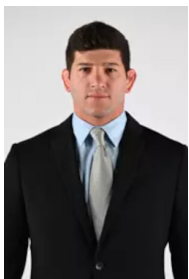


NJSIAA 2025 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

The 27th Annual High School Hall of Fame ceremony gives us the opportunity to honor the following individuals – most deserving of our recognition.



ANTHONY ASHNAULT **South Plainfield HS** **Athlete - Wrestling**

Anthony Ashnault wasn't just any wrestler when he arrived on the scene as a freshman at South Plainfield for the 2009-2010 season.

He'd already won seven straight championships at the Kids State Tournament, dating back to second grade, and his family was well-known for its wrestling involvement in town. All that time, he dreamed of wearing the green singlet of his beloved hometown Tigers.

Excellence may have been expected, but over the next four years, he turned that into all-time high school greatness. And for good measure, he later added legendary achievements in college.

When he defeated Gary Dinmore of Hunterdon Central, 4-2, in a dramatic 138-pound state final on March 10, 2013 at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City, it completed a career in which he went 170-0 with four state championships. He became the first unbeaten, four-time champ in state history.

His state titles came in four different weight classes - 103 as a freshman, 112 as a sophomore and 126 as a junior, leading up to his 138-pound win as a senior. In his final match, he executed a two-point takedown in the final seconds to break a 2-2 tie. He also helped South Plainfield to a 30-0 team record and No. 1 state ranking as a senior. The Tigers finished as the state's top-ranked team three times during his career.

His individual goal entering high school was to do exactly what he accomplished, even though no one had ever completed a perfect four-year career. "Right before high school, I told myself I was going to do it," he said. "I really did believe in myself, but I stayed humble and focused on my goals. I saw it as realistic and I made it come true."

His next stop was Rutgers University, where he was a four-time All-American and three-time Big Ten Champion. The caper to his career came as a redshirt senior for the 2018-19 season, when he went 32-0 and won the NCAA championship in the 149-pound weight class. He also set a Rutgers record by winning 123 career bouts.

He also competed internationally throughout his career, and was the 2019 and 2020 Pan American champion in the 70 kilogram class.

After graduating from Rutgers with a bachelor's in Planning and Public Policy and a masters in Global Sports Business, Anthony remained at RU as an assistant coach. This past season was his first as an assistant at Princeton.



JOSH EVANS **Irvington HS** **Athlete - Football & Track**

They've been playing sports for 99 years at Irvington High School. And when a list is made of its all-time great athletes, Josh Evans deserves a place near the top of the list.

Evans, who graduated in 2009, was an exceptional performer in both football and track and field.

Football was his sport at the University of Florida, which led to an NFL career with Jacksonville Jaguars and Washington Redskins.

As a football player at Irvington, he was a four-year standout who played quarterback his final two seasons. The team went 19-2 over those two campaigns, and was 38-6 over his four years. As a senior, Josh completed 123 of 190 passes for 1,800 yards and 18 touchdowns, while also running 118 times for 1,312 yards and 14 TDs. He was also a standout playing in the defensive secondary. Those overall numbers earned him All-State First-Team recognition.

His senior year, however, was just getting started.

That winter, he won the 55-meter hurdles at the NJSIAA Indoor Meet of Champions in dramatic fashion. His time of 7.40 was .01 faster than the runner-up. He became the first Irvington boys track athlete to win a MOC event. He was also the Group 4 indoor 55-meter hurdles winner as a junior and senior.

That spring, he won another MOC event by taking the outdoor 110-meter hurdles. He also won the Group 4 110-meter hurdles as a junior and senior.

Later that week, he scored the game-winning touchdown as time expired to lift the North All-Stars to a 13-7 victory in the New Jersey High School Football North-South All-Star Game.

He enjoyed a solid football career at Florida. Playing safety, he made 154 tackles over the course of his career. In 2012, he was honored with the program's Fergie Ferguson Award, which is given to a senior football player who displays outstanding leadership, character and courage.

He was drafted by the Jaguars in 2013, and made 58 tackles as a rookie. The following year, he started 14 of the 16 games and finished with 90 tackles. He wound up making 202 tackles over the course of his four-year NFL career.

All the while, he never forgot his hometown. He hosted a Josh Evans Football Camp for Irvington youth, and paid for apparel and footwear for the attendees. He also donated a substantial amount of money for a study hall and SAT prep program for Irvington students.



KEN FRANK

Toms River South HS Baseball Coach

When the final chapters are written about Ken Frank's baseball coaching tenure at Toms River South, there will be many things covered - wins, losses, championships and more. Those things are all recordable.

But what Coach Frank really wants to be measured by are the intangibles of his 47 years at the helm of the Ocean County program, which lasted from 1978 - 2024. Those intangibles were wrapped up in a simple concept stressed within his teams: "You never know who's watching." Those who watched his teams also saw another quality - greatness.

He retired with a career record of 934-356-3, making him by far the winningest baseball coach in state history. The next closest is Mike Sheppard Jr. of Seton Hall Prep, with 871 and counting. Frank had 41 teams finish with winning records, and 27 win at least 20 games.

His teams won five Group 3 state championships and 10 South Jersey sectional titles. There were also seven Shore Conference tournament championships and 14 Ocean County Tournament titles. Frank's teams also won 22 Shore Conference divisional titles. He was also named National Coach of the Year in 2015. An especially memorable team was his state championship-winning 1994 squad which went 29-5 and was ranked eighth nationally by USA Today, No. 1 in the Eastern U.S. and No. 1 in New Jersey.

Aside from the dozens of TRS players who landed college scholarships, many were also drafted by Major League teams, including Todd Frazier, who was a first-round pick by the Detroit Tigers and enjoyed a stellar big-league career. Todd was also a 2018 inductee into the NJSIAA Hall of Fame. "Tradition is a big part of our program," he said. "The kids who used to play for me always come back to the games and preach to the current players what it takes to win."

A native of Jersey City, Frank graduated from Snyder HS, and started on teams that won back-to-back sectional championships in 1963 and '64. He played his first two years of college ball at Miami Dade Junior College before transferring to Montclair State for his final two seasons. Soon after, a college teammate from the Shore area recommended he try for a teaching position in Toms River, and Frank was hired. That was in 1969, when the district had just one high school. After expansion began the following year, the original building became Toms River South. He stayed there, and worked as assistant coach to Al Fantuzzi before taking over the program in 1978. For 30 of those years, he coached opposite his brother, Bill, who amassed a 520-279-2 record as head man at Toms River East before retiring in 2014.

Coach Frank and his wife, Cecilia, have four married daughters - Danielle, Jacqueline, Erin and Kristen - and 12 grandchildren. He is a retired assistant principal, having worked in that position for the last 15 years of his 39-year teaching career at Toms River South.



DEANNA KNOBLOCH

Moorestown HS

Girls Lacrosse Coach

When it comes to high school coaching success, there are winners, and then there are people like Deanna Knobloch.

Knobloch was the girls lacrosse coach at Moorestown High School for 27 years, from 1992 through 2018. Her record was an incredible 557-44-4, with 17 NJSIAA state championships, plus seven Tournament of Champions titles.

But equally impressive were the dozens of players she sent onward to college programs, and the many who have become coaches themselves. It's an appropriate thing, considering that's the way her own career developed. Knobloch was an All-South Jersey defender as a player at Moorestown under another legend, Lynn Schilling. She graduated in 1986. She moved on to Trenton State College, where she was a two-time All-America selection before graduating in 1991. Schilling retired that same year, and Deanna, straight out of college, was hired to take over the program in 1992.

She was a winner from the get-go, and coached the Quakers to the state championship in 1995. The team continued to win, but the success reached another level at the start of the 21st Century. Moorestown reeled off a string of 10 straight state titles from 2000 through '09. The state tournament crowned a single winner until 2007, when Group championships were then introduced. The Tournament of Champions (TOC) also debuted in 2007, and Moorestown - the Group 3 winner - was the champion the first three years of the event.

During that time, Moorestown won 228 straight games against New Jersey competition until a 7-6 loss against Shawnee in the 2010 South Jersey, Group 3 final. The streak dated back to a 5-4 loss to Summit in the 1999 state final. Within that streak was an overall run of 82 straight wins from 2000 into 2003 that established a state record. The Quakers, who always sought out the best competition possible, lost nine out-of-state games during that decade, and were named national champions in 2001 and '03.

Moorestown put together another streak soon after, winning five straight Group 3 titles from 2011 through 2015 (and the TOC from 2012 through 2015). During that run, Moorestown broke its own New Jersey record by winning 88 straight games against all competition, lasting from a 10-9 loss to Ridgewood in the 2011 TOC final to an 11-10 regular-season defeat to Ridgewood on April 25, 2015.

Moorestown won its final championship under her guidance in 2018, when it beat an old rival, Ridgewood, by a 14-9 score in the Tournament of Champions final. It was after that season that Deanna, who was assisted during much of her tenure by her husband, K.C., made the decision to step down in order to watch their children, Kacey and Shane, compete in their own lacrosse careers. "For us it was never about winning," she said. "While that was an added bonus, what kept us coming back year after year were the players and their parents and the entire program. That's what we loved."



CAROL LEWIS **Willingboro HS** **Athlete - Track and Field**

There are certain ways of knowing you are an all-time great performer in New Jersey high school track and field.

Setting a record that's held for 44 years is definitely one of those signs.

Carol Lewis not only set a still-standing girls long jump record 21-07 during her time at Willingboro High School in 1980, she was a four-time NJSIAA Meet of Champions winner in the event, from 1978 through her senior year in 1981. She was also a two-time MOC winner in the 100-meter high hurdles.

Her list of accomplishments didn't end there. She won four straight long jump championships at the Penn Relays, setting a record as a senior that held for 18 years.

She was so dominant in the long jump that she qualified as a Willingboro student for the 1980 United States Olympic team. Although she could not compete because of the U.S. boycott of those games in Moscow, she would later qualify for the Olympics in 1984 and 1988.

Carol would also win two NCAA long jump championships competing for the University of Houston. She was also the United States long jump champion in 1982, 1983, 1985 and 1986, and the U.S. Indoor champ in 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1991. She also set an American record in 1984 which held for two years.

She is part of one of New Jersey's great athletic families. Her parents, Bill and Evelyn, were pioneer track coaches in South Jersey, who encouraged their four children to participate in multiple sports. Carol, for instance, competed in gymnastics and diving growing up, and later in bobsled at the 2002 World Cup.

Her oldest brother, Mackie, was a champion sprinter at Willingboro Kennedy High School. The next-oldest brother, Cleveland, was the first African-American drafted in the North American Soccer League. And there's brother Carl, one of the greatest track athletes ever, who was inducted into the NJSIAA Hall of Fame in 2006.

With her induction today, Carol and Carl make history by becoming the first brother and sister combination enshrined in the NJSIAA Hall of Fame.



FRANCESCA RUSSO

Wayne Valley HS

Athlete - Fencing

When it comes to high school fencing in New Jersey, there's never been anyone quite like Francesca Russo.

Francesca, a sabre specialist who graduated from Wayne Valley in 2014, made history the prior year by becoming the first girl fencer to win three NJSIAA championships, a feat which earned her state Fencer of the Year honors.

Two boy fencers had also won three state championships, but no one had ever earned four. That changed during her senior year, when Francesca defeated Allison Lee of Northern Highlands, 5-4, in a thrilling bout at Montgomery High School to win a history-making fourth sabre championship, and allow her to repeat as Fencer of the Year.

She did so during an active career that included academic work which landed her a scholarship to Notre Dame, and a grueling schedule of fencing around the world. As a junior, for instance, she made it to the districts after flying home the night before from a competition in London.

She ended her career at Wayne Valley with an 80-4 record, with three of those setbacks as a freshman. She was also a three-time district and four-time Passaic County sabre champion.

At Notre Dame, she was the 2015 and 2017 NCAA sabre champion. She was a three-time All-American and was the 2017 Atlantic Coast Conference Fencer of the Year for sabre. Notre Dame was also the 2017 and '18 NCAA team champion.

Francesca had an accomplished international career, beginning during her high school days (including a third-place finish at the 2012 Cadet World Championships), and highlighted by an spot on the Olympic team at the 2021 games in Tokyo.

"The best skill I have learned through fencing is to be confident in my own actions," she said in an interview. "With fencing, you are put in a position in which you have to make split-second decisions. I have learned that in life, instead of deliberating over decisions, it is best if you stick with your intuition, because more times than not, you are right. And if not, there's always next time."

Francesca is the middle child of Roberto and Caterina Russo. She has a younger brother, Gianluca, and older sister, Jessica, who was the state sabre champion in 2008.



NICK VENA

Morristown HS

Athlete - Track & Field

When Nick Vena competed in the shot put for Morristown High School, the meet would turn into an event.

People from everywhere on the grounds would gather to watch Vena throw for the Colonials, and for good reason. He was so good, and so much better than anyone before or after, that he was one of the most dominant athletes in any sport in state history.

The 2011 graduate broke the record for every in-state meet in he competed in, capped by an incredible 75-10 heave in his final high school throw at the 2011 NJSIAA Meet of Champions. He won the MOC shot put all four years at Morristown, both indoors and outdoors. He also won the discus at the MOC in 2009. No New Jersey boy had ever won an event four times at the MOC, indoor or outdoor, and none has done so since.

He also became the only American high schooler to win an event four times at the Penn Relays, and he also set national freshman, sophomore and junior state records. He also won numerous U.S. Junior National championships.

He also finished his career with a national record of 96 throws over 70 feet. In the 13 years since, one New Jersey thrower has reached 70 feet indoors, and none have done it outdoors.

Vena, who was 6-4 and 270 pounds as a senior, never got caught up in his records.

"All I tried to do was keep improving," he said. "If a big throw or record came with it, then that just made it even better. I would like to be remembered as someone who showed that if you put your mind to something and work hard at it every day, anything is possible."

He went on to star collegiately at the University of Virginia and University of Georgia. He received a prestigious honor in 2024 when he was inducted into the Penn Relays Wall of Fame.

Vena now teaches physical education at Morristown, coaches the throws and the high jump, and is also a volunteer cross-country coach at his alma mater.