

NJSIAA 2023 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

The 25th Annual High School Hall of Fame ceremony gives us the opportunity to honor the following individuals – most deserving of our recognition.



BOB BIANCHI **Columbia HS** **Athlete - Lacrosse**

Bob Curcio coached a dozen All-American players during his time as the boys lacrosse coach at Columbia High School. Of that stellar group, one player stood above all the rest, and his name was Bob Bianchi.

A 1979 graduate, Bob was blessed with an extraordinary ability to score goals and set up teammates through his impeccable playmaking skill. Better yet, he was also an individual whose character and leadership abilities were equal to his play on the field and made him someone that aspiring lacrosse players in the community looked up to as an example of who to become. A three-time All-State selection and two-time All-American, his impact on the New Jersey scene was so great that he was a charter inductee into the New Jersey Lacrosse Hall of Fame and would later be chosen the Player of the Century in boys lacrosse by the Star-Ledger.

During the time that he played, there were actually two championships for teams to shoot for. One was the Coaches Tournament, which was the hardest to win because the field included prep school teams that bolstered their already strong lineups with post-graduates. The other was the NJSIAA tournament. In 1977 and 1978, Montclair defeated Columbia in a highly-charged NJSIAA state final. Columbia entered the 1979 season with hopes of winning both. And with Bianchi leading the way, it made perfect sense. Sure enough, the Cougars embarked on a season for the ages. The team went 17-0, including an 11-9 victory over Lawrenceville in the Coaches Tournament final and then a 10-4 win over Montclair in the NJSIAA championship. Bianchi's numbers that year included 41 goals and 62 assists for 103 points, which earned him state Player of the Year recognition. For his career, he had 116 goals and 112 assists. "Bobby Bianchi was the complete package," Curcio said. "Smart, talented, and confident as well as being a natural leader. He was team oriented and mentally tough; the kind of player who made his teammates better and a guy everyone looked up to. Even though he was a superstar, he was as coachable as anyone I've ever coached. I only wish every coach could have the opportunity to coach players like Bobby Bianchi and his three brothers - all of whom were captains of their college teams."

For Bobby, his older brother Jim and younger brother Kevin, that meant being captain at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. At Navy, Bob continued to excel on and off the field. In addition to his team captaincy, he was also an All-American. After graduating from Annapolis in 1983, he reported to flight school in January of 1984. He graduated, earned his "Wings of Gold," and became a Naval Aviator in May of 1985 in Pensacola, Florida. He was assigned to HC-5 in Guam in January of 1986. He made flight commander on January 30, 1987. Bob was assigned to the USNS Mercy that March to aid with its four-month humanitarian mission in the Philippines and South Pacific. On March 23, 1987 the HH-46 Helicopter he was piloting crashed approximately 32 miles north of Subic Bay Naval Air Station on the Bucao River. He did not survive. He was 26 years old. His brother Kevin, who followed him to stardom at Columbia and at the Naval Academy, also became a commander. He, too, died serving his country in a Navy helicopter crash, in July of 2003 off the coast of Sicily. In tribute to Bob's lacrosse accomplishments and service to his country, he became the first ex-player to have one of New Jersey's high school lacrosse divisions named in his honor.



LOU CREEKMUR **Woodbridge HS** **Athlete - Football**

Lou Creekmur emerged from a 6-0, 200-pound lineman during his days at Woodbridge High School into a 10-year professional, whose stardom led to his induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

At Woodbridge, where he was part of the Class of 1944, he played under coach Nick Priscoe and helped the team post winning records in each of his seasons, capped by a 6-2-1 record as a senior. Among his teammates were Tommy Thompson, who went on to play with the Cleveland Browns, and Harding Peterson, an all-around athlete whose baseball exploits led to a career which included his induction into the NJSIAA Hall of Fame in 2022.

Following graduation from Woodbridge, he moved on to the College of William & Mary in Virginia. After his freshman year, he served two years in the military. Hardened by that experience, Creekmur returned to William & Mary to play from 1947 through '49, where his career continued to blossom. He was named an All-American as a senior.

Having grown to 6-4, 245-pounds, he joined the Detroit Lions of the NFL in 1950, playing first as offensive guard and then offensive tackle, with some defense mixed in. He played in every pre-season, regular season and playoff game through 1958, a streak which totaled 165 games. To make that happen, he played through a number of serious injuries. He also played in the Pro Bowl from 1950 through '57. With Lou anchoring the offensive line, the Lions reached the NFL championship game four times, and brought home the championship in 1952, '53 and '57. He attained notoriety for his play, which is never easy for a lineman, and especially so in the era in which he played, when media coverage and fan attention was far more focused on the players who ran or threw the ball, not the men who blocked for them.

He retired at age 31 following the 1958 season, and was honored by the Lions with a "Lou Creekmur Day" at the last game that year. But after a 0-4 start the following year, he was coaxed out of retirement, and played the remaining eight games that year before hanging up his cleats for good.

He received numerous honors in the years that followed. In Woodbridge, one can find Lou Creekmur Plaza at Town Hall. The biggest came in 1996, when after a long wait, he was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He was presented by another Lions legend, Doak Walker, who benefited from Lou's blocks to achieve his own stardom.

In those days, even as a standout player, he made more money working for a trucking company, which he actually did while still in-season with the Lions. In fact, the only reason he missed the Pro Bowl in 1958 was because his work boss said he was needed on the job and could not go. Regardless of that, his experiences there led to a long and successful career in the trucking industry. He died in 2009, at the age of 82.



MIKE GREY
Delbarton School
Athlete - Wrestling

Mike Grey did not burst onto the high school wrestling scene at Delbarton School in Morris Township as an unexpected talent. He had already won several state championships on the NJ Kids Circuit. But what Grey achieved on the scholastic mat in the four years encompassing the 2002-03 season through the 2005-06 campaign was unprecedented.

Grey became the first New Jersey high school wrestler to win four individual state championships on his way to posting a stunning 158-2 career record. That win total put him at the top of the Garden State's career victory list at the time.

The lightweight wrestler won championships at four different weight classes – 103, 112, 119 and 125 – on his way to New Jersey immortality. His dominance is further revealed in the fact that he pinned 120 opponents, 37 of those coming his senior season when he was 44-1. He won an NHSCA Senior Nationals championship after that 2006 season.

His other high school achievements included four NJSIAA District and four Region championships. He also won a Junior National Freestyle championship in 2005. Grey's wrestling endeavors steered him to Cornell University, where he twice earned All-American status after placing sixth at the NCAA Tournament in both his freshman and senior seasons at 133 pounds. A four-time NCAA tournament qualifier, Grey registered a 117-30 career record, won two EIWA championships and earned All-Ivy League four times. He helped spearhead the 2010 and '11 Cornell teams to second place finishes in the NCAA Tournament.

Grey very naturally continued his love for the sport as a coach, working as an assistant coach for 11 seasons at Cornell before assuming the head coaching position for Big Red in 2021. With Grey at the helm, Cornell has remained an NCAA powerhouse.

He graduated from Cornell in 2011 with a B.A. in Developmental Sociology and resides in Ithaca, N.Y. with his wife, Kaille, and his two children, Declan and Delaney.



JACK DUBOIS **NJSIAA** **Administrator**

Jack DuBois is a man who spent a long and distinguished career devoted to high school athletes in all parts of New Jersey.

A Monmouth County native who graduated from St. Benedict's Prep in Newark and Assumption College in Massachusetts, he served a total of 52 years as a coach, athletic director and official, as well as an assistant director at the NJSIAA, where he worked for 16 years until his retirement in 2021.

His accomplishments with the organization were many. Perhaps most notably, he served as NJSIAA football director for his last 10 years, and among many innovations, orchestrated the process which led to the season playing down to one overall champion in each of the classification groups.

He started his career fresh out of college in 1969, when he was hired as the first athletic director at a brand-new school, St. John Vianney in Holmdel. While there, he introduced girls basketball as an interscholastic sport in the days prior to the passage of Title IX, was the founding president of the Raritan Valley Conference and served as a head coach in boys basketball, baseball and cross country. He coached the 1973 cross country team to a state championship that was the first for any sport in school history. He also coached SJV teams in one sectional and three conference championships.

When Manchester Township opened its doors in 1976, DuBois was its founding athletic director. During his time there, he also served as Shore Conference president for two years, secretary for 10 years and divisional vice president for four more. He was Shore Conference representative to the DAANJ for six years, NJSIAA sectional representative in baseball for 20 years and boys soccer for 10 years.

He was chapter assignor and secretary for the Shore Football Officials Association for a decade, and officiated numerous state playoff games.

He became athletic director at Morris Hills High school in the early 1990s, a position he held for over a decade before joining the NJSIAA. While there, he served as president of the Iron Hills Conference and was the Morris County representative to the NJSIAA Executive Committee for six years. He was chosen 2001 New Jersey Athletic Director of the Year by the DAANJ, as well as that year's Northeast Regional AD of the Year. Furthermore, he's been inducted into numerous Halls of Fame, including the St. Benedict's and Newark Athletic Halls of Fame, the St. John Vianney Hall of Fame as both an administrator and as coach of the 1973 cross country team, the DAANJ Hall of Fame and also as part of the Morris Hills Wall of Fame.

At the NJSIAA, he was in charge of football, ice hockey, fencing and boys lacrosse. Among other activities, he was also heavily involved in the corporate sponsorship and scholar-athlete programs, the NJ Scholastic Coaches Association, the coaching certification program, and the NJSIAA Hall of Fame.



FRANK TRIPUCKA

Bloomfield HS

Athlete - Football

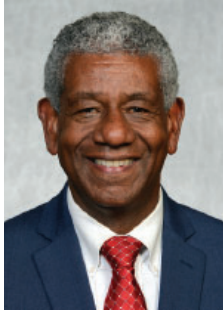
Frank Tripucka would have fit in very well among today's quarterbacks. Run-pass option? Been there, done that – in the 1940s to be exact.

Tripucka took the reins as Bloomfield's imposing quarterback and quickly proved a handful, whether he was running or throwing the football. The throwing part was still something fairly new in those days of powerhouse, smash-mouth football when imposing one's will carried the upper hand over finesse. Bloomfield legend has it that coach Bill Foley had to talk Frank's mom into allowing him to play football. Once Mrs. Tripucka relented, she unknowingly had released a ground-breaking force onto the football world. The 6-3 Tripucka was, in fact, the first true scholastic passer of his era. He embodied an intimidating balance in rushing for 14 touchdowns while passing for 15 scores to lead Bloomfield to a state championship his junior season. Bloomfield rolled to an 8-1 record his senior season in '44 and "Trip" earned his second straight First Team All-State selection. Tripucka, who died in 2013 at the age of 88, was quite the well-rounded athlete, starring in basketball and baseball, too, at Bloomfield. He captained both of those squads and earned First Team All-State his senior year at first base. That season, he guided Bloomfield to the Greater Newark Tournament championship.

Frank left Bloomfield for Notre Dame and he led the Irish to a 9-0-1 record his senior season. The Irish missed the No. 1 ranking in the nation that season by two votes to Michigan. Despite Notre Dame's run-oriented attack, Tripucka completed 53 of 91 passes, mostly to Heisman Trophy winner Leon Hart, for 660 yards and 11 TDs.

A 15-year professional football career (1949-63) followed. He was the Philadelphia Eagles first round draft pick out of Notre Dame University but was shipped immediately to Detroit. After four seasons in the NFL, he played the next seven years in the CFL, where his mobility, strong arm and skill at reading defenses made him one of the top quarterbacks in the league. He played six seasons with the Saskatchewan Roughriders and one in Ottawa before returning as an assistant to Saskatchewan's head coach Frank Filchock. When the AFL was founded in 1960, Filchock was hired to coach the Denver Broncos and brought Tripucka along, as a coach. But, dissatisfied with his quarterbacks' play, he placed Tripucka back behind center, where he remained for four seasons. Frank would throw the first touchdown pass in AFL history and then set and held all of the Broncos' passing records until John Elway came along. Tripucka's No. 18 was retired by the Broncos and it sits in Mile High Stadium's Ring of Fame. He's also been enshrined in the New Jersey Sports Hall of Fame, the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame, the Bloomfield Hall of Fame and the National Polish-American Sports Hall of Fame.

Frank and Randy Tripucka's six sons were all Division 1 athletes. Tracy and Todd were basketball stars at Lafayette, Mark played football at UMass, T.K. played basketball at Fordham University, Chris played football at Boston College and Kelly is in Notre Dame's basketball ring of honor. Kelly also played 10 years and scored more than 12,000 points in the NBA. He was named New Jersey's High School Basketball Player of the 20th Century in 2000 and is also enshrined in the NJSIAA Hall of Fame. The oldest of the seven Tripucka children, Heather Carr, an excellent athlete in her own right, was a teacher in the Bloomfield School District.



LARRY WHITE **NJSIAA** **Administrator**

Larry White did a bit of everything during his time in high school athletics, beginning as an athlete in his home town of Penns Grove and culminating with his tenure as Executive Director of the NJSIAA.

"My whole career has been based in education as a teacher, and as a player, coach and official," he said upon his hire as Executive Director, which began on Jan. 1 2018 and ended with his retirement on June 30, 2020.

A key part of his professional philosophy was to govern with a belief that participation in high school athletics was an extension of the school day.

"It's tremendously important that we consistently emphasize that our high school sports venues are no more or less than extensions of the classroom," he said. "Scholastic athletics exist to be a vehicle for teaching young people key life lessons."

He was the eighth Executive Director in the history of the organization, and the first African-American to serve in the role. He holds a bachelor's degree from LaSalle University and a master's degree from Rowan University.

He served as an NJSIAA assistant director beginning in 2005, where his duties included oversight of compliance for eligibility and transfer rules, managing controversies committee cases, and supervising officials associations. He was the assistant director in charge of basketball, baseball, volleyball, bowling and gymnastics. During those years he also helped implement the pitch count rules in baseball. He was also in charge of the NJSIAA Hall of Fame program.

His professional experience also included serving as a vice principal in the Pine Hill School District and as a teacher in Monroe Township (Gloucester County), the Woodstown-Pilesgrove district, St. James High School and in West Deptford.

He also coached baseball, basketball, golf, boys and girls tennis, and worked as an official in basketball and umpire in baseball. His baseball officiating was especially notable, since he also became a high-level ump on the college level, and then in the minor leagues, where he called games as high as Triple A.

Among the honors he's received is his induction into the Salem County Sports Hall of Fame, as well as the Penns Grove High School Athletic Hall of Fame.



AJEÉ WILSON

Neptune HS

Athlete - Track & Field

Ajeé Wilson is one of the greatest and one of the most decorated 800-meter runners in United States history, and it all began during her time running for Neptune High School.

A tour de force on the world stage since her days running for the Scarlet Fliers, Wilson is a two-time Olympian, has won multiple World Championships and U.S. National Championships, and she's the American indoor record holder in the 800.

During her high school years, Wilson captured three NJSIAA Meet of Champions titles (the 800 indoors and outdoors) and the 1600 outdoors, and won two New Balance National Indoor 800 Championships.

Internationally, Wilson won titles in the 800 at both the 2011 World Youth Championships and 2012 World Junior Outdoor Championships, and her winning time of 2:00.91 at the latter was the second fastest time ever run by a high school girl at the time, and is still the New Jersey state high school record.

Wilson, who attended Academy of Allied Health & Science (in Neptune), and ran for Neptune HS, turned pro after graduating high school in 2012. Since then, Wilson has made the U.S. Olympic Team in 2016 and 2020, captured the Gold Medal at the 2022 World Indoor Championships, set U.S. records indoors (a still-standing 1:58.29 in 2020), and outdoors (a now broken 1:55.61 in 2017), won six U.S. Indoor National Championship, and has captured an astounding 12 national titles in her legendary career.

Wilson was also a member of the U.S. record breaking distance medley relay (10:36.50 outdoors in 2015) and 4x800 relay (8:05.89 indoors in 2018). The 28-year-old Wilson has also placed second at the World Indoor Championships in both 2016 and 2018, and was third at the World Outdoor Championships in 2017 and 2019.

Her global success was recognized by her home town in 2021, when Neptune named the track at the high school in her honor. Aside from recognizing her achievements on the track, the school district honored her for her continued support within the community, which includes spending time with the youth and donating shoes to the track program.

"When I found out, I was super-stunned at first," she said at the time of the track-naming. "It's a huge honor. I literally grew up on that track. I lived maybe a mile or so away. My love for the sport was born there."