conference were Kyle Mahoney and Brian Gilreath, while honorable mentions went to Regan Johnson and Mike Wilcox.



Standing, from left; head coach John Hollow, Kyle Mahoney, Monroe Mathis, Brian Gilreath, Andy Mulvaney, Cuyler Tonkovich, Kody Andrew, Chase Ford, assist. coaches Gary Dalton, Clyde Peterson. Kneeling; David Lamb, Evan Price, Ryan Guazo, Regan Johnson, Micah Crowley, Logan Jackson, Matt Nottingham, Charles Pierce, Jake Riggle. Sitting; John Thynard, Chris Hoang, Nick Fox, Riley Ford, Spencer Farrell, Chase Dalin, Sean Briceno, Michael Wilcox.

2003 Helena High Boys Soccer

By Curt Synness

The defending State champion Bengals captured the Western Conference title, going 9-1-2. HHS was undefeated until the next-to-last game of the regular season, being edged by Butte 2-1. It was their first loss in 24 games, dating back to the 2001 State Tournament.

Helena opened play at State at the Airport (Seibel) Fields with a 3-zip whitewash over Billings Skyview, powered by a pair of Kody Andrew goals, with David Lamb assisting on the first score. Chris Hoang's PK added an insurance marker with 3 minutes left in the game, while keeper Evan Price anchored the defense's sixth shutout of the year.

"The kids played really well, and we recovered from a serious loss," coach John Hollow said, referring to the season-ending injury of starting defender Cuyler Tonkovich in the second half. "That's where this team benefits from depth."

Waiting in the semi-finals was crosstown rival Capital (8-5-1), the West's No. 3 seed. Having edged the Bruins by 1-0 scores in both regular season meetings, Helena was tasked with beating a good team three times in the same season, which can be a difficult chore.

But Kody made sure the Bengals' were not to be denied, rifling in three goals for the team's only Hat Trick of the year, during the 4-2 victory.

The score was tied at 2s going into the second half, before Bengal Nick Fox piped the go-ahead goal, followed by Andrew's third tally. "The kids kept coming back," Hollow said, "and Evan had great hands today. Getting up there in the groove is tough, but he did a good job."

Kody Andrew continued his hot foot in the Chipper vs. Kalispell, scoring his 6th and 7th goals of the Tournament, the latter in overtime to clinch back-to-back championships for the red-and-white. The Western runner-up Braves (10-3-1) – who tied HHS 1-all and lost 2-1 during the season – had beaten Eastern champion Billings Senior in the semi's to reach the finals.

Helena took the lead in the first half on Andrew's score, after receiving a pass from Hoang. Mid-way through the second half, Flathead tied it up, and regulation ended knotted at 1s. After a scoreless first O.T., a Braves' goal pushed them in front 2-1 with 5

minutes left to play.

But the Bengals got even again a minute later, thanks to Hoang's PK. And then with about 2 minutes left, Andrew's boot – and HHS' ensuing defense – cemented a 3-2 triumph for the title.

"The defense did a great job holding out," said Hollow. "Kevin Harlen, Logan Jackson. They've all kind of been in the shadows this year, but they really held the team together."

Helena finished at 12-1-2, while outscoring the opposition 38-13. The defense posted six shutouts and five 1-goal games. Andrew led the offense with 11 goals (a school record), and 5 assists for 27 points. Next came Riley Ford's 16 points (7 goals, 2 assists).

Kody Andrew and Chris Hoang were selected 2003 All-Staters, while Cuyler Tonkovich, Nick Fox and Evan Price were named second team All-Conference.



Standing, from left; mgr Malissa Bradley, assist coach Gary Dalton, Robert Maher, head coach John Hollow, Sean Briceno, Josh Rhynard, Evan Price, Chris Petric, Hayden Book, Micah Crowley, Chris Hoang, assist Clyde, mgr Bridget Espeland. Kneeling; Kody Andrew, Kevin Aarlen, Matt Emery, Charles Pierce, Logan Jackson, David Lamb, Ryan Guazo. Sitting; Nick Fox, BJ Biskowack, Riley Ford, Monroe Mathis, Chase Dalin, Cuyler Tonkovich.

2002 Capital High Girls Volleyball

In the fall of 2002, Capital's volleyball team authored one of the most memorable championship runs in Helena's volleyball history. What began with an early-season statement victory at the Great Falls Invitational Tournament eventually culminated in a dominant State title performance that cemented the Bruins among the elite teams in local history.

From the outset, CHS displayed the grit, chemistry, and determination that would define their season. At the Great Falls Invite early on, Capital announced itself as a serious contender by capturing the tourney title against the AA's strongest competition.

As the season progressed, coach Mike Burk's squad continued to sharpen their game, developing into a unit capable of matching power with poise. By the time State arrived, the Bruins were playing with confidence and momentum.

The State Tournament, however, would test CHS' spikers in every possible way.

The brown-and-gold opened tourney play in the Electric City with a strong victory over Bozeman, showcasing the balanced attack and relentless defense that had become their trademark. Next, the Bruins faced Great Falls High in a heated matchup that ended in controversy.

A scorebook error created confusion and frustration, and Capital suffered a difficult loss that could've derailed many teams. Instead, they responded with resilience.

On Day 2, CHS regrouped and battled through victories over CM Russell and Butte, earning a place in Saturday's championship rounds. Each match seemed to strengthen the Bruins' resolve.

Then came one of the defining moments of the tournament. Facing Billings Senior on Saturday morning, Capital found itself in an intense contest.

They fell behind 0-2 but refused to lose. Showing remarkable composure under pressure, the Bru-crew stormed back in dramatic fashion, completing a thrilling reverse sweep for a 3-2 win. The emotional triumph propelled CHS into the championship round and seemed to elevate the team to another level.

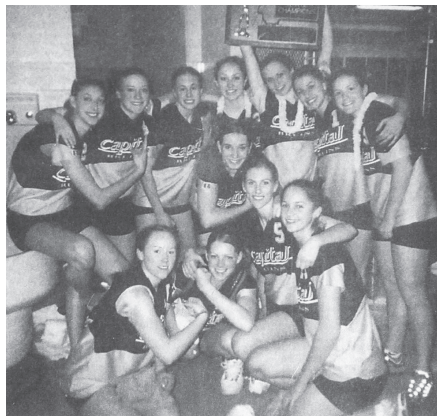
By that point, Capital was playing its best volleyball of the season. Waiting in the finals was Great Falls, whom they needed to beat twice to claim the title. The Bruins met the challenge head-on, winning the first tilt to force the rubber match.

What followed was a performance that left little doubt who deserved the crown. With momentum fully on their side, the brown-and-gold spikers overwhelmed GFH in the winner-take-all finale, for a 3-0 sweep and the 2002 State championship.

The victory was a culmination of perseverance, teamwork, and competitive fire. The Bruins overcame adversity and controversy to finish their season at the pinnacle of Montana volleyball.

CHS teammates selected as first team All-Staters were seniors Jessica Peterson at middle hitter, setter Katie Polette and outside hitter Sarah Barnhill, and junior Lacie Brenton at outside hitter. Middle hitter Morgan Dolan and defensive specialist Janae Cunningham were tabbed honorable mention All-Conference.

"More than two decades later, the 2002 Capital High volleyball team is remembered for not only winning a state title," Mike Burk said, "but also for the determination and championship spirit they displayed throughout an unforgettable tournament run."



In front, from left; Lauren Merritt, Liz Rocco, Janae Cunningham, Katie Polette, Christina Simelann. In back; Jessica Peterson, Veronica Krings, Lacie Brenton, Sarah Barnhill, Morgan Dolan, Lindsay Mullen, Amy Nickel.

2002 Capital High Boys Football

By Curt Synness

The Mark Samson-coached football Bruins entered the 2002 post season with an unblemished 10-0 record. In their first round of the State playoffs, a 51-14 trouncing of Big Sky, the Bruins outgained the Eagles 491-212 total offensive yards, while sacking MBS's quarterback seven times.

QB Kyle Samson passed for 202 yards, and scored four touchdowns – three rushing, and a 25-yard strike to Narles Layne. Todd Nelson ran for a pair of short TDs, Cody Nickel rushed for 74 yards and a short score, and Mike Sherwood kicked a 30-yard field goal and three extra points.

In the semi-finals versus Flathead, Capital led 7-3 at halftime on Todd Nelson's 13-yard touchdown catch, but fell behind 10-7 heading into the fourth quarter.

Then came a crucial 56-yard drive on seven plays, capped off by another Nelson TD run, pulling CHS back in front by 4-points.

After the defense halted two Flathead possessions in its own territory, kicker Mike Sherwood assured "Mohawk Time" with a 27-yard field at 1:59 to cement the 17-10 victory.

Samson connected on 6 of 7 passes for 131 yards, and Ryan Turcott caught 3 passes for 105 yards.

Waiting in the chipper was perennial rival and defending champion CM Russell (11-1), who's only loss during the year was a 31-30 thriller in O.T. to Capital. This one was no less exciting, as the Bruins came all the way back from a 21-7 deficit early in the third quarter, reeling off 21 unanswered points for a 28-21 victory.

The winning score came on a 3-yard run by Nelson after a 60-yard drive with 48 seconds left on the clock. He said the play "was designed to go between the tackles," but he bounce outside and outraced the defenders across the goal line.

CMR led 14-7 at the half – Layne tallied the Bruins' first score – but it could've been worse, if not for Jesse Auck's leaping interception in the Rustler's end zone.

Russell extended the lead to 14 points, followed by Kyle Samson's 4-yard TD run several minutes later, closing to 21-13.

Then, during the Electric City club's next possession early in the final stanza and with his team sitting at midfield, Russell coach Jack Johnson went for a 4th and 1 play. "But a gang of Capital tacklers stuffed the CMR runner short of the first down, and at that point, the momentum completed shifted in the favor of the brown-and-gold," the IR reported.

The Bruins tied it up on the ensuing possession, on a 25-yard strike to

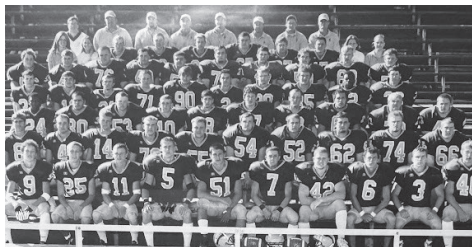
Turcott, and Samson's conversion pass to Turcott at the 8:10 mark.

Next came the winning drive, which was an equal blend of pass and run. It was the Bru-Crew's (13-0) third undefeated crown in four years, and 12th title overall.

Samson completed 12 of 16 passes for 148 yards, while rushing for a game-high 9. Turcott made 7 receptions for 103 yards.

Brown-and-gold gridders earning first or second team All-State were Kyle Samson QB (Class AA offensive MVP), John Drynan TE, JJ Perino OG, Bob Daly DE, R.C. Pearce DL, Quincey Bourne LB, Matt Larson DB/KOR, Marc Samson DB/PR, Ryan Turcott WR, Cody Nickel FB and Mike Sherwood K.

Those making Honorable Mention were Bryan Beniger OT, Todd Nelson WR, Narles Layne RB, Luke DenHerder DE, Matt Roberts DB and Jesse Auck DB.



Front row, from left; Ryan Turcott, Ty Sparing, Matt Roberts, JJ Perrino, Kyle Samson, Cody Nickel, Jesse Auck, Bob Daly. Row 2; Rob Simons, Marc Samson, Shane Allred, Craig Lake, Tony Melcher, Jake Kuntz, John Root, John Drynan, Travis Wilson, David Horner. Row 3; Narles Layne, Adrian Largent, Pat Rice, Mike Cline, Nick Fearon, Dugan Kanta, Keaton Kanta, Bryson Cuzzie, Brady Hanson, Ben Beehl. Row 4; Mike Sherwood, Casey Kelly, Derrick Zuelke, George Howell, Dustin Glueckert, Shaun Holland, Todd Nelson, RC Pearce, Robert Layne, Mike Molster. Row 6; Quincey Bourne, Rory Glueckert, Scotty Rucker, Adam Becker, Sam Roth, Bryan Beniger, Ty Moy, Ross Robertson, Luke DenHerder, Rob Humphries. Row 7; Courtney Skuletich, Kaycee Scurr, Jaeger Kockley, Dave Sebastian, Tom Bischoff, Conor Fox, Morgan Ceroski, Witt York, Nicole Davis, Tonyan Eldridge. Back row; trainer Steve Gross, assist. coaches Bob Pearce, Lee Carter, Chance Ferlicka, Jai Partridge, head coach Mark Samson, assist. coaches Dick McMahon, Kam Wrigg.

1940 Helena High Hockey

By Curt Synness

When the Helena High hockey team defeated Butte High 3-1 to win the 1940 State championship, a trio of team members had the same last name: Chilton. And Mickey (defenseman), Bob (goalie) and Jack (center) Chilton didn't just make up one-third of the roster. They were in fact the three best players on the team.

Rounding out the Bengals' lineup were Fred DeWolf, John Flies, Bob Veach, Joe Downs, John Eklund and Rusty Kelley. And their coach was... yep, another Chilton, the boys' father Gordon "J.G." Chilton.

In fact, it was J.G. Chilton who had revitalized the ice sport locally three years earlier. When the Chiltons moved to Helena from Canada in the spring of 1937, there had been no organized hockey in the Capital City for almost 25-years. That initial winter, J.G. set about building a skating rink with the help of his four sons, along with Walt Raymond, Bob Kelley, Ed Schumaker, Don Chisholm and J.W. Dolohan. The ice facility was completed by early December, 1937, at the corner of Montana and Boulder avenues, the current site of Capital City Health Club's parking lot.

The local puck squad, comprised of a group of adults along with the teenaged Chiltons – going by either the "Vigilantes" or "Rangers" – played three seasons in the Montana State Hockey League, from 1938-41. The late Bob Kelley, who earlier had a tryout with MLB's Boston Red Sox, told me, "We were good because the Chiltons were good."

Mickey and Jack Chilton were both "Hat Trick" scorers. Back before goalies wore masks, and brother Bob, (back before goalies wore masks) once stopped 42 saves in a game.

A fiery competitor, in a game vs. Butte's School of Mines, he left the net to fight an opponent, caused a 15-minute brawl between the two teams. "When peace was finally restored, the referee decided to penalize no one, since both teams would have been in the penalty box," reported the Montana Standard.

Bengal hockey member John Flies went on to play football for undefeated 1941 Carroll College. After serving three years in the Navy during World

War II, he returned home, became a city fireman and learned to play handball.

HHS teammate Fred DeWolf, who later tried his hand at boxing, served 4 years in the army in the war, in North Africa and Italy. Fred later belonged to the Union Market's "By Golly Boys" with brothers Bill and George.

This year marks the Chilton family's fourth entrance into the Helena Sports Hall of Fame. Bob was a charter HSHOF inductee in 2003 as an official, and again in 2017 as an athlete, while daughter Casey (Chilton) Molloy was enshrined in 2022.



Seated, from left; Fred DeWolf, John Eklund, Bob Chilton, John Flies, Joe Downs. Standing; Jack Chilton, Rusty Kelley, Mickey Chilton.