

Hillsboro Hall Of Fame To Add Twelve

Nine individuals and three teams will be inducted into the Hillsboro High School athletic hall of fame during ceremonies preceding the Hiltopper home football game on Friday, Sept. 7. Induction ceremonies will begin at 6:20 p.m. prior to the 7 p.m. kickoff against Roxana.

Three of the inductees are coaches—Dave Ball, Dyke Buerkett and Rich Stewart—and two of the three, Buerkett and Stewart, were also outstanding HHS athletes. They will be inducted into the hall of fame with Nicolo Casarta, Jeremy Connor, Randy McCoy, Tyler Shelton, Hope (Schulte) Pankau and Dale Willis, along with the 1985 Hillsboro football team, and the back-to-back state

runner-up girls cross country teams in 1990 and 1991.

The 2018 hall of fame class will be enshrined alongside previous inductees Stan Wallace, Mary Beth Zimmerman, Ed Dahler, Harold Osborn, Buzz Ott, Tony Parola, Mark Frailey, Walter Westbrook, Tony Corso, Pat McClurg, Matt Hughes, Maria Pretnar, Brooke (Beeler) Lynch, the state champion 2006 girls basketball team, the state champion 1914 boys basketball team, Shane Cress, Mark Hughes, Irwin Little, Charles Grantham, Cecil Hart, Brian Pesko, Bertie Smith, Adam Beeler, the state runner-up 1982 boys baseball team, and the state runner-up 1949 boys basketball team.

Hope (Schulte) Pankau, Class of 2007

Hillsboro High School class of 2007 graduate Hope (Schulte) Pankau has a hall of fame resume that checks all the boxes—four year starter, all-time leading scorer, and state championship.

And that's just in high school. She went on to an award-winning basketball career at Illinois Wesleyan University.

As a Hiltopper, she lettered in volleyball, but it was on the basketball court where she made her mark on Hillsboro history. During her four years as a starting guard, the Lady Toppers compiled an eye-popping 98-27 record, including an Illinois High School Association state championship in 2006.

Her teams won regional championships all four years she played—2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007—as well as sectional championships in 2006 and 2007 and a super-sectional title in 2006 on the way to the state title.

She was named to the all-conference team all four years in high school, the *Springfield State Journal-Register* all-area first team as a junior and senior, the IHSA IA all-state basketball team as a junior and senior, and earned a spot in the Illinois Basketball Coaches Association all-star game after her senior year.

During her four years as a

starter, she shot her way to the top of the Hillsboro High School all-time scoring list with 1,969 career points, a total she now shares with HHS senior Sammi Matoush.

At the collegiate level, she played four years for Illinois Wesleyan University, a team that went 111-12 during her tenure on the team, including 53-3 in the College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin (CCIW) and an NCAA Division III final four appearance.

She started 92 games at Wesleyan and played in a school record 121, scoring a career 1,036 points with 430 rebounds, 256 assists, 223 steals and 69 blocks. As a senior, she averaged 9.3 points and 4.7 rebounds per game, and her team-leading 76 steals that year ranks third all-time for a single season at IWU, and her team-leading 104 assists rank ninth.

In college, she made all-conference first team once and third team twice, earned honorable mention on the Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA) all-American team, and the WBCA first team all-region.

She earned the All-American Titan award, given to the Wesleyan player who is outstanding both on and off the court, and won the Order of the Titans award, given to the superior IWU senior.

Nicolo Casarta, Class of 2003

The early 2000s ushered in a new resurgence in Hillsboro High School football and 2003 grad Nicolo Casarta was right in the middle of the revolution.

After three years of missing the playoffs, Hillsboro earned a spot in 1999, going 9-0 in the regular season before falling to Lombard Montini in the opening round.

The Hiltoppers wouldn't miss the playoffs again for nine years, marking the longest postseason streak in the program's history.

Casarta was a big part of the Toppers' success during his time with the orange and black, earning varsity letters in 2000, 2001 and 2002.

He would start on both sides of the football in his junior season, earning all-conference first team recognition both on offense and defense. Hillsboro would go on to go 5-0 in the South Central Conference Eastern Division, going 8-3 overall before being eliminated by Benton in the Sweet 16.

Casarta would break out in his senior year, setting school records for most rushing yards in a season (2,227) and most touchdowns (32). Team glory followed individual accolades as the Toppers overcame a 1-1 start to peel off ten straight wins.

Hillsboro would narrowly miss making it to the IHSA Class 4A State Championship game, falling to Mt. Carmel 27-24 to end their season in the final four.

The Toppers would outscore their opponents 396 to 123 that season, with Casarta accounting for nearly half of those points. His gaudy senior statistics boosted him into the top spots for career yards (3,046) and career rushing touchdowns (46). All told, he would finish his career with 48 touchdowns, adding a TD reception and a kickoff return for a score to his list.

Conference coaches, who voted him to the first team on the offense and defense for the second consecutive year, weren't the only ones who took notice of Casarta's success. In his senior year, Casarta was named to the all-state team at running back, putting him amongst the best players in Illinois.

The things that made Casarta excel on the gridiron also allowed him to be a top sprinter for the track team, where he was a four-year letter winner. Twice the Hillsboro speedster helped the Toppers earn school records, in the 4x100 (44.12 seconds) and in the 4x200 (1:32.4).

1990-91 Girls Cross Country Team

While the history of the Hillsboro High School girls cross country program is not as long as some other sports, the Lady Toppers were one of the most successful programs on campus during the early 1990s.

A run of seven straight state finals appearances was highlighted by a pair of second place finishes in 1990 and 1991, the seventh and ninth IHSA state trophies in the school's history (wrestling would earn a fourth place finish behind the two runner-up awards).

Coached by Mel Romanus and Brian Patton, the 1990 squad consisted of Michelle (Thompson) Blankenship, Erin Landers, Carmen (Walz) Larimore, Michele Garrett and Amy Patton. Following the program's first sectional title the previous year, the team would win the sectional and advance to the state finals.

Only St. Joseph-Ogden would finish ahead of the Lady Hiltoppers, with Hillsboro beating out other top five finishers Rock Island Alleman, Urbana-University and Herscher for the runner-up spot. In 1991, Brian Patton contin-

ued on as head coach and brought back four of the previous year's top five in Blankenship, Landers, Larimore and Garrett. Replacing Amy Patton were Courtney (Yount) Malone and JoGari (Zer-rusen) McCartney.

Some familiar competition followed them to state in 1991 as well, as Herscher, who was fifth in 1990, won the state crown. Urbana-University, Elmhurst Timothy Christian, Seneca and 1990 champ St. Joseph-Ogden took the next four spots behind the second place Lady Hiltoppers.

Hillsboro would go on to qualify for state four more times after the back-to-back second place finishes, always finishing in the top 15. In 1993, Erin Landers would finish sixth overall to earn the first individual medal in the program's history.

Patton moved on to coach at his alma mater, Greenville College, where he has been the head men's and women's cross country and track and field coach since 1994, earning coach of the year honors by the St. Louis Intercollegiate Athletic Conference 22 times.

Randy McCoy, Class of 1974

Randy McCoy lettered in football, baseball and basketball as a member of the Hillsboro High School class of 1974, but it was in basketball where he established himself as among the best in school history.

His 1,478 career points are the fifth highest total by any player in the 112-year history of Hillsboro boys basketball.

As a junior, he scored 474 points averaging 19.7 per game, shot 54 percent from the field and 72 percent from the free throw line to earn a spot on the first team all-conference. That season, he scored 25 points in the championship game of the Litchfield Invitational Tournament to help the Hiltoppers defeat Highland 75-74 for the title.

As a senior, he set a then-school-record by averaging 24.5 points per game, earning another spot on the all-conference first team. He set records at the Edwardsville Holiday Tournament with 117 points and 47 field goals in four games.

After his senior season, he was an all-state special mention in the

Tyler Shelton, Class of 1997

A three-time MVP, three-time top defensive player award winner, and three-time all-conference selection, Hillsboro High School class of 1997 member Tyler Shelton earned his spot in the hall of fame on the baseball field.

He also lettered in football and basketball, but was a four-year letter winner in baseball where he was his team's most valuable player as a sophomore, junior and senior, and earned the team's Best Defensive Player award as a freshman, sophomore and junior, all while playing at shortstop, the most difficult defensive position on the field.

Consider, also, he hit over .500 during each of his three MVP years: .596 as a sophomore and .522 as both a junior and senior, all while popping 23 career home runs.

As a senior on the mound, he went 10-3 with two saves, 110 strikeouts and a 3.05 ERA in 80.1 innings, leading the Toppers to a regional championship and appearance in the sectional championship game. Hillsboro finished the 1997 season with a 19-10 record.

Dale Willis, Class of 1973

Dale Willis, class of 1973, will enter the hall of fame as the ninth leading all-time scorer in Hillsboro High School boys basketball.

In addition to his credentials on the basketball court, Willis also lettered in track and football, where the team compiled a 12-6 record during his two years as starting quarterback. As a senior, Willis passed for 477 yards.

In basketball, Willis' 1,244 career points ranks him ninth all-time in Hillsboro High School boys basketball scoring. A four-year letter winner and a teammate of fellow inductee Randy McCoy from the class of 1974, Willis was key in the

1973 Litchfield Invitational Tournament championship, clinched by the Hiltoppers with a 75-74 win over Highland in the final.

As a junior and senior, he was first team all-conference in basketball, and earned all-state special mention after his senior season.

Willis went on to play basketball for the University of Missouri in St. Louis. After two years there, he transferred to Millikin University in Decatur where he was first team all-conference in the College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin (CCIW) his senior year, and earned academic all-American status twice.

Jeremy Connor, Class of 1996

To achieve the level of excellence that Jeremy Connor reached during his four years at Hillsboro High School in one sport would have been impressive, but to do so in two sports is even more so.

In basketball, the 1996 grad ranks in the top ten in career points and career rebounds for Hillsboro boys basketball, with 1,307 points (seventh all-time) and 610 rebounds (third all-time).

Connor started about half of the season his freshman year, then was a fixture in the Hiltopper lineup from then on, winning the team MVP award as a sophomore, junior and senior. He would also be a three-time all-conference selection by the Mid-State coaches during that same span.

As Connor grew, so did the Toppers, going from 8-18 his freshman year to 19-9 his senior season. Hillsboro would come up just nine points short of their first regional title since 1982, falling to Lincolnwood 69-60 in the regional championship game at Morrisonville.

As good as he was on the basketball court, Connor was even better on the football field. The three-year starter was a force for the Black Tide at defensive end and tight end, earning all-conference honors in 1993, 1994 and 1995.

After making the playoffs for

the first time since 1988 in his junior year, Connor helped Hillsboro to an 11-1 record and an Elite Eight appearance as a senior in one of the program's best overall seasons.

Hillsboro would finish the regular season 9-0 and won the Mid-State Conference. For his efforts, Connor earned all-state recognition from the *Chicago Sun Times*, all-area honors from the *Decatur Herald and Review* and the *State Journal-Register*, and was named to the East-West Shrine All-Star Game roster.

Connor also was an academic all-state selection his senior year and went on to graduate from the University of Akron with a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering in 2001. He was also a three-year letter winner at tight end for the Zips, joining the small group of Hillsboro grads who went on to play for a Division I program.

After graduation in 2001, Connor returned to Hillsboro, where he has continued the legacy of Topper athletics as a coach, currently serving as an assistant basketball coach.

A civil engineer and member of the board of directors at Hurst-Rosche in Hillsboro, Connor and his wife Shanna have three children, Bryce, Brynn and Brylee.

Dyke Buerkett, Class of 1978

For the better part of the last four decades, Dyke Buerkett has found a way to contribute to the success of his alma mater on the basketball court in almost every way possible.

Buerkett was a two-year letter winner under Coach Harland Scheibal, helping the Hiltoppers to a 37-15 record during his junior and senior seasons.

After a solid varsity debut in which he scored 349 points and had 95 rebounds while shooting 47 percent from the field, Buerkett turned in a stellar senior campaign that saw him earn recognition as the MVP of the Litchfield Invitational Tournament (which Hillsboro won with a 79-65 win over O'Fallon) and an honorable mention all-state nod.

A two-time Mid-State Conference honoree, Buerkett scored 486 points and had 103 assists for the 20-6 Toppers. He would shoot just over 50 percent from the field (191-of-380) while also hitting 74 percent from the charity stripe (104-of-140).

While he also lettered in cross country and track at HHS, earning MVP honors in track in 1978, Buerkett's future was on the hardwood as he moved on to play basketball at Lincoln Land Community College in Springfield.

Following a two-year career with the Loggers, where he was an all-region selection as a sophomore, Buerkett took his talents north, to the University of St. Francis in Joliet.

A spot starter as a junior, averaging eight points a game for the Fighting Saints, Buerkett came into his own as a senior and turned in one of the program's most complete seasons, posting top 12 totals in steals (51), field goal percentage (.544) and free

throw percentage (.783). His 51 steals are still ninth best for a season in the program's history.

He would also lead the team in assists with 61 and averaged 14.3 points per game, numbers that earned him all-conference and all-district honors in 1983. In 1999, Buerkett was inducted into the University of St. Francis Athletic Hall of Fame.

After graduation, Buerkett made coaching and teaching stops in Romeoville and Bethalto Civic Memorial before returning to Hillsboro to teach at Hillsboro Junior High School in 1990.

For 17 years he coached his alma mater, racking up 226 wins, the second most all-time behind Joe Fearheiley (365). Buerkett's tenure as the Toppers head coach was highlighted by the 1997-98 and 1998-99 seasons, where Hillsboro won its first regional titles since 1982.

In 1998, the Toppers went 25-5, falling to Farina South Central by two points, 60-58 in the sectional championship. In 1999, Hillsboro took it a step further, going a program best 30-1 and advancing to the Sweet 16 before a 49-42 loss to Carmi-White County knocked them from the ranks of the unbeaten and ended their season.

After his time as head coach ended in 2007, Buerkett continued to be involved in the game, both as an official and as the coach of the Hillsboro Junior High seventh grade girls basketball team, who won an IESA state title in 2013, then repeated as eighth graders in 2014.

His success in the coaching ranks earned him coach of the year honors multiple times, both at the high school level and at the junior high level, by the Illinois Basketball Coaches Association.

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For More Information:

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