



Falls History Project 2026

# The Girls Stepped Forward

Educators and Athletes Reflect on Title IX



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Michelle Thompson,  
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***“Somewhere behind the athlete you’ve become and the hours of practice and the coaches who have pushed you is a little girl who fell in love with the game and never looked back... play for her.”***

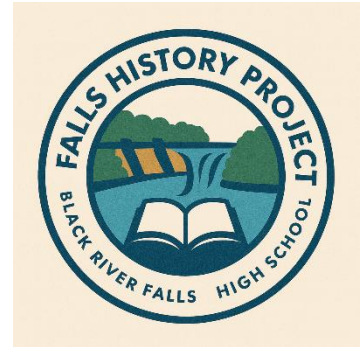
***Mia Hamm***

***Olympic Soccer Champion***



## ***Acknowledgements and Preface***

History rarely moves in straight lines. It advances through openings—moments when circumstances shift and people act. For twenty-five years, the Falls History Project has traced those openings in our community. Two ideas guide us: **contingency**, which reminds us nothing was inevitable, and **agency**, which brings us to the choices people made. Together, they ground our work in a simple truth: history is people finding their way through changing worlds.



This year we turned to a story long overdue for deeper attention: **the rise of women’s sports at Black River Falls High School in the early years of Title IX**. Origin stories matter. They show us how we arrived here and highlight the courage of those who stepped forward before the path was clear. The young women who competed in the 1970s could not have imagined the landscape of 2026, yet their efforts helped build it. As we pieced together this history, one pattern stood out: the early years already carried the marks of strong teams. After nearly fifty years of coaching, I’ve learned that great teams share three elements—**talent with character, coaches who demand excellence, and love**. Those qualities were present from the start. This project also brought my own past into view. My youngest sister, Mim, ran on the first girls’ track team here in 1970, and revisiting those memories has been a gift. Title IX arrived during my high school years, and when we moved to West Fargo in 1973, I watched those first girls’ teams form, made up of my classmates and friends. I didn’t realize I was watching a **cultural shift** take hold. My coaching career began in 1977 at Concordia College with young women who were pioneers in their own right, an experience that shaped me more than I knew at the time. In a twist of fate, I later married one of those pioneers. Decades of coaching young women (and men) have only deepened my appreciation for the women whose voices anchor this project.

As always, the topic proved larger than the time we had. We extend our deep thanks to **Mary Mack, Carol Anderson, Kitti Young, Mary Rykken, and Holly Smith** for sharing their time and insight. We are equally grateful to the “girls”—now elders—who revisited their stories from fifty years later. Their voices remind us that the past is never abstract; it lives in memory and gains strength in the telling. **Any errors or omissions are my responsibility, and we welcome the**

**chance to correct the record if needed.** Their reflections also underscore something essential about the early years of girls' athletics: these programs did not emerge fully formed. They were built season by season, often with borrowed uniforms, shared practice space, and coaches juggling multiple roles. Yet from those modest beginnings came teams that competed fiercely, supported one another, and laid the groundwork for the opportunities young women now take for granted. Their stories widen our understanding of what **courage** looks like in everyday life.



Special thanks to our intern, **Lily Sullivan**, whose discipline, curiosity, and care strengthened every part of this work. She now joins twenty-six interns who have helped build the Falls History Project. We are so fortunate. Interns like Lily remind us why this project exists in the first place: to give young people a chance to practice the craft of history, to follow evidence where it leads, and to discover how local stories illuminate larger national currents. Her work this year assisting with interviews, sorting archival fragments, and helping shape the narrative -- reflects the best of that tradition.

My thanks also go to **Eli Youngthunder** and **Mary Woods**, whose scholarship and commitment continue to sustain this project. Our hope is simple: that this work adds a meaningful chapter to the story of Black River Falls and encourages future students, researchers, and community members to keep asking good questions. For twenty-five years, this project has grown through the curiosity of young people willing to follow the evidence. This year's work stands in that tradition and, we trust, will inspire the next generation to do the same. The story of women's sports at BRFHS is still unfolding, and the next chapters will be written by those who continue to care, to wonder, and to look back with the same courage the pioneers showed when they first stepped onto the court, the track, and the playing fields.



Paul Rykken  
June 2026

# The Girls Stepped Forward

## *Educators and Athletes Reflect on Title IX*

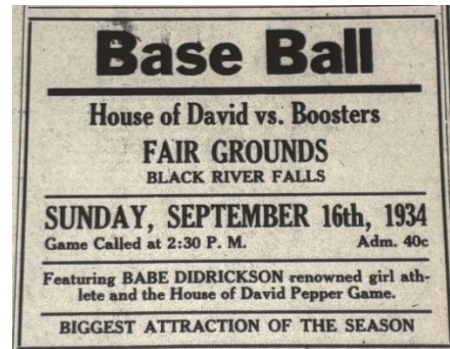
(By Paul Rykken)

*“All historical experience must be imagined before it can be understood.”*

*David Blight*

### **Part 1: Prologue**

On a Sunday afternoon, ninety-two years ago, the Fairgrounds diamond in Black River Falls shimmered under late summer heat. By mid-afternoon, spectators ringed the field three deep, cars jammed every scrap of ground, and more than a thousand people leaned in as if the whole town shared one breath. The Boosters, the



***Babe Didrikson Zaharias***  
**(1911-1956)**

city's club team, carried a fifteen-game winning streak into the day and the excitement was palpable. But they were not the only reason the crowd surged. The House of David barnstormers had arrived -- bearded showmen from a Michigan religious colony -- spinning their famous pepper game like a joyous ballet. The *Banner Journal* called them the “hirsute lads,” a name that fit their odd charm and the spectacle they brought to any field.<sup>1</sup> Then came the jolt no one forgot. A 23-year-old woman from Beaumont, Texas -- Olympic champion and national sensation -- walked onto a men's baseball field with unmistakable swagger. Babe Didrikson.<sup>2</sup> In an era that told girls to watch, not play, she laced

<sup>1</sup> *Banner Journal* (Black River Falls, WI), 19 September 1934 coverage of the House of David barnstorming game, “Hirsuit” refers to a hairy appearance and most of the players were long-haired and bearded, certainly unusual for baseball players.

<sup>2</sup> For biographical background on Babe Didrikson's athletic career and barnstorming appearances, see Susan E. Cayleff, *Babe: The Life and Legend of Babe Didrikson Zaharias* (University of Illinois Press, 1996). Babe Didrikson spent part of the summer of 1934 barnstorming with the House of David baseball team, a popular touring club known for its showmanship and its willingness to feature standout guest players. Contemporary accounts and surviving memorabilia confirm that she traveled with the team and appeared in games, extending a pattern in which men's teams invited her both for her genuine athletic ability and for the crowds she reliably drew. Her stint with the House of David followed earlier high-profile pitching appearances against men's teams and added another chapter to her role as a barrier-breaking athlete whose presence boosted attendance and visibility wherever she played.

her spikes, warmed her arm, and took her place among the barnstormers, pitching the first inning and holding the locals scoreless. Her presence bent the frame of the afternoon.

The moment people talked about for years, however, came during the seventh inning stretch. A wiry local kid -- sixteen-year-old Bob Teeples, known for his speed -- lined up to race the Babe from center field to home. He lost, fair and square.<sup>3</sup> That short sprint across the outfield said what the whole day was already whispering: a young woman was claiming space never meant for her, and for a heartbeat, the familiar diamond felt new, as if the game sensed a future rushing toward it. And yet the game itself remained cautiously familiar to the fans. Bert Jones and Hank Kleven, local sports heroes, rose to the moment with quiet defiance, matching the barnstormers pitch for pitch.



*Robert Woodrow Teeples  
(1918-2011)*

What followed was a tight battle, and when the final out settled into a glove, the Boosters claimed a stunning 1–0 upset victory.<sup>4</sup> For an exhilarating moment, Black River Falls felt like the center of the baseball universe. Moments like this linger in the imagination. And while the girls in the crowd that September afternoon would not grow up to benefit from Title IX, the sight of Babe Didrikson on a men’s baseball field offered a bright glimpse of what might one day be possible. Yet the future rushing across that outfield would not arrive for another generation. The girls in the stands grew up in a vastly different athletic landscape, one shaped by the uneven, often fragile history of women’s sports before Title IX began to change the rules.

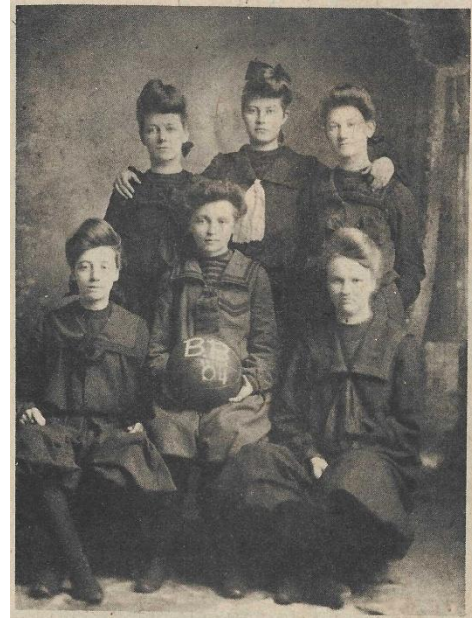
<sup>3</sup> I first heard Bob’s story when he participated in our initial foray into local history, the 2002 FHP on World War II. He also recounted the story in his self-published 1996 book, *Fair Play*. Bob was a gifted young ballplayer who briefly pitched and played shortstop for the **Eau Claire Bears** of the Class D Northern League in 1938, making eleven appearances and posting a 1–2 record before his career was interrupted by World War II. At just nineteen, he signed with the Bears, then later played for La Crosse and Winnipeg, finishing his short minor-league career with a .169 batting average across twenty-five games. Stats Crew His story, though, became far larger than baseball: Teeples served 37 months in the Pacific with the U.S. Army’s 32nd Infantry Division, earned the Silver Star, trained with the elite Alamo Scouts, and was severely wounded before returning home. After the war he continued to pitch semi-pro ball locally, helped launch Jackson County Little League, and built a long career in telecommunications -- becoming one of those small-town legends whose life stitched together local sports, military service, and community leadership.

<sup>4</sup> *Banner Journal* game summary, 19 September 1934, documenting the Boosters’ 1–0 victory over the House of David. Amazingly, the House of David barnstormers played 212 games in their 1934 season and had a record of 165 wins and forty-seven losses. For a good write up of that season, consult the Center for Negro League Baseball website: <https://www.cnlbr.org/>

## Pre-Title IX and Women's Sports

Women's sports in the United States did not suddenly appear with Title IX in the early 1970s; they followed a much older rhythm of emergence, retreat, and revival. In the early 1900s, girls and women played basketball and other sports with joy and surprising visibility. High schools, colleges, YWCAs, and community clubs fielded teams, and photographs from the era show athletes proudly claiming space on the court. Their games drew crowds, and in many communities -- especially rural ones -- girls' basketball became a celebrated part of local life. A look through early yearbooks suggests that Black River Falls High School reflected this national enthusiasm, though only in scattered and inconsistent ways. The first women's basketball team appears in 1903–04, but references fade until the 1921–22 school year, when the school highlighted a team that competed against outside opponents, including Humbird and Warrens. Grace Thomas (1896–1985) coached that squad, and for a moment the school mirrored the broader national pattern of early support for girls' basketball. But those moments proved fleeting.<sup>5</sup>

By the 1920s and 30s, a powerful cultural shift pushed competitive girls' sports to the margins. Influential leaders in physical education, guided by medical theories warning against "overexertion" and by social norms policing femininity, argued that girls should avoid



**Women's Basketball Team at BRF High:  
1903-04**

*The* BLACK RIVER BREEZE

GIRLS' BASKET BALL

Vera Hagen, Captain, Left Forward	Elizabeth Monsos, Right Guard
Jane Ormsby, Center	Myrtle Sprester, Left Guard
Mildred Van Gorden, Right Forward	Thelma Van Gorden, Sub
Grace Thomas, Coach	

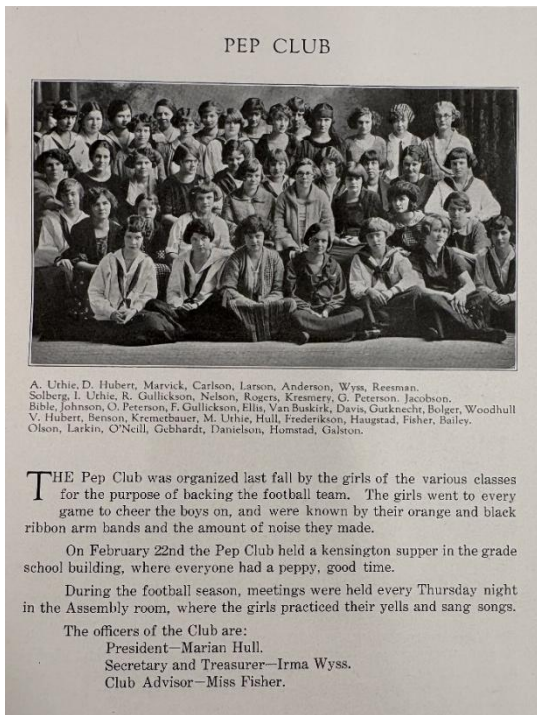
GAMES PLAYED

Games	Date	Score	Favor
B. R. F. vs Humbird	Feb. 10, 1922	18- 2	Humbird
B. R. F. vs Warrens	Feb. 24, 1922	11-10	B. R. F.
B. R. F. vs Warrens	Mar. 17, 1922	2- 2	

Our girls' team was not organized until late in January, consequently they had little time for either practice or games. Miss Thomas deserves much credit for her work in coaching the team and we feel sure that had there been more time, the girls would have been able to defeat any opponent.

<sup>5</sup> For early-20th-century women's athletics, see Pamela Grundy and Susan Shackelford, *Shattering the Glass: The Remarkable History of Women's Basketball* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Beyond the 1921-22 BRFHS yearbook entry, teams for girls disappear with Pep Club and G.A.A. on the rise.

strenuous competition.<sup>6</sup> Many schools responded by eliminating interscholastic teams and replacing them with “play days,” intramurals, or carefully supervised activities designed to minimize competition.<sup>7</sup> The effect was profound: what had been a growing, public athletic culture for girls became quieter, more random, and far less supported. This national retreat shaped the landscape in Wisconsin as well. With the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) focused exclusively on boys’ sports until 1970, schools across the state relied on the Girls’ Athletic Association (GAA) as the primary structure for girls’ physical activity. The GAA emerged nationally in the 1910s and 1920s as a school-based organization run by physical education teachers, designed to provide girls with intramural play, fitness activities, leadership opportunities, and socially acceptable forms of athletic participation at a time when competitive sports for girls were discouraged.

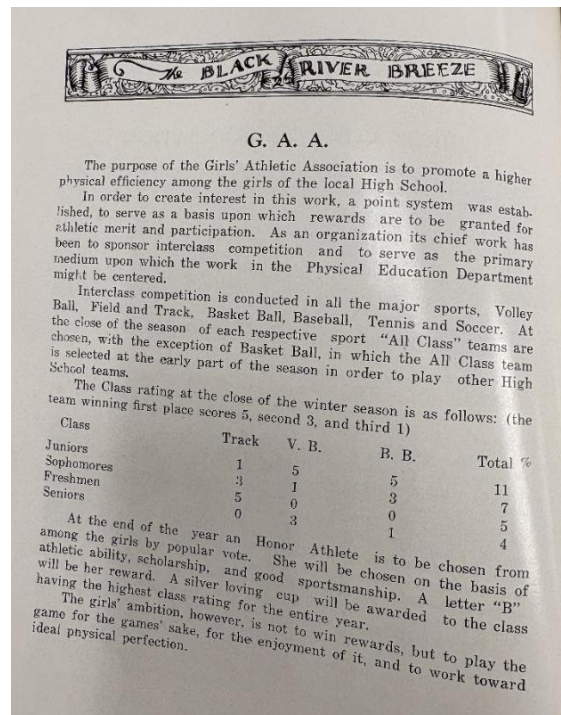


THE Pep Club was organized last fall by the girls of the various classes for the purpose of backing the football team. The girls went to every game to cheer the boys on, and were known by their orange and black ribbon arm bands and the amount of noise they made.

On February 22nd the Pep Club held a kensington supper in the grade school building, where everyone had a peppy, good time.

During the football season, meetings were held every Thursday night in the Assembly room, where the girls practiced their yells and sang songs.

The officers of the Club are:  
 President—Marian Hull.  
 Secretary and Treasurer—Irma Wyss.  
 Club Advisor—Miss Fisher.



The purpose of the Girls' Athletic Association is to promote a higher physical efficiency among the girls of the local High School.

In order to create interest in this work, a point system was established, to serve as a basis upon which rewards are to be granted for athletic merit and participation. As an organization its chief work has been to sponsor interclass competition and to serve as the primary medium upon which the work in the Physical Education Department might be centered.

Interclass competition is conducted in all the major sports, Volley Ball, Field and Track, Basket Ball, Baseball, Tennis and Soccer. At the close of the season of each respective sport "All Class" teams are chosen, with the exception of Basket Ball, in which the All Class team is selected at the early part of the season in order to play other High School teams.

The Class rating at the close of the winter season is as follows: (the team winning first place scores 5, second 3, and third 1)

Class	Track	V. B.	B. B.	Total %
Juniors	1	5		
Sophomores	3	1	5	11
Freshmen	5	0	3	7
Seniors	0	3	0	5
			1	4

At the end of the year an Honor Athlete is to be chosen from among the girls by popular vote. She will be chosen on the basis of athletic ability, scholarship, and good sportsmanship. A letter "B" will be her reward. A silver loving cup will be awarded to the class having the highest class rating for the entire year.

The girls' ambition, however, is not to win rewards, but to play the game for the games sake, for the enjoyment of it, and to work toward ideal physical perfection.

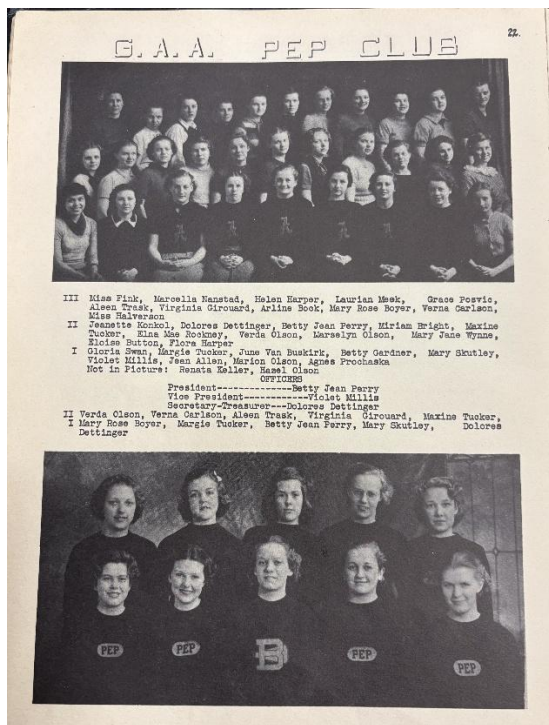
Beyond the occasional, irregular offering of a basketball team -- such as the 1921–22 squad -- young women were relegated to two organizations connected to athletics: the GAA and the Pep Club, the latter designed primarily to support the boys’ football teams of the era. Black River Falls mirrored this pattern, as noted by these pages (above) from the 1924 and 1926 school yearbooks (*The Breeze*). The GAA offered seasonal intramurals, calisthenics, service projects,

<sup>6</sup> On medical and cultural arguments against girls’ competitive sports in the 1920s–30s, see Allen Guttmann, *Women’s Sports: A History* (Columbia University Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> For the rise of “play days” and the retreat from interscholastic girls’ sports, see Linda J. Borish, “Women’s Sport and Physical Education in the United States, 1900–1940,” in *Sport and the American Society*.

and “sports days” with nearby schools, but it did not provide the sustained, competitive opportunities that boys enjoyed through the WIAA.<sup>8</sup>

This retreat from interscholastic girls’ sports did not happen everywhere, at least not to the same extent. In Iowa, for example, girls’ basketball not only survived but thrived.<sup>9</sup> Rural communities packed gymnasiums, and the state built a governing structure that kept girls’ basketball alive through the Depression and World War II. But Iowa was the exception. Across most of the country, institutional support faded, opportunities narrowed, and the public record thinned. Girls still loved to play, but the systems around them no longer made room for their ambition. By mid-century, women’s sports persisted mostly in pockets -- church leagues, industrial leagues, private clubs, and the occasional rural stronghold. The broader culture had all but forgotten the vibrant athletic world that had existed just a generation earlier.<sup>10</sup>



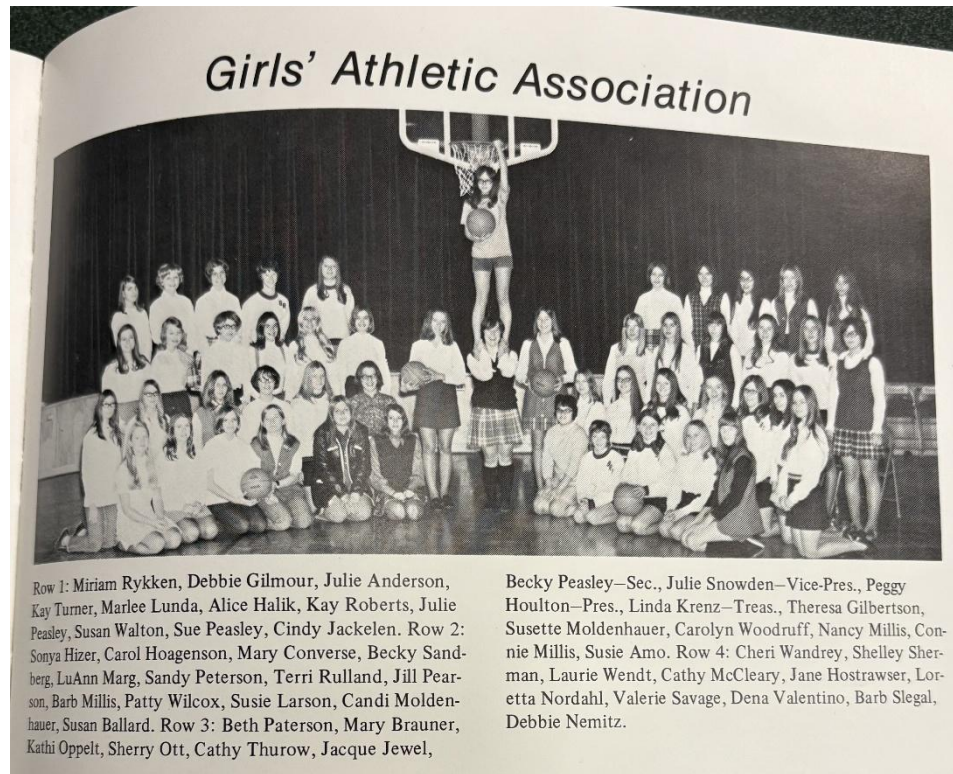
**G.A.A. had a lot of staying power as noted by these photos from 1937 (left) and 1957 (right)**

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted also that Cheerleading Squads emerged from Pep Clubs. Separate photos of the cheerleaders at BRHFS, for example, show up first in the 1951 *Breeze*, signifying their growing presence.

<sup>9</sup> For Iowa’s unique support of girls’ basketball, see Max McElwain, *The Iowa Girls: The Story of the Nation’s Most Successful High School Girls’ Basketball Program* (University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> On mid-century women’s athletic opportunities in church, industrial, and community leagues, see Jaime Schultz, *Qualifying Times: Points of Change in U.S. Women’s Sport* (University of Illinois Press, 2014).

In Wisconsin, the GAA remained the dominant structure for girls' athletics well into the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>11</sup> Only with the cultural shifts of the late 1960s -- and the legal force of Title IX in 1972 -- did the WIAA begin sanctioning girls' sports. As WIAA sponsored programs emerged (starting



Row 1: Miriam Rykken, Debbie Gilmour, Julie Anderson, Kay Turner, Marlee Lunda, Alice Halik, Kay Roberts, Julie Peasley, Susan Walton, Sue Peasley, Cindy Jackelen. Row 2: Sonya Hizer, Carol Hoagenson, Mary Converse, Becky Sandberg, LuAnn Marg, Sandy Peterson, Terri Rulland, Jill Pearson, Barb Millis, Patty Wilcox, Susie Larson, Candi Moldenhauer, Susan Ballard. Row 3: Beth Paterson, Mary Brauner, Kathi Oppelt, Sherry Ott, Cathy Thurow, Jacque Jewel,

Becky Peasley--Sec., Julie Snowden--Vice-Pres., Peggy Houlton--Pres., Linda Krenz--Treas., Theresa Gilbertson, Susette Moldenhauer, Carolyn Woodruff, Nancy Millis, Connie Millis, Susie Amo. Row 4: Cheri Wandrey, Shelley Sherman, Laurie Wendt, Cathy McCleary, Jane Hostrawser, Loretta Nordahl, Valerie Savage, Dena Valentino, Barb Slegal, Debbie Nemitz.

with girls' swimming in 1970 and accelerating rapidly through the mid-1970s), the GAA gradually receded. At Black River Falls, as in most Wisconsin schools, the GAA continued into the mid-1970s before giving way to formal varsity and junior varsity teams. Indeed, many of the young women who signed up for those "first" teams at BRFHS had grown up with the GAA experience. What had once been the only sanctioned space for girls' athletic participation became unnecessary as interscholastic girls' sports finally moved to the forefront.

### ***The Turning Point: Title IX and the Return of Opportunity***

It was not until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 began challenging discrimination in education -- and, for the first time, made sex discrimination a matter of federal concern -- that the legal ground started to shift. Although the Act did not yet require equal athletic opportunity, it created the framework and momentum that made Title IX possible eight years later.<sup>12</sup> What had once been lost returned with force, reshaping opportunities for generations of girls who had never been

<sup>11</sup> Evidence of GAA activity in Wisconsin schools appears consistently in mid-century yearbooks and in teacher-training curricula from UW--Madison, UW--La Crosse, and UW--Stevens Point.

<sup>12</sup> Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. 88-352, especially Titles IV and VI, which began addressing discrimination in education and laid groundwork for later sex-equity legislation.

invited to step fully into the game. When Title IX became law in 1972, its thirty seven words carried a quiet but revolutionary promise: **“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”**<sup>13</sup> Few anticipated how profoundly that promise would reshape American athletics. At the time, just over 300,000 girls and women participated in high school and college sports nationwide, and athletic scholarships for women were almost nonexistent.<sup>14</sup> Girls’ teams -- where they existed -- were underfunded, overlooked, and expected to make do with whatever resources they could gather on their own. This was not accidental. For decades, schools had denied women access to competitive teams, scholarships, facilities, and coaching. Title IX did more than expand opportunities; it corrected a longstanding inequity by requiring institutions receiving federal funds to provide equal access to educational programs, including athletics.<sup>15</sup>



*Indiana Fever Guard Caitlin Clark*

Fifty-four years later, the transformation is unmistakable. Women’s athletics have been remade. The phenomenon surrounding **Caitlin Clark** — her record-breaking performances, national following, and ability to fill arenas — did not appear out of thin air. <sup>15</sup> Her rise reaches back to those first post–Title IX seasons, when girls stepped onto courts and fields long closed to them. In two generations, the unimaginable has become routine. What once felt like a rupture now reads as the natural fulfillment of a promise made in 1972.

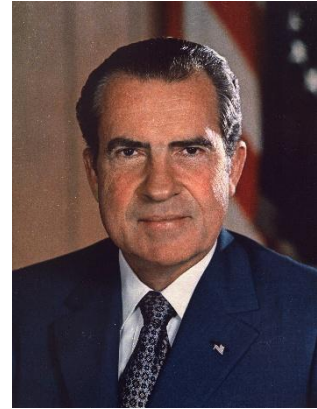
<sup>13</sup> *Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972*, 20 U.S.C. §1681(a). The statute’s thirty-seven words read: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

<sup>14</sup> Participation data from the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), early 1970s reports.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *Title IX, and Intercollegiate Athletics: Policy Interpretation* (1979), outlining institutional responsibilities for equal athletic opportunity.

## Part 2: A National Story Becomes Local: BRFHS in the 1970s

On June 23, 1972, President Richard Nixon signed Title IX into law. Although the statute addressed far more than athletics, its most visible impact has been the dramatic expansion of competitive sports opportunities for girls and women. In the more than half-century since its enactment, high school girls' participation has grown from 300,000 nationwide to more than three million.



*Richard M. Nixon (1913-1994) 37th President of the United States*

Wisconsin played an outsized role in that transformation. The Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) began sanctioning girls' sports even before Title IX existed, making the state an early leader in organized girls' interscholastic competition.

Swimming & Diving received sanction in 1970, and Track & Field followed in 1971 -- both arriving ahead of the federal mandate. Between 1970 and 1976, seven more sports were added in rapid succession, mirroring the momentum of the broader women's athletics movement. After an early pause, Soccer was added in 1983, Ice Hockey joined the list in 2001–02, and Wrestling followed in 2022, extending opportunity into new arenas for Wisconsin's young women (see chart on page 10).

The national story -- and Wisconsin's early embrace of it -- set the stage, but the real transformation unfolded at the grassroots in communities like Black River Falls. Title IX did not arrive with fanfare; it arrived as a question: ***What would equal opportunity look like here?*** In the early 1970s, that question moved through school hallways, locker rooms, and the old high school gym as an eager group of girls stepped forward to claim what earlier generations had been denied. They provided the momentum. With committed coaches and advisers beside them, they carved out leftover gym time, pulled on mismatched uniforms, and traveled on shoestring budgets. Crowds were modest, but each contest carried the weight of something larger -- a community learning, sometimes slowly, that girls belonged on courts, fields, and tracks every bit as much as boys did.

Indeed, Black River Falls reflected the national shift but developed its own local texture. Teachers pushed. Administrators and school boards adjusted. Parents cheered. And the athletes refused to shrink their ambition. Opportunities multiplied quickly. Between 1970 and

1978, six sports entered the mix -- track and field, basketball, golf, volleyball, softball, tennis, and cross country -- each one expanding the space available to young women. The athletes, coaches, and administrators who built those programs ushered in a new era in which girls' athletics were no longer an afterthought but a growing force in the life of the school. Each season strengthened the foundation for what would follow.

Within a few years, those tentative beginnings solidified into a genuine girls' athletic program. Conference titles arrived. State tournament appearances followed. And a generation of young women grew up expecting -- rather than requesting -- the right to play. The story of women's sports at Black River Falls High School begins there: in the early 1970s, on the cinder track behind the school, in whatever gym space the girls could secure, and on the Skyline Golf Course where early teams learned to compete with quiet determination. Track and field opened the chapter -- no fanfare, just the sound of feet striking cinders and a new stride taking hold -- joined soon by the sharp squeak of tennis shoes on worn gym floors and the clean, confident crack of a golf ball sent down the fairway. Those sounds told the community a change had begun.



*Black River Falls High School, c. 1970*

### ***Exhibit: Timeline of First Sanctioned Seasons in Wisconsin and BRFHS***

The following table presents each girls' sport in the order first sanctioned by the WIAA, including BRFHS's first team (if any), and head coach in each sport.

<b>Sport</b>	<b>WIAA Sanction Year</b>	<b>BRFHS First Year</b>	<b>Head Coach</b>
Swim and Dive	1970	<b>2016</b>	Erin Peterson
Track and Field	1971	<b>1970</b>	Dorothy Berg
<i>Gymnastics</i>	<i>1971</i>	<b><i>No Sanctioned Team</i></b>	
Tennis	1971	<b>1975</b>	Rich Stevens
Golf	1972	<b>1972</b>	Grace Rosenberg
Volleyball	1973	<b>1973-74</b>	Mary Mack
Cross Country	1975	<b>1978</b>	Dave Meyer
Basketball	1976	<b>1970-71</b>	Mary Mack
Softball	1976	<b>1973</b>	Carol Anderson
<i>Soccer</i>	<i>1983</i>	<b><i>No Sanctioned Team</i></b>	
Hockey	2001-02	<b>2010-11</b>	Steve Mickelson
Wrestling	2021-22	<b>2022</b>	Steve Markee
<i>LaCrosse</i>	<i>2023-24</i>	<b><i>No Team</i></b>	

### **Looking Back**

The WIAA's timeline of girls' sport sanctions reflects both Wisconsin's local leadership and a broader national shift toward equity. By sanctioning girls' sports even before Title IX, the state signaled an early commitment to expanding athletic opportunities. The rapid growth of the 1970s, the later period of consolidation, and the recent additions of Ice Hockey and Wrestling trace a steady arc of progress. As participation continues to rise and new sports emerge, the WIAA's record stands as both a benchmark and a reminder that expanding opportunity remains an ongoing task.

## “First” Teams at BRFHS in the Early Title IX Era

The first team to be organized in this period was the Track and Field team of 1970, coached by P.E. teacher **Dorothy Berg**. They received some attention in the Banner Journal. Several girls advanced to the State Meet and traveled to Appleton for that experience. Notably, this was the year prior to official sanction by the WIAA. **Mary Mack** assumed the head coaching position the next year and the team solidified further and became a regular part of the spring sports scene.



**Dorothy Berg (left) and Mary Mack coached the first Track and Field teams.**

Representing the girls track team from the Senior High in Black River Falls at the State meet in Appleton on Saturday are the girls seated in the front, (l to r), Louie Marg, Nancy Millis, Miriam Rykken, Lorretta Nordahl and Karen Lund.

Other girls attending the Viroqua Track Meet on Saturday were: Back row, (l. to r) Beth Paterson, Jane Avery, Cathy Mc Cleary, Sue Anderson, Linda Hopinkah, Peggy Houlton, Becky Peasley, Annette Johnson, Linda Olson, Nancy Pratt and Sonia Hizer. In the second row (l to r) Darlene Maurer, Debbie Upton, Wendy Voskuil, Jacque Jewell, Mary Converse, Cathy Thurow, Connie Millis, Sue Ballard, Jean Mengel and Becky Sandberg.

### GIRLS' STATE TRACK, FIELD RESULTS

Black River Falls Senior High School was well represented at the state girls' track and field meet on Saturday, May 23 when they competed against a nearly 400 girls from 125 other schools.

Karen Lund competed in the fourth flight in the high jump event. After finals for all five flights involving 50 girls were scored, Karen placed seventh.

The 880-yard medley relay team also placed in seventh position, out-running 13 other teams. Nancy Millis began by running 220 yards. Miriam Rykken ran 100, Louie Marg dashed 110 yards and Lorretta Nordahl finished by going 440 yards.

Lorretta Nordahl also ran the mile run which concluded the day long meet. She placed fifth in her heat and ninth in the final mile scores against 45 girls.

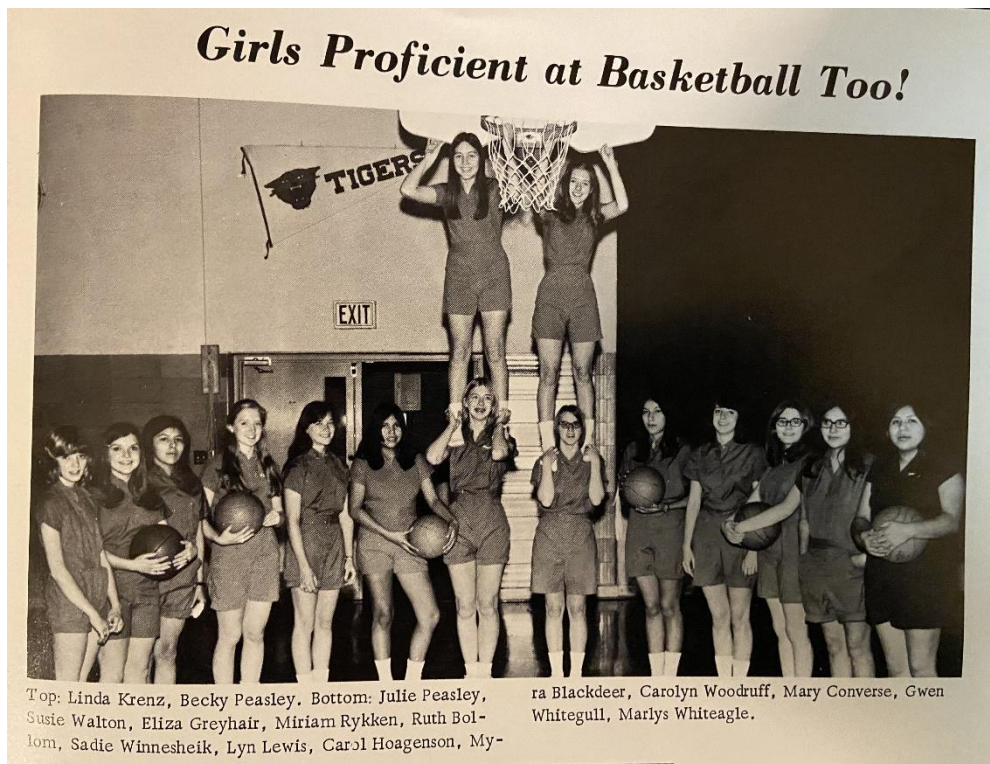
This was the first year the senior high school has participated in track and field events for girls. Therefore these results are most outstanding. Mrs. Dorothy Berg coached the team.

*Note: From 1970-78, Track and Field consistently produced state qualifiers. In 1970, Karen Lund, Loretta Nordahl, Nancy Millis, Mim Rykken, Louie Marg, and Loretta Nordahl. In 1973, Patty Peasley and Dawn Brumfield. In 1974, Patty Peasley, Lori Oigny, and Debbie Engebretson. In 1975, Ann Homstad, Debbie Engebretson Sue Brown, Patty Peasley, Kathy Hutchens, and Kathy Peasley. In 1976, Laura Perner. In 1977, Kathy Peasley. In 1978, Kathy Peasley and Julie Behrens.*

The first Girl's Basketball Team was organized in the 1971-72 school year with P.E. teacher **Mary Mack** at the helm. Coach Mack details this in her interview and this article from the school paper of the time indicates that she required the girls to take a rules test in order to play.

**GIRLS BASKETBALL**  
 By LuAnn Gearing

There is a group of girls, who through written tests and tryouts, finally made their goal: to be on the girls' basketball team. The team consists of: Ginger Bell, Ruth Bollom, Mary Converse, Eliza Greyhair, Carol Hoagenson, Linda Krenz, Lyn Lewis, Becky Peasley, Mim Rykken, Gwen Whitegull, Sadie Winnieshiek, and Carolyn Woodruff. In case there are any injuries to any of the players or they can't play, they'll have to rely on the alternates: Myra Blackdeer, Julie Peasley, Susie Walton, and Marlys Whitesgle. The girls are practicing very hard and we hope they'll bring home a victory when they go to Tomah for their first game on January 27.



Golf came into the mix in the fall of 1972, coached by **Grace Rosenberg**. As indicated by this article from the Banner Journal, their first season was super successful!

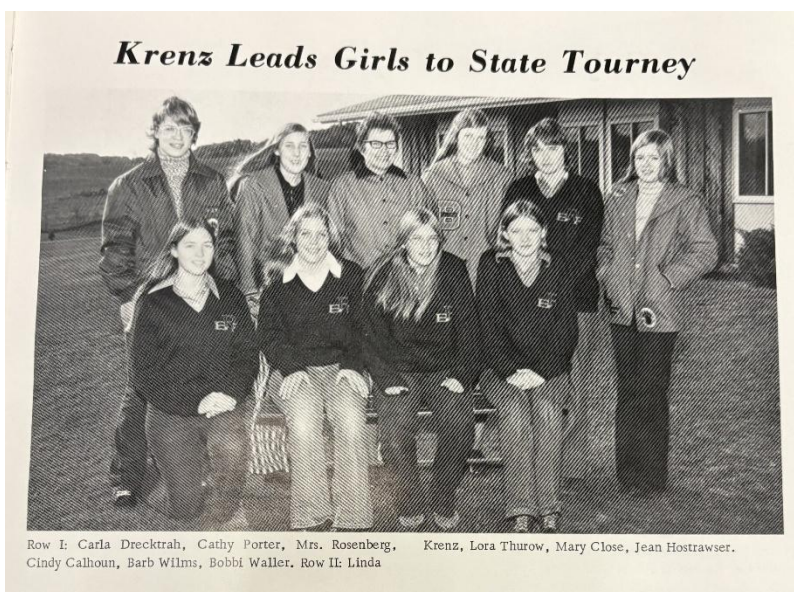
**Girl Golfers State Bound**

The Black River Falls girls' golf team fired a team total 243 last Friday afternoon on the breezy Skyline Golf Course to capture second place in sectional tournament action and gain a berth in the state meet this Saturday. Chipewa Falls won the sectional by posting a 222, while Chetek finished third at 247. Eau Claire Memorial finished with a 252, followed by Viroqua at 259. Owen Withee at 279, and Adams-Friendship shot a 331. The state meet will involve twelve teams participating at the Winagamic Golf Course in Appleton.

Linda Krenz led the way for Tiger golfers as she fired a nine-hole total of 50 while teammates Barb Wilms, Mary Close and Lora Thurow followed with scores of 58, 65, and 70 respectively. Joan Hostrawser's 81 was discarded as only the top four scores for each team were recorded in the final tabulations.

Joanne Fallien of Chetek came in with medalist honors at 44 and she will also compete in the 18 hole state tourney.

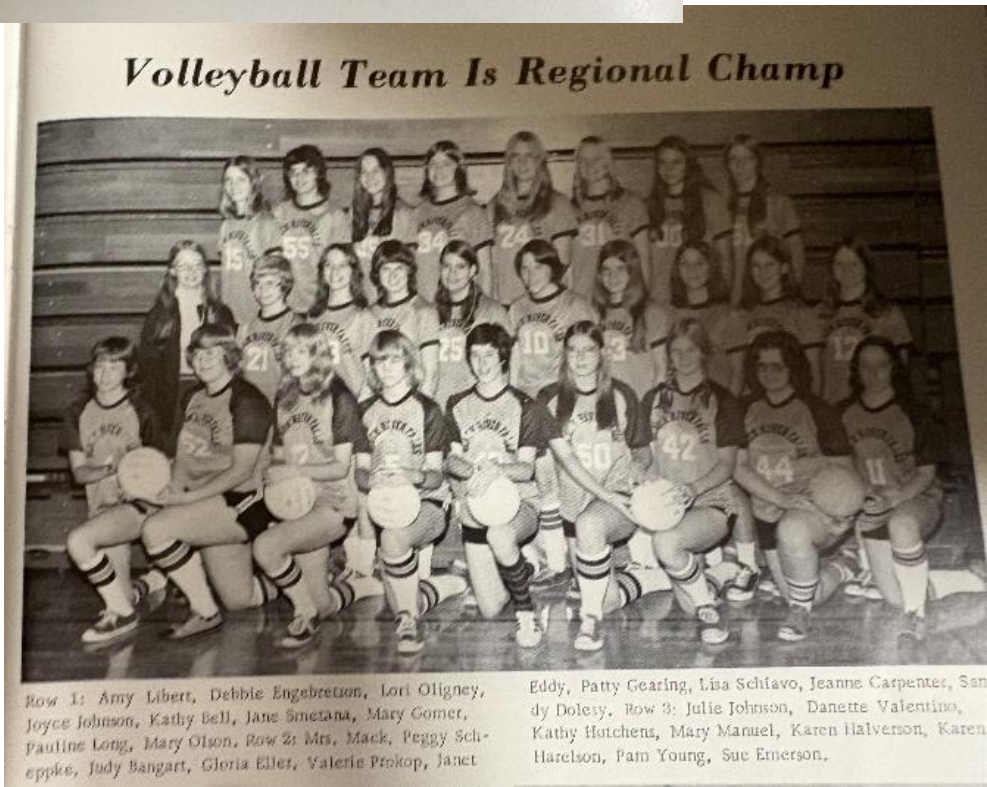
This year is the first year that Black River Falls girls have competed in the team sport and it also marks the first year the WIAA has conducted a state tournament for girls. Black River's team is coached by Grace Rosenberg.



The next addition to the sports program was Volleyball in the 1972-73 school year (first photo below). Once again, **Mary Mack** served as head coach. As with other sports, the young women started out with great enthusiasm and success. Within two years, the team won the Regional Championship.

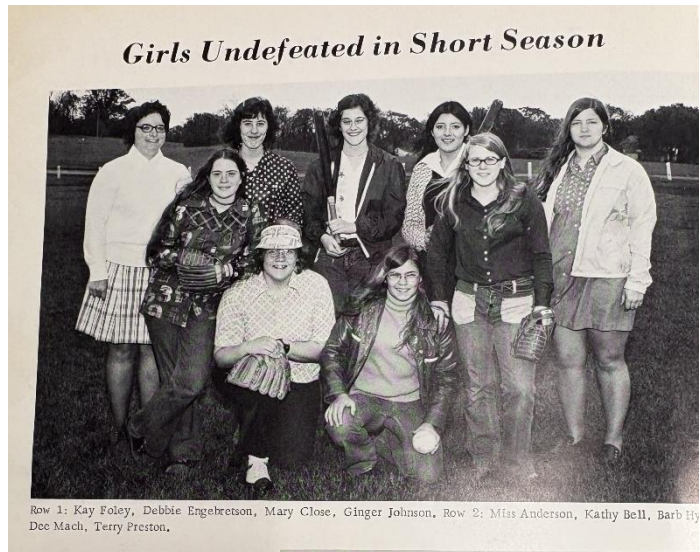


Row 1: Barb Stahl, Joyce Johnson, Lori Oligny, Kari Cooksey, Gloria Eller, Patty Peasley. Row 2: Mary [unclear], Marianne Kobinski, Dawn Will, Barb Metzger, Rosemarie Schmidtke. Row 3: Julie Paar, Kay Ernst, Jane [unclear], [unclear], Pauline Long, Mrs. Mack.



Row 1: Amy Libert, Debbie Engebretson, Lori Oligney, Joyce Johnson, Kathy Bell, Jans Smetana, Mary Comer, Pauline Long, Mary Olson. Row 2: Mrs. Mack, Peggy Schepke, Judy Bangart, Gloria Ellet, Valerie Prokop, Janet Eddy, Patty Gearing, Lisa Schiavo, Jeanne Carpenter, Sandy Doley. Row 3: Julie Johnson, Danette Valentina, Kathy Hutchens, Mary Manuel, Karen Halverson, Karen Harclson, Pam Young, Sue Emerson.

Softball arrived in the spring of 1973 with **Coach Carol Anderson** at the helm. As with the other “firsts,” enthusiasm ran high as noted by the increase in participation in 1974 (below). This pattern was repeated during this period – once a team was established, more young women wanted to participate.



In the fall of 1975, BRFHS organized its first Tennis Team under head coach **Rich Stevens**.



ROW 1: Kathy Olson, Geri Easley, Lynn Brown, Anita Murray, Denise Peterson, Mary Peterson, Peggy Nemitz ROW 2: Sue Brown, Jolene Valentino, Barb Olson, Mr. Stevens, Debbie Nyberg, Margaret Freudenberg, Kathy Peasley

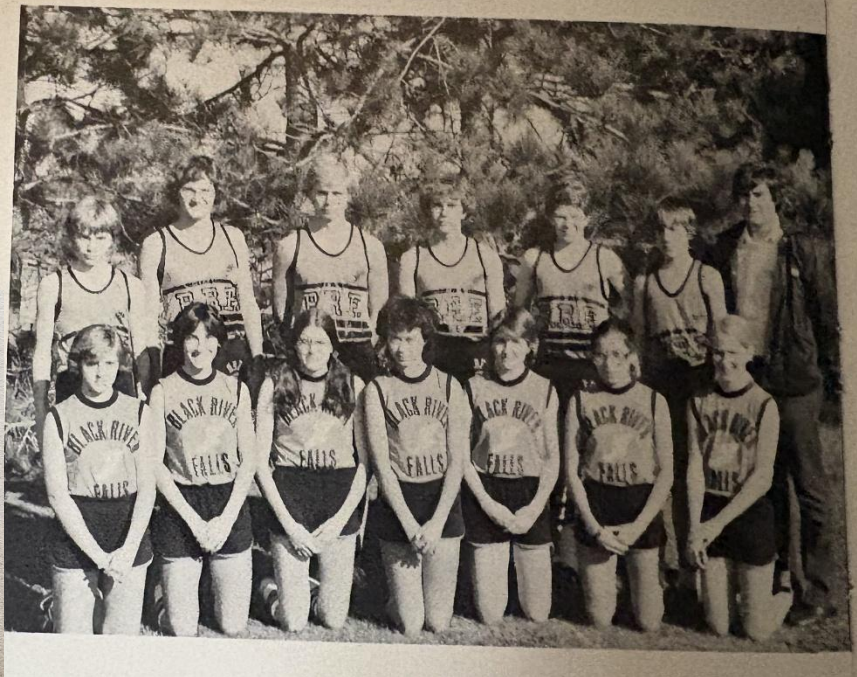
The final "first" team of the early Title IX era to be added at BRFHS was the Cross Country Team of 1978 under head coach Dave Meyer.

ABOVE LEFT: Sally Hart runs ahead of the pack. ABOVE RIGHT: E.J. Rosenberg strides to a victory. RIGHT: Front Row—Jennifer Peasley, Mary Holder, Jennifer Zschernitz, Linda Eddy, Sally Hart, Sherry Lewis, Amy Krohn. Back Row—Jim Hoffman, Tim Murray, Jan Ploen, E.J. Rosenberg, Del Atkinson, Skip Crutchfield, Coach Meyer.

First year coach Dave Meyer has done an "axe-celent" job thus far. The team is already showing tremendous improvement. A feeling of spirit and togetherness has gripped the team in their endeavor to mesh mind, body, and sinew into

squad. The girls' team consists of Mary Holder, Jennifer Zschernitz, Amy Krohn, Sally Hart, Sherry Lewis, Linda Eddy and Jennifer Peasley. With no seniors in this bunch, girls' cross-country should be thriving for many years to come.

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## **Feature: The Year the Stars Aligned: 1977-78**

The 1977–78 school year marked a breakthrough for women’s athletics at Black River Falls High School. After earlier individual state qualifiers, BRFHS had never sent two girls’ teams to State in the same year. Then Volleyball and Basketball pushed through regional play -- Volleyball making one of its only two State trips, Basketball earning its lone berth. Those young women are now in their mid-sixties, but their run remains a defining moment in the school’s Title IX era. According to Coach Mack, these girls were talented and fun to coach. After losing a sectional tie-breaker the year before, they came back and earned a trip to UW-Oshkosh and the State Tournament. It was an especially big year for three athletes who played on both State teams -- Lisa Lovlien, Laureen Savage, and Chris Yeskie. Though the team did not get a lot of attention at the time, they woke up the local fans to the fact that girls could compete too!



**The BRFHS 1977 Volleyball Team (Head Coach: Mary Mack)**

(Front Row L-R): Debbie Olson, Peggy Nemitz, Sharon Smith, Sandy Uting, Lori Stevens, Cheryle Sundeen. (Middle Row): Manager Ann Kniseley, Gayle Dimmick, Laurie Hyde, Lisa Lovlien, Chris Yeskie, Laureen Savage, Coach Mack. (Back Row): Katy Rudkin, Debbie Smith, Cathy Chandler, Ruth Lindberg, Jamie Goetzka, Manager Cindy Dunn

Before the Tigers made their historic run to Madison in 1978, the girls' basketball program had already undergone a quiet but pivotal transition. After coaching the 1975–76 squad, Carol Hornby stepped away when she became pregnant with her daughter, Amy. Activities Director Don Halverson posted the position -- and no one applied. As the 1976–77 school year approached, only the assistant job had drawn interest. That is when a twenty-eight-year-old elementary teacher named John Lindahl walked into Don's office and asked about helping out. He had no coaching experience, only a three-sport high school background and a willingness to learn. Don urged him to take the head job, and Lindahl accepted. He prepared the only way he could—by studying books and leaning on veteran coach Sam Young. His first team responded immediately, finishing 16–4 in the South-Central Conference and reaching the sectional semifinals before falling to Ladysmith.



That foundation carried straight into the 1977–78 season, when the Tigers authored a breakthrough of their own. Black River Falls stormed through the Coulee Conference and into the WIAA Class B State Tournament, joining Lomira, Omro, and Cuba City under the bright lights of the UW–Madison Fieldhouse. Their only loss of the season came in the semifinal against Omro -- a tight 43–37 battle that ended a remarkable ride. For players like Julie Behrens Sundby, the journey to Madison remains unmatched: a tall, imposing lineup with three six-foot starters, opponents left stunned, and a community that rallied behind every step -- from the electric sectional win in Ladysmith to fire-truck rides down Main Street. She remembers the clippings, the photos, the cheers, and the feeling of being part of something that would never be duplicated. The loss to Omro broke hearts across town, but the bond forged by that team—four senior starters closing out their careers on the state stage -- became one of the defining chapters in the early era of girls' athletics at BRFHS.

And that surge didn't happen in a vacuum. Ann Homstad (Class of '77), felt the ground shifting even before her sister Heather joined that 1978 state team. Both sisters played basketball, golf, and track, and their scrapbooks reflect the changes -- *Banner-Journal* clippings stacked thick from seasons when girls' sports were still fighting for oxygen. Ann remembers the early



days, when refs told the girls to “take it easy,” as if intensity needed permission. Then, overnight, the whole scene snapped into focus: big crowds, spectator buses, a kazoo band, and a gym that finally sounded like it believed in them. She points to a 1977 tournament article where Coach Lindahl said he felt sorry for teams with no supporters -- while Black River Falls rolled in with busloads. She also remembers the other side of the era: getting yelled at in Neillsville for not smiling, a reminder that some expectations placed on female athletes refuse to die. Through it all, her loyalty to the coaches who shaped those years -- Mary Mack, Carol Hornby, John Lindahl, and Jim Hornby, her “bonus” track coach -- never wavered.

As the memories of that season continue to stretch across the decades, Coach Lindahl remains clear-eyed about what it took, what he learned, and what that team meant to him. In his words, the story looks like this:

“I felt at the conclusion of the 1976–77 season that the next year could be special. The things that stood out in my mind about these young women was how close knit they were. Not only were they good basketball players, but they were also great friends and played for each other. They were very coachable and continued to try to improve themselves throughout the season. I feel these young women were ahead of their time in their abilities during the time they played. There were no basketball camps for girls at that time. The skills these girls displayed were developed by themselves and they were all multisport athletes who excelled in other sports. We had three young women who were at least 6'0 tall and coordinated and others who could handle the ball very well. The 1977–78 team was a special group of young women. They got to experience a season no other Black River Falls girls’ basketball team has gotten to experience. It was special for the entire community. Years later, parents would still tell me how special the season was for them.”

From Lindahl’s vantage point five decades later, the 1978 season did not single-handedly transform girls’ athletics in Black River Falls. He believed the real shift came as coaches with college playing experience arrived and began shaping the girls’ programs, and as younger athletes entered sports earlier and reached high school with stronger skills. Even in his final years on the bench, he still saw ninth graders trying basketball for the first time, but the landscape was changing. Soon after he stepped away, the district launched a middle-school program that finally gave girls a true starting point, and the rise of summer camps and off-season opportunities accelerated that growth. In Lindahl’s view, those developments -- more than any single season -- laid the groundwork for the future of girls’ sports in Black River Falls.

Coch: John Lindahl (UW-Eau Claire '73)  
Captain: Game Captain

## BLACK RIVER FALLS

School Nickname: Tigers  
School Colors: Black & Orange



(Left to right) Front Row — Annette Tenner, Laureen Savage, Lisa Lovlien, Chris Yeskle, Julie Behrens, Kathy Peasley. Back Row — Assistant Coach Ron Augustine, Ann Knisley, Heather Homstad, Sue Coffey, Susie Brown, Coach John Lindahl. Not Pictured — Sue Twin.

### ***Participant Voice: 1977-78 Up Close***

*Julie Behrens Sundby offered these reflections regarding the State Tournament experience and her participation in Track and Field.*

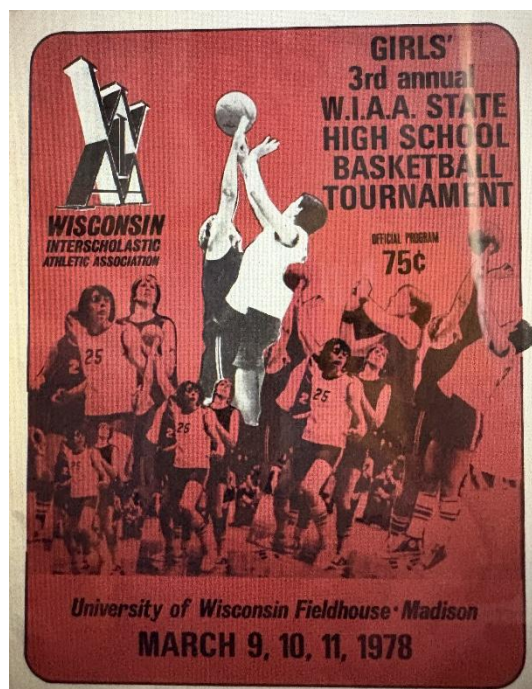
“Girls today are lucky to have so much access to year-round sports opportunities. They find it hard to believe we did not have formal WIAA sports available until the late 70’s. My sophomore year, 1975-1976, was the first year for the tournament. Up until then, those of us with athletic aspirations had GAA Club (Girls Athletic Association) or cheerleading. These activities were fun but not the same as competition sports like the boys had. Opportunities at cheerleading were very limited and you had to be able to do the splits to ever make the squad. (I was 6 foot tall – not happening!) The first time I got to play organized basketball was my first practice for the “B” team basketball in 1976. This team only lost one game that year and this set the path for our success at Regionals in 1977 and our trip to the state tournament in 1978.



Although I was on girls track teams that had success while I was at BRF, my greatest experience was our run to the state tournament. We had just moved to the Coulee Conference and entered the tournament undefeated. One thing that made our team stand out was that we

had three 6' starters on the 1978 team. Girls that tall were not common back in those days, much less three on one team. Most of our opponents were just stunned. Winning the Sectional championship at Ladysmith was so exciting and we had such wonderful support for the community before and after that game. I have piles of newspaper clippings with well wishes, photos, trips down Main Street on the fire trucks, and stories in the Banner Journal about our games. That actual trip to state was unbelievable, but there was nothing like winning the game that sends you to state. Unfortunately, we lost our first game at state against Omro and our hearts and the hearts of the entire town were broken. Four of our starters were graduating so our days of being the best basketball teammates ever ended with that game."

To be sure, Sundby remembers the 1978 season with enormous pride, but she also recalls the quieter inequities that shaped girls' sports in that era. Even as the team kept winning, she and her teammates often wondered, as she puts it, "where the news coverage had been all season up to State." Their success drew comparisons to the boys' program, yet the attention they finally received carried a tone that now feels unmistakably of its time. One example stands out for her: a well-meaning letter to the editor published after the sectional win. It was "sweet and



### They deserved that cry

Relax gentlemen, all is not lost. When the doctor arrives and announces you're the father of a brand new baby girl, we know there's a little twinge of disappointment. Oh sure, you're happy she's healthy, happy, pretty and has a nose just like yours, but deep down inside you were hoping for a fullback, right?

Well, luckily they aren't making many girls that resemble fullbacks these days, so would you mind settling for a potential star guard, forward or center who some day may play in a State Tournament? Of course you will.

I don't like to get all slobbering over a bunch of 16 and 17 year-olds, but I'm afraid I'm about to. I can't recall a group of kids that deserve recognition any more than the Black River Falls girls' basketball team does. They are bright, courteous, pleasant and some of the toughest competitors you'll ever want to find. They're also humble, respectful, and when they're really happy they tend to cry a lot.

Julie Behrens started it all when she fouled out with 49 seconds remaining in the game. Before long Sue Coffey was consoling her and when the game concluded, I couldn't find a dry eye on the team.

But they deserved that cry. They had been waiting 21 games for it and it was one of the most legitimate expressions of total happiness that I've ever seen.

There's a funny side of athletics that most of us fail to consider: It's a lot tougher being a winner than it is a loser. To be a winner, first off, you have to have some talent and then you have to groom that talent through hard work, sacrifice and dedication. And once you're there, at your peak, you have to sustain it by repeating the sacrifices and dedication rituals. From there, you have to try and improve some more.

It's not easy, but it's fun. And the ultimate accomplishment is well worth the time. Congratulations girls.

complimentary," she says, but it also revealed how many people still viewed girls' athletics as a kind of charming novelty — "a cute curiosity for those dads who really wanted boys." Even the praise came with a gentle mea culpa and a comment about the girls being "criers," a detail that seemed harmless then but reads differently now.

For Sundby, these moments don't overshadow the joy of that season; they help explain it. They show what it meant to compete as a young woman in the 1970s — pushing hard, winning big, and navigating a culture still learning how to take girls' sports seriously. What she remembers most is the pride that surrounded the team. "The town and school couldn't have been prouder," she says. "It was the most rewarding experience of my high school years." This thank you letter appeared in the *Banner Journal* at the close of the season and speaks volumes.



## *A lot to thank*

With the end of our season here, the girls' basketball team has a lot of people to thank for our success this year.

First, our coaches Mr. Lindahl and Mr. Augustine. They have given countless hours of their time to us and we hope we are a team they can be proud of; we are proud of them.

Secondly, we must thank our faithful statisticians Ginny Gribble, Diane Evenson and Bert Vase. They were always there making all those buttons and beautiful posters and in general just being there when we needed them.

Lastly, we must thank all the wonderful people in the town of Black River Falls. The support you've given us this season is really terrific. You don't know how much it meant to us to look up in the stands every game and see so much support.

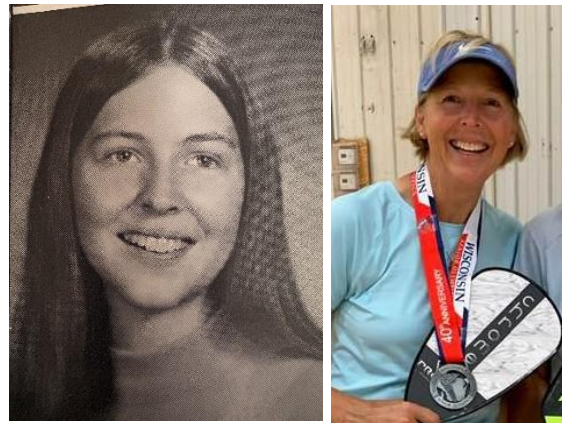
All of you made our success possible, and you can bet we are saying "We're From Black River, Couldn't Be Prouder!"

**The 1978 Girls' Basketball Team: Julie Behrens, Susie Brown, Sue Coffey, Heather Homstad, Ann Knisley, Lisa Lovlien, Kathy Peasley, Laureen Savage, Annette Tenner, Sue Twin, and Chris Yeskie.**

## Epilogue: “The Torch Has Been Passed”

Fifty years ago, something quiet but remarkable began at Black River Falls High School. It did not arrive with a parade or a proclamation. It arrived the way change often does, through a door left slightly ajar. Sometimes history taps you on the shoulder long before you know enough to turn around. The women whose stories follow -- now elders, now keepers of memory -- stood at the threshold of that moment. They stepped forward without knowing they were stepping into history. They simply wanted to play. Yet in doing so, they became the first to wear the uniform, the first to gather under the name “Tigers,” the first to test the shape of opportunity. Their voices form the living thread of this project.

One of the early voices, **Linda Krenz Nicastro** (Class of '73), contacted us and offered insight into those years that perfectly frame the interviews that follow. Like Kittie Young, Holly Smith, and Mary Rykken, Linda carried those early athletic experiences into her life's work. She coached high school athletes, taught in classrooms, and watched her daughters step into a world where opportunity was no longer fragile, no longer improvised, no

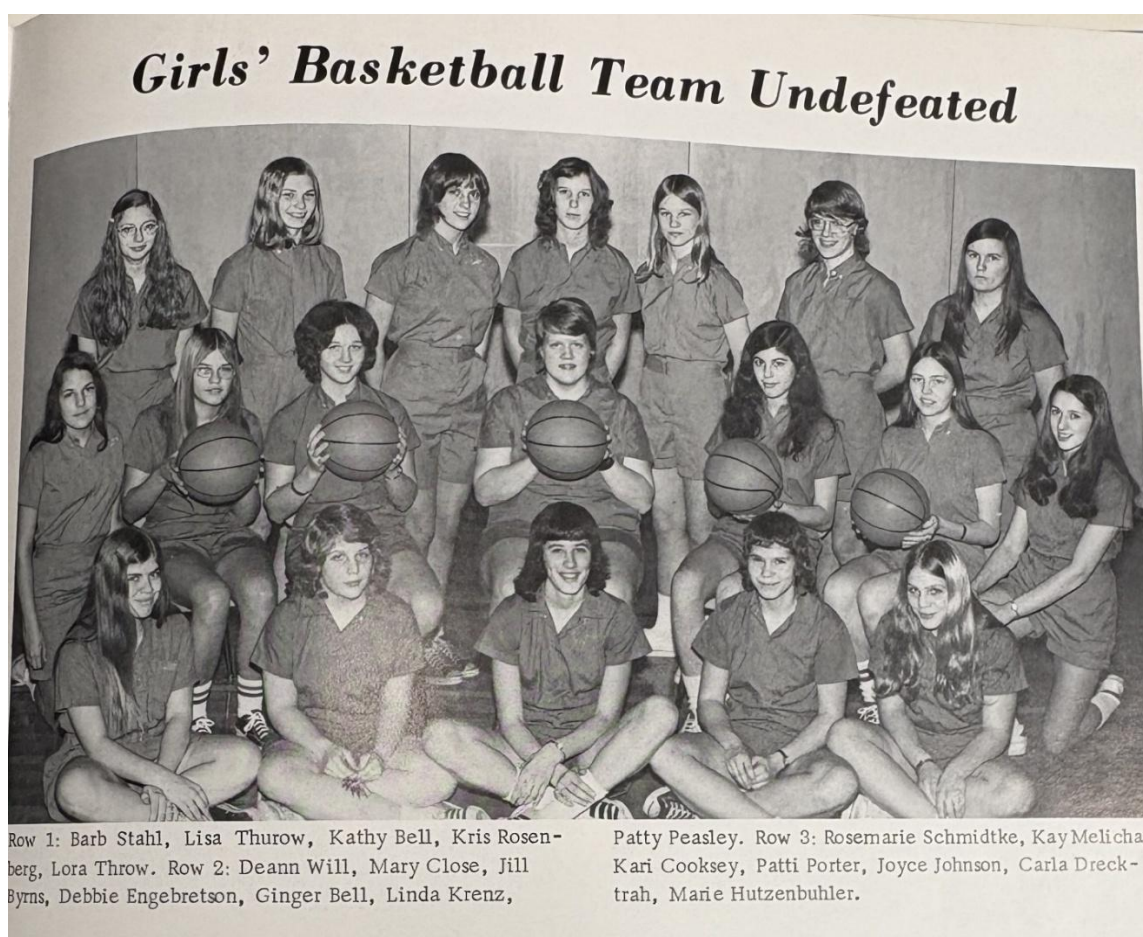


longer an afterthought. When Linda looks back --and I suspect she speaks for many of her contemporaries -- the memory that glows brightest is not a score or a trophy. It is the sight of the women who coached them, teachers who stepped into roles no one had prepared them for.

*“What still stands out to me today,” she said, “are the female high school teachers who became the first girls’ teams coaches—Mary Mack, Carol Anderson, and Grace Rosenberg. I’m not sure they knew much about the sport they were coaching, but they took the job on, figured it all out, and gave us the opportunity to play. They were our leaders, our first heroes of Title IX.”* She reminds us, too, that Title IX did not create female athletes. *“We were already athletes,”* she said. *“We grew up in neighborhoods where all the kids -- boys and girls -- played outside together and organized our own games.”* What changed was the world around them. *“Title IX required our community, our school, and the WIAA to offer the same opportunities that male athletes had. For the first time, funds, coaches, equipment, uniforms, and organized schedules were available to girls.”* With those resources came something deeper—a sense of belonging. *“We now represented our school—Go Tigers! We learned to practice, to play as a team, to*

*respect our coaches. We gained leadership, dedication, work ethic, fitness, and competitive confidence. Most of all, we became comrades and life-long best friends. We were now recognized as a team."*

And they were more than recognized -- they excelled. During Linda's years (1971–73), the girls' basketball team learned the game and grew into fierce competitors. Track and field athletes pushed their way to regional, sectional, and state meets. And in the fall of 1972, Linda stood on the tee box as a member of the first BRF girls' golf team, qualifying for the inaugural WIAA State Girls Golf Tournament. *"I can proudly say I was there at the beginning of Title IX,"* she reflected, *"and thrilled to see the explosion of women's sports."* Her words carry the weight of someone who witnessed the ground shift beneath her feet -- and then spent a lifetime helping others find their footing. *"The torch has been passed,"* she said, *"and the light is shining bright."*



## Part 3: Legacy Forward: Coaches and Emerging Coaches

The emergence of girls' athletics at BRFHS unfolded within a larger national shift. Title IX's "quiet but revolutionary promise" reset expectations for young women who had grown up with the limited structures of the GAA and the "leftover gym time" of the pre–Title IX era. Once formal teams appeared, "more young women wanted to participate," and the pattern repeated nationwide as schools moved from improvised opportunities to sustained interscholastic programs. BRFHS followed that same arc: early teams formed, participation surged, and within a few years girls' athletics moved from novelty to norm. The change was structural, but also deeply personal — a generation discovering that competitive sport was not an exception for girls but an expected part of their education.

The five interviews that follow put this transformation into personal focus. **Mary Mack** and **Carol Anderson** stepped forward to coach the first BRFHS teams, improvising and advocating in ways familiar to early pioneers across the state. The other three interviews — with **Kitti Young**, **Holly Smith**, and **Mary Rykken** — trace how those first opportunities shaped the young women who came of age with Title IX. Though none attended BRFHS, they grew up in the first decade of expanded opportunity, and those early experiences launched them into **long coaching careers**. Each later spent part of her professional life in Black River Falls, extending the work begun by Mack, Anderson, and other coaches of that early period. Together, their stories show how the same forces that reshaped BRFHS were reshaping young women across the upper Midwest, producing a cohort who not only benefited from new opportunities but went on to sustain and expand them. Title IX's impact radiated outward — from federal statute to local gym, from early participation to professional vocation — and continues to move through the educators and coaches who lived its promise.

## Biography: Mary Stearns Mack

Mary Mack was born on September 14, 1948, in Faribault, Minnesota, the middle child between two brothers and, as she liked to say, “the favorite daughter.” Her father worked more than forty years at the Faribault Woolen Mill, and her mother spent over three decades as a switchboard operator at the Faribault State School and Hospital. Mary grew up in a neighborhood where childhood unfolded outdoors—pickup games organized in seconds, forts rising in the woods, and long afternoons spent roller skating, ice skating, or biking across town.

She attended Winona State College and graduated in 1970 with a double major in physical education and health. Her father often joked that she had spent four years learning how to teach children to jump rope and play hopscotch, a line Mary carried with humor and pride into her teaching career.

That fall, she accepted a position at Black River Falls High School. Her fiancé joined the district as an eighth-grade math teacher, and the two began their careers -- and their marriage -- in the same community. Their wedding followed in December 1970.

Mary arrived in Black River Falls at a pivotal moment. Girls’ athletics stood on the edge of transformation, and she stepped directly into that shift. With Title IX only two years away, she became one of the early educators who pushed forward opportunities for young women simply by showing up, saying yes, and insisting that girls deserved the chance to compete. She taught at the high school for fourteen years before moving to the middle school, where she spent the next two decades. Throughout those years she coached girl’s track, basketball, and volleyball at the high school and continued coaching volleyball at the middle school until her retirement.



Mary’s work helped build the foundation of girls’ athletics in Black River Falls. She guided teams, encouraged reluctant athletes, and created spaces where young women could test themselves, grow, and take pride in their abilities. Her timing placed her at the front edge of a national movement, but it was her dedication—steady, practical, and deeply rooted in care for her students—that turned opportunity into reality.

Teaching and coaching in Black River Falls brought her profound joy. She valued the small-town connections, the familiarity with students’ families, and the strong community support for teachers and girls’ sports. That support shaped her career, and her presence, in turn, shaped the lives of countless students who discovered their strength because she believed they should have the chance to try.

## **Mary Mack: Coach**

Paul Rykken: So, we're here today with an interview with Mary Mack, and this is our Title nine project. This is the 2025-26 Falls History Project. This is our 25th anniversary project, so we're excited about that. So, we're going to have a conversation for the next few minutes. And I'd like to start. Would you please provide your name and date of birth, and where you were born?

Mary Mack: Mary Mack, I was born September 14, 1948. And I'm from Faribault, Minnesota, and that's where I grew up, and that's still considered my hometown.

Paul Rykken: So, you were born in 48, you started school in the 1950s. While you were growing up, what was the kind of climate at that time or landscape for women's sports that you can remember? What would be an early memory of anything related to women participating in athletics?

Mary Mack: When I went through junior high, there were no sports for women. At the high school, I had GAA, Girls Athletic Association or Girls Recreation Association, and we had playdates where we would get together with our conference girls and have fun with basketball, volleyball, swimming and so forth.

PR: Did you, yourself, I'm going to use a term right now that might not be politically correct today, but were you a tomboy? In other words, were you someone that was trying to play sports and you would have liked to have that opportunity and you didn't, have it?

MM: Yes, I think I was considered a tomboy. I grew up with two brothers. Our neighborhood was basically all boys. We played softball. We did everything together outside.

PR: Okay. I just think that's an important component of this because that's part of the history of it. So you go from that experience, and let's say at Faribault High School, were there any women's sports?

MM: No. There were none.

PR: GAA would have been the closest thing you had. Before you got out of that. And this is based on the interview I did two days ago. Was there a woman at all in your background that may have influenced you in terms of wanting to be a P. E. teacher?

MM: My junior high teacher was young, probably just out of college, and I thought she was fabulous, you know. And then in high school, I was very active in GAA, and I don't think I missed one meeting. We had one a week and it was two miles away and I went every time.

PR: Where did you live? On a farm?

MM: No, no.

PR: So, just two miles away from the city?

MM: Yeah.

PR: You ultimately end up teaching in Black River Falls. Can you give us just a quick nutshell of your path to getting there?

MM: I graduated from Winona State University with physical education and health majors, and they had an opening here in Black River Falls along with a math opening. My husband and I were not married yet, but we wanted to go to the same town for teaching. And Melvin Schmallenberg, the superintendent here, hired both of us. So, it was perfect. And we were married in the first year of our first teaching year in December.



*Melvin Schmallenberg and Mary Mack*

PR: It's interesting to me because that practice of hiring a man and woman to teach was not common at that time. Districts were sometimes afraid to do that. But I'm interested that Black River was doing that early.

MM: Mr. Schmallenberg was really good about that, though, because he knew that they would stay there.

PR: Exactly. So, your first year here would have been what year.

MM: The fall of '70.

PR: So, what was the situation with women's sports in 1970 in Black River Falls?



MM: When I got here, there was GAA, and the girls told me that some of their members went on to state track the spring before. So, this would have been the spring of 1970, and these girls wanted to continue and have a track team again in the spring. And I said "Sure, we'll do that." From the notes that I have from way back. The girls that went to state that year were Karen Lund in the high jump, Loretta Nordahl in the mile, and the 880-yard relay team of Nancy Millis, Mim Rykken, Luan Marg and Loretta Norvell.

**Received from Mim Rykken: 5.8.2026:**

As I look back at the late 60s and early 70s, I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in our school's girls' athletic programs during their fledging stages. I graduated high school in 1972, a few months before the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. My school sports experiences began with weekly GAA (Girls' Athletic Association) practices at school and expanded to occasional conference basketball scrimmages and regional and state track events. I was very fortunate to have enthusiastic and supportive Phy. Ed teachers in Junior and Senior High School--Ann Pederson, Dorothy Berg and Mary Mack--who taught all of us the fundamentals of various sports, coached our practices and sports events, and supported our physical Training.

Participating in sports was fun, challenging and invigorating, from both a physical and psychological standpoint. Team sports helped build my confidence in ways different from my extracurricular musical and academic pursuits and helped me build teamwork in ways I had not previously experienced. Under Title IX, young women today benefit from participating in much more comprehensive athletic programs; in our school days we were fortunate to participate in the early developmental stages of girls' athletics programs that set the stage for our participation in college and community-based teams.

PR: Well, I love that you brought that up because my sister was one of three older sisters, and Miriam, or Mim, got into some of this at the very start. We'll talk to her about this, too, but I remember her doing that.

Interestingly, though, when you think about the landscape of sports at the time, I don't remember that anybody went and watched her. She just went and ran the state track meet, and today it would be like everyone would want to go. Like my parents didn't even go to see her.

MM: But that's the way it was. I understand that because that's the way I saw it also. But these girls, I think they probably had one meet during the regular season, or they just got together. They competed against a couple other schools and that qualified them for the state meet.

PR: Isn't that great? Oh, that's so fun. So, was track really the initial sport? So, I'm assuming that you inherited GAA. Because I know I've seen pictures in the annuals from there. So now you've come in 1970, then '71, and '72 is when Title IX comes in. And I don't expect you or others to necessarily know all the particulars of that law. I had to go back and look at it myself. And one thing I learned was that the initial law set forth the idea that there should be equity between men and women in terms of facilities and opportunities in sports. But then they wrote several rules for the law that really made it more solid by about 1975. So, this early period was each district's feeling out and how they would want to do it. So, with that in mind, Mary, do you remember the initial steps of either track and/or basketball for getting it in? Like how did you get games and other teams, and how did you put this together from scratch?

MM: Basketball was the next one, and that was the winter of '71, my first year. And the girls came to me and said, "Let's have a basketball team." And I don't know if I contacted Osseo-Fairchild High School or if Betty Ward, who was the coach up there and the P.E. teacher, contacted me. "Let's let these girls have a game." And I'm sure Betty and I officiated, and we were in the gym, and nobody was there to watch. And I had five girls that I don't know if I handpicked or if they said, "Hey, we got to get her and her." And because these girls, Peggy Houlton was a senior -- Carolyn Woodruff, Linda Krenz, and Ginger Bell.

PR: Okay. So, I must ask you about Peggy Houlton, because I have this double history of being here in Black River in the sixties growing up, and then leaving, and coming back 20 years later as a teacher. But Peggy, it stands out in my mind as someone from that period that people just looked at her and thought, this is a great athlete. I remember that about her. I now have this kid's memory of her. So, she must have been distinguishing herself somehow within the community as an athlete, I wonder if she was a golfer or... How would you describe her?

MM: A typical athlete, just gung-ho about everything. She grew up with brothers. I think she had more than one brother when they were older, and so she was one tough girl. And it was fun to

#### 5.2.2026: LuAnn Marg Aschenbrenner (member of the first track team)

I do remember the girls first track team. I know I was very proud to be part of it-it was the first chance that young female adults could participate in a conference sport event. I always remember we had to wear our gym uniforms to compete!! (the uniforms were blue, one piece jumper and not attractive) I didn't think much of it at the time-but when our relay team went to state -I realized that the bigger schools from the southern part of the state- all had track uniforms with their school name on the back. I wasn't thinking about the significance of being on the first women's track team at the time-I was just excited to compete in a competitive sport.

I give a lot of credit to Dorothy Berg and Mary Mack for going the extra mile and standing up for female athletes- to give them an equal opportunity to participate in organized team sports. I'm sure there were lots of doubts and a very low budget to deal with in first years.



watch her play basketball. I don't remember her excelling in any other sport. She was not a golfer.

PR: Would she have been one of those that came and sought that experience?

MM: I can see her doing that. And Linda Krenz was a sophomore then. And Linda would probably say, too, "Let's play basketball."

PR: And she had older brothers?

MM: Yes, they had two other older brothers.

PR: And think that might be a common denominator that we're going to find. A lot of the girls were in families where there were athletics.

MM: And Ginger Bell was another one. She was a sophomore, then. The high school was made up of sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

PR: And her dad was a coach, right – Gene Bell.

MM: Yes. And Linda's father was the principal, and he had coaching experience, and athletic experience at a college level.



PR: So, I'm interested in this and that's a nice Segway. Were you getting support to do this?



*Principal Norman Krenz*

MM: Yes, Norm Krenz's support. Don Halverson, who was kind of stepping into the athletic director position. And of course, Sam Young was a P.E. teacher when I got here. Plus, he was the athletic director. They were all very supportive. And as a couple of years went by, I wanted uniforms for the girls. We needed equipment. We needed officials as the sports grew. And I had to go in front of the school board and request some of this. And Melvin Schmallenberg was very supportive. He was on the school board, and Delores Iliff was on that school board. She was the only woman on the school board. And of course, we had Mr. Thurow, who had a few daughters, and they were all, "Yes! Yes! No problem." And I thought I would have to go through a spiel of trying to, you know, explain to him what the girls wanted and what we needed.



*Don Halverson*



*Delores Iliff  
School Board Member*

PR: And having said that, was there any resistance from anybody? Did anybody question what you were doing, or did you feel any of that?

MM: No. After a few years, we felt we wanted gym time for basketball right after school, too. And that's where we had to take turns.

PR: And Sam was okay with that?

MM: Sam knew he had to be okay with that, but it worked out. It worked out just fine.

PR: That's really a great story in and of itself; you are going in front of the board to do that. I'm sure that you couldn't have been very old at that point.

MM: No, I was probably in my mid-twenties.

PR: Were you getting paid for anything for this?

MM: Not the first couple of years... And that's one thing I had to present in front of the board that I wanted to get paid. But I understood that I only have two games. We have two games scheduled, where the boys have ten. And I said, you know, I don't put in all the practices that the boys do. So, I just wanted payment accordingly.

PR: One of the things I found that we will include in the project was a piece in the Oriole, which was the school newspaper, and it was a short article about how in order for the girls to play, you're quoted in there that they had to pass a test. You gave them a little exam... that's not coming back to you? Like on the rules and stuff for basketball. There's a short article in there. I'll show it to you.

MM: Yes. I would like to see that.

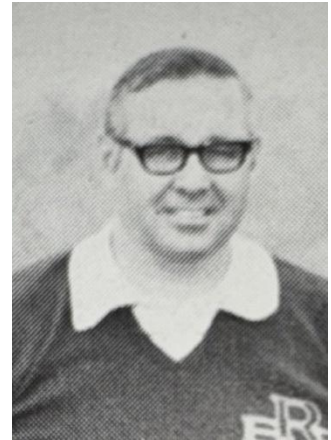
PR: My takeaway when I read it was that this was a serious thing. Like you really wanted them to know what they were doing. A good example of memory. So, when you did practice, you were a person that had not had this opportunity growing up, so there you are trying to take a group of girls and teach them how to defend and run an offense, and so forth. Were you getting help with that, or did you make it on your own?

MM: I did it pretty much on my own. Basketball was tough, though, because the girls were transitioning between a six-player team and a five-player team.

PR: Do you want to explain that?

MM: Well, six players is what I learned in high school and through, I would say, most of college.

PR: I think that came out of Iowa. MM: Yes. And with three girls on each side of the court, you couldn't cross over the center line. You could have one girl be the rover. So, there were forwards on one side that the guards would throw the ball to, and the forwards could shoot. And then when there was a rebound, and of course, you went down to the opponent's basket. Then whenever you got possession of the ball, you had to feed it to your forwards on the other side. Girls couldn't run the full court; they didn't have the energy. They didn't have the stamina so they might have passed out on the court.



*Sam Young*

PR: Yeah, that's the reason I wanted to raise the issue with you about resistance, because I think there were people who still held that point of view at that time that this was too intense for the girls. Unfortunately. You might have already alluded to this, but is there a point at which or some moment that you can remember where you felt like you had made sort of a breakthrough, like this was really going to happen, and this was going to get expanding?

MM: I would say about the mid-seventies. We had track, basketball, and every year our contests were multiplying. Then we got some tennis courts. The tennis courts were built in 75 or so, and volleyball and golf were big ones. The fall of 72. That was a nucleus of girls. And Grace Rosenberg was the coach. And they did an awesome job. They were very good.

PR: And Linda was right in the middle of that.

MM: She was a medalist for almost every contest that they had, every match.

PR: And I'm glad you brought that up, because I think the skyline is part of this story. Because there were girls that were exposed to golf early and many of them lived near there. And then Grace was living near there. So, it's a very small-town story, this golf course, which was a golden centerpiece for the community. And at that time, golf was on its heyday. I mean there's a lot of people golfing today, but I don't know if it rivals that period. So that's a very fun part of the memory. So, let's talk about the girls for a minute. These young women who are now in their sixties and seventies, that's a little hard to imagine, but that's just the passage of time. How are they reacting to this? Like, how did they feel when you would get to go play a game in Osseo? Do you remember any of their reactions?

MM: Oh, they were excited to do this. They were happy. They didn't care if they won or lost. Well, yeah, they did. But it was just, "Hey, we got to do this. We get to do that. Let's start a new sport. Let's play volleyball."

PR: Do you know when volleyball came in? That would be the next one, I think. Well, no, I think cross country would be the next one. Cross Country came in 1978.

#### Recollections from Carla Drektrah Nielson (received 2.9.26)

Q 1 - My moment or experience from women's sport in the early 70's that resonates still would be the quality of the coaches. I still play golf and Coach Rosenberg is always whispering in my ear to "never leave a putt short" and "follow through" on my swing. My soft ball playing days are over, but Coach A instilled the basics in all of us. When I go to kids little league games I always know what to yell. Like "plays at first, or second, or third" which seems basic but not every one knows it. The other thing would be the friendships that happen when playing sports. Fifty years later I'm still spending time with team mates. We have been each others weddings and attended our respective kids weddings, too. Aside from getting together much more often now that all of us are retired.

Q 2 - This is the question I've spent the most time pondering an answer. I never knew a time that we didn't have girls sports. Even though I was in on the ground floor for sports it was business as usual in my world. My parents seemed to think that girls sports were different than the opportunities for the boys. My brother was a gifted athlete and my folks never missed a football game or track meet. Keep in mind, I'm 10 years younger than my brother. When I had sporting events mom and dad wished me well and said I could tell them about it when I came home. Between the two of them they came to one basketball game and one track meet, and I lettered in four sports. Being an aspiring athlete in the early 70's wasn't taken as seriously in my home as boys sports. In my memory, the respect at school for female athletes was on par with the guys. We are still talking about Deb Engebretson going to state in track. Her record in the shot put still holds in feet and inches as a school record.

Thanks for including my voice.



MM: Volleyball, I've got to think about that one. Mid-seventies too. I should have this down here.

PR: That's okay. We can pull up some of those details later, but it's safe to say that by the time you get to eight years after you start this process, within eight years it's expanded quite a bit. By the time we get to 1980, it's a full-on program. So that's about 45 years ago. So, we've had about 45 years of sports. But that early period is critical for understanding. I want to ask one more question to follow up on that. Did any of the girls that were first involved go into teaching or coaching that you're aware of?

MM: We did have Kari Cooksey. And she did not graduate from here because they moved away from her senior year; I believe it was. She was very active here and ended up coaching tennis.

PR: I think she did until very recently. Okay. So that'd be one. I'm sure there's others that you wouldn't be aware of. But I'm just wondering if any of them are grabbed on and like, I want to do this.

MM: I think Linda Krenz continued with golf even later in life. And she had a couple daughters and I'm sure that they were active in sports, too.

PR: We talked about her earlier, but Peggy Houltan, do you ever know what happened? Because she also had, like Pat Houltan, her brothers, I think one of her brothers even played some professional football. So that's quite a story, too. Were there allies for you along the way? Is there someone that stands out, like this was a person that really championed this for me; they really helped make it go at that time that it might not have been the same if they hadn't been around or influencing it.

MM: No, I think we had a camaraderie with other coaches in the area. And I still remember names out there that we would just call, "Hey, let's have a game or whatever." And Sam Young. You know, I looked up to him, because he was so successful as a coach and Don Halverson.

PR: Did any school in the area stand out like they jumped out early, and they were highly successful?

MM: Tomah was always a big rival and Osseo-Fairchild, Mondovi, Prairie du Chien in track. Oh my gosh, yes, some of those.



#### Recollections from Kari Cooksey Nelson (received 2.5.26)

##### 1. Reflecting on early experiences:

While I don't have one specific "big" moment, I feel incredibly fortunate to have been part of the initial wave of Title IX. Seeing how far women's athletics has come—from youth leagues and AAU to televised collegiate and professional games—is remarkable. I cherish the teamwork, friendships, and life skills I gained. A particularly meaningful detail was wearing jersey #32, the same number my father wore in high school. During my first year in BRF, we actually had to play in our gym suits before getting real jerseys in my junior and senior years. I also want to highlight Mary Mack, who coached multiple sports and the Girls Athletic Association (GAA); she truly made sports a wonderful high school experience.

##### 2. What I wish people understood:

The early 1970s was a time of significant cultural change with the Equal Rights Amendment and Title IX. I wish people understood that as female athletes, we balanced the same responsibilities as the boys—school, family, and work—while simply wanting the same opportunities for fun and competition that our fathers and brothers had. We weren't trying to take anything away from the boys' programs, though we did occasionally have to compete for gym time.

Growing up in a small town, Friday night games were the heart of the community. I wanted to be on the field just like the boys. I ended up trying every sport offered except golf. This passion led me to a career in Physical Education, Health, and Guidance. Over the last 32 years, I've coached 28 seasons of girls' tennis and 16 seasons of boys' tennis, and I even had the privilege of coaching my own children. It all started in Black River Falls, and I remain an active athlete and spectator today.

PR: So again, it was all different, it was a patchwork of schools jumping in. And I'm not sure, we can look this up, but the first state tournaments started happening for cross-country, I know they go back to when they started in 78, they had the first women's state tournament and that type of thing. And I know what you said about state track, so Wisconsin must have been doing some women's sports before 1970, at least on a small scale.

MM: Maybe a small scale, maybe some of the bigger cities with bigger high schools near Madison or Milwaukee.

PR: Yep. So, is there anything we left out from that early period that you wanted to make sure you included? I have a couple more long-term questions here.

MM: I found my notes on volleyball. The fall of 73 was the first time we had volleyball here in Black River. We had an A and B team. Their records were not really good. They had like five matches, and it just grew from then on.

PR: And did you coach that too?

MM: Yes, I coached basketball and track. We continued with GAA because there were a lot of girls that wanted to have fun in the gym and that's what it was. And they got to know some of the sports and then of course they thought, "Huh, I'm going to go out next year for this. I like this." And I had Pep club and the cheerleaders. I had no children and then I kind of weeded myself out of some of these. I just said, "I can't do all of this."

PR: That's a lot. You were doing so much.

MM: Yeah, but they didn't have that many games.

PR: I understand. But you were still organizing a lot of stuff. That day was full for you. On the volleyball note, when it all starts, you're still doing the thing where you're calling school and saying, "Let's get together and play." Did anybody come and watch it? Ever? Like the media and spectators?

MM: Maybe a couple of high school kids. Maybe a few parents. I don't think the janitors at DePaul pulled any bleachers out.

PR: It's just interesting to me how that streamed, I mean, it's completely different. It had to have been viewed as recreational sort of. And you also advised the cheerleaders. That's always been an interesting dichotomy to me as well, because cheerleading is the girl standing on the sideline cheering for the boys. They're not participating. And not that great cheerleading isn't an athletic event when you go to a big school or something like a college, that's the whole thing they're doing. But the mindset of that is that women watch and boys participate. So that's what's shifting. So, these are some long-term questions and please feel free to ask anything you want to ask that I might be missing. But looking back, how do you think Title IX changed the community that we live in?

MM: I think they finally noticed that girls have sports and they can compete like boys and they're having fun with it. It was just great to give the girls something to feel good about.

PR: Absolutely. What was the hardest part of this whole experience for you from that period? What was the greatest challenge that you faced?

MM: They were changing some of the rules and adding more rules to different sports. I went to rules interpretation meetings. We had to be on top of that, of course. Not having the experience in college to be coaching this. I think I had one coaching class, and all of a sudden, I was thrown into track because the girls already had this shortened or small little nucleus of girls that were in track the year before I came. Along with knowing about the exchange zones and shot, discus, long jump, all of those things. Ron Augustine was coaching the boys at the time, and he was very patient with me. The girls had success with it. And that was an important thing. One time during my prep, I went out there and I told Ron, "I'm going to mark the exchange zones for tonight's meet." And I think it was Mr. McCullough from the shop class who made us a tray that we could put the colored chalk in and hit the spots between the lines for our exchange zone. And Ron had seventh or eighth hour free, and he went out there, and he said, "Oh, Mary, they're all wrong." So that made me feel really good. And that was one of my experiences in track. "So just take your foot and move those cinders around or dirt around a little bit and change it a few inches." So it was that way.

PR: At that time and when I was going through school and my age, we didn't have any coed classes like there were girls Phy Ed and boys Phy Ed. You weren't bringing them together. You obviously taught into an era where that changed. Do you remember when that changed? Because that's significant.

MM: It was in the early eighties that we started having mixed classes. I had mixed feelings about that. The girls had mixed feelings about that. You know, we always had the divider in the gym at the high school, the solid divider, and girls on one side, boys on the other. And it was a challenge because there were girls that were a little timid in Phy Ed. Anyway, that would step back and just let the boys do it, you know? So, it was hard for everybody to get involved.

PR: It's just an interesting dynamic because that integration, it seems to me that would have been coming when all this sports stuff was changing and that would have changed some of the way the kids maybe thought about things, because they would participate together in certain things, which now we have track is that way and cross country's that way, but initially not.

MM: That's correct. The state track for boys was in Madison; state track for girls in Merrell and then finally the girls were moved to Monona Grove which was near the boys meet. But we were separated for several years.

PR: Let's talk about the equity issue for a minute. Did you feel there were equal facilities for boys and girls here?

MM: For basketball, that was the hardest one because we opened up the Gebhardt gym. And sometimes the girls had to be bused over there right after school for practice. And then the next week, the boys would be bused over there. So, we had to improvise.

PR: One thing that was always interesting to me here, when I came back, I wasn't thinking about it as a kid, but the locker rooms themselves were unequal. The boys had the team room, and the girls just had one locker room, and the boys had a bigger space.

MM: The boys had the weight room.

PR: Okay, and you didn't have access to that?

MM: Oh, we did. I think I even took Phy Ed classes there. But they could kind of close off the boy's locker room with the door or something. But there were always boys coming down to use the weight room during their study hall in the seventies. But we'd have to holler, "Girls coming in," and I'd say, "Girls just go right into the weight room." And so, we could lift weights. After school, it was more of a problem because a lot of kids were using it. A lot of boys were using the weight room at that time.

PR: And the girls would have been pushed aside.

**Katie Bell Kline, Class of 1975, Age 68**

MM: Right. We couldn't really use it.

1. When you think back to your experience as a young woman in sports during the early 1970s, what is one moment or experience — big or small — that still stands out to you today?

PR: My point on that is that at the beginning this was like, "Oh, let's let the girls do some of this because it'll be fun for them." And as it evolves, it becomes a much bigger issue. And you must start thinking about equity. I asked you about your most challenging thing. So, what is your most gratifying memory of this?

Two things:

1. We as young girls finally had a chance to compete as athletes. And we had the full support of our school administrators to form girls (we were just girls back then!) sports teams. And looking back, I believe we were one of the earliest in the conference, to have basketball, softball, golf and volleyball programs. (Track had already been established and also provided athletic competition.)

2. Looking back now, what do you wish people understood about what it was like to be a female athlete or aspiring athlete in those early years before and after Title IX?

After Title IX, it was difficult to get women's programs in place and/or officially recognized as sanctioned programs at many schools. Many folks wanted to prevent it because money would be taken from men's sports to support these programs. And today, while extremely successful, very few women's sports programs are self-sustaining.

MM: Oh, just working with the girls and giving them the experience of going beyond the Phy Ed class or GAA, and watching them develop their skills and do so well. It was just fun. It was a good era.

PR: For sure. And do you still have contact with any of these girls?

MM: Not really. I see Kathy Bell on Facebook, Linda Krenz, I know she lives in Mondovi, and I think I saw her at her mom's funeral, y'know, and stuff like that.



PR: But that's one of the weird things about teaching. My first students, who I started teaching in 1979, are now 64. And I had this woman as a teacher. I don't know if I had you specifically. We moved when I was a sophomore in high school. But the Macks, in my memory, you were this young, vibrant couple. I mean, as a kid, it was fun to have such young teachers, you know what I mean? I want to go back to one other thing. My wife, when I interviewed her, became very emotional when she remembered the woman that had inspired her. We had to stop the interview at that point. So, I think you have had that effect on a lot of girls. I just can't imagine you didn't. People would remember her very well for this episode that we're talking about. So, do you have anything that you want to ask, or do you have anything you want to add?

MM: I want to add that when I first got here, the Rotarians hosted the athletic banquet for the boys. It was a big deal. I mean, these boys dressed up and all the Rotarians were there all dressed up and everything. And I went to introduce the cheerleaders. Of course, all the boys team members were introduced and brought up in front for the banquet. And then the girls were introduced. The cheerleaders. And that happened for

several years. And I look back on my records, and the Rotarians then invited the girls to come to the banquet in 1973. And there were 34 girls that participated in sports that year. And in 1974, there were 44 girls that went to the Rotary Athletic banquet. So, the men in that Rotary banquet, the Rotarians, they were very good about, "Hey, let's get the girls here, too." And I think a lot of them probably had daughters that they wanted to include. I'm trying to think... letter club, that was a boy's organization. Then, in '75 and '76, that's the year that the girls could join as a letter club member. So that was a big deal.

PR: Do they even still have a letter club? Are you aware of that? I don't know if they do. But that was a big deal. Everybody would get the jackets.

MM: Yes. Everything just swoosh, you know. And we had all of this, I think of the first girl's tennis team just after the courts were finished. And Rich Stevens, a teacher here, coached the boys in the and then in the fall, the girls wanted a team, and he had a very strong tennis team. That first fall in '75, I think it was in the fall of '75. I was not really happy because some of the best athletes went out for tennis instead of volleyball. So, this team and there's some good athletes in there that he took away from volleyball. You know, there's Susie Brown, and I think there's Cathy Peasley in there and even Barb Olsen and they were good. I don't know if you put pictures in. This is our state volleyball. That's all we have. I don't think it was ever in the paper. You know, the only thing. Jim Frederickson was the sports editor. Yeah, and he was actually pretty good for girls. And he put this in a little blurb with Don Halverson handing me the plaque, and Jim was pretty good about it, but they didn't get the sports. And here's the full team. And of course, when you go to state, you're limited to 12 members or whatever. So, you know they were important to the ones that didn't go to state.

PR: Let's see. Well, we didn't even get into this topic and I should have. Did you initially have involvement by Native girls?

MM: Oh yes. In fact, one of our first basketball games we got together, I think it's in something you know, we played against the Indian girls. They had a team out of the mission and it's perfect. You know, they were all high school kids, you know? We're going to play the Indian girls tonight. Or after school and they had fun. The girls, you know, they all love to do that.

PR: Okay. And did you have Native girls that played? See, I see some right here. I think that kids today in our community know how important that was when Native kids got involved in sports. And so the young women being involved would be a whole different game. And of course, we've had that ever since.

MM: And the black and white is the fall team. And that was probably in the yearbook. Because I see Jim Speltz's name on the back

PR: This is good. This and we'll have, you know, a certain number of documents in the project. And you have to think about the period we're in. There weren't high graduation rates yet for Native students. That doesn't come until quite a bit later. Yes, but we're in an early period of the schools getting integrated in 1963. So, this is only like seven years later.

MM: So maybe girls were more apt to graduate than boys.

PR: I'm guessing that might be true if we went back to the annuals. We've done research on this in other projects than that, but that's an important feature in this. I've always argued or you know, I've been involved in Native American history here for a long time. I really think sports in

this community and this goes under the radar a little bit, but it was a meeting point between the two cultures when Sam young we interviewed Sam, legendary figure here, he got the rotary to give kids rides home because a huge issue was kids couldn't come from the mission. They didn't have cars right. And Sam did that. And suddenly, we had these big Native boys playing football and this was in the early mid-sixties. And the teams were very good. They were winning conference titles. And now you had brown and white boys playing together in this community. That's a big deal. That was big. I mean, because then they could rally together about something. They had something in common instead of, you know, sparring with each other. It was neat. And that was still very evident here when I came to teach in the nineties that we would go to, and we were known as the Indian School by G-E-T, for example. We had real trouble with G-E-T. We would go over there, and they would chant at us. So, you know, it's real ugly racism kind of stuff going on. And then on the football field itself, during games there's a lot of derogatory language going on and our kids would rally, too. It was like your siblings. You don't always love them, but boy, nobody better ever attack them.

MM: Is that when Black River was in the Coulee Conference, or a lot of this was the South Central?

PR: Which was more so a different range of schools, you know it's so that race issue. I don't know how we'll play that in this. I wasn't even thinking about that till this morning, but I think that it's something we'll figure out how to include in a good way.

MM: Like I said, there's a couple of girls that are Native American, the volleyball team that went to state and then in the winter and '78, when the girls basketball team went to state, I remember they had Sue Twin and Sue Coffey.

PR: Oh, the beginning of that.

MM: But that was a strong nucleus of girls '75, '76, and '77. There was a state volleyball team, in '78 there was a state girls basketball team that went to state in two sports that year for team sports.

PR: And I'm glad you brought that up because that was a strong start for this. Really, when you think about it, there's a lot of stuff happening. And then they were having some of these early successes, which is a big deal. You know, I forget about this, but again, a person my age, I'm 68, so just to put that in perspective, I started coaching women in the late seventies, and I didn't think about it at the time, but that was early. So, we're sort of crossing here with our time frame a little bit, and I'm surprised by that as I've been looking at some of this information because I wasn't thinking about it so much at the time. That's one of the things when you do history, we have the perspective of hindsight. We can see where it was and where it went. But at the time, you're just doing it. You're just in the middle of it and trying to make it work. And anyway. Well, Mary, thank you so much for doing this.

## *Run, Jane, Run*



Row I: Patty Peasley, Ann Brauner, Mary Converse, Lora Thurow. Row II: Carol Hoagenson, Linda Krenz, Jean Hostrowser, Dawne Bromfield, Carolyn Woodruff, Becky Pea-

sley, Mary Brauner. Row III: Sherry Hart, Carla Drectrah, Mrs. Mack, Kari Cooksey, Myra Blackdeer.

### ***1972 Tiger Track and Field Team***

## Biography: Carol Anderson



Carol Anderson was born in Kenosha, Wisconsin, on March 19, 1949, and grew up in rural Kenosha County with three younger sisters. She attended small country schools through eighth grade before riding the bus into Kenosha for ninth grade at Lance Junior High and then Mary D. Bradford High School. Throughout those years she threw herself into 4-H, her church youth group, and steady babysitting work. She also excelled academically as a member of Latin Club and the National Honor Society.

After graduating, Carol enrolled at Carroll College in Waukesha (now Carroll University). During her junior year she traveled to Greece and Italy, a formative experience that sparked a lifelong passion for exploring the world. She completed a major in Latin and minors in English and Secondary Education.

In 1971 Carol accepted a position to teach Latin and English at Black River Falls High School. She began her career there—and, remarkably, she ended it there as well. Over 33 years, she embodied steadiness and consistency, becoming one of those rare educators who spend their entire professional life in a single school community. Her presence shaped generations of students.

Carol made significant contributions to the high school, but her most distinctive legacy came through her instruction in Latin. She taught the language throughout her entire career, offering a course of study that had become increasingly rare in Wisconsin's public high schools, especially in her later decades of teaching. Her commitment ensured that Black River Falls students had access to a classical language uncommon in the state.

Beyond the classroom, Carol advised Latin Club and the student newspaper—the Oriole and later the Paw Print—guiding students as they found their voices and built community. When students asked her to “coach” a softball team, she stepped in simply to give them the opportunity to play. What began as a willingness to provide a warm body quickly grew into an experience she enjoyed, thanks to the talent and dedication of the athletes she supported.

Carol's career stands as a testament to loyalty, depth, and quiet influence—an educator who stayed, who invested, and who left a lasting mark on the school she served.

### Carol Anderson: Coach

Lily Sullivan: Can you please provide your name, place of birth, and your date of birth?

Carol Anderson: Carol Anderson. I was born in Kenosha, Wisconsin, not in the city. Grew up in the rural area outside of Kenosha. And I was born on the 19th of March in 1949.

Lily Sullivan: Can you please describe for me the kind of landscape of women's sports when you were growing up?

Carol Anderson: I was in a country school, so there was no landscape with school at all. We had a lot of neighborhood softball games in the summer, you know, just kids getting together in

somebody's backyard. High school, there was GAA, but I was on more of an academic track and so I did not participate in GAA at that time. Girls Athletic Association. I think that's probably come up to you. So, I was sort of a non-sports person. Which makes me a very weird fit for the culture. Unlikely. It was just a need for a warm body for these girls that really wanted to play softball. And I had Debbie Engebretsen and some others in class, in Latin class.

Paul Rykken: Question on that too. Were you pals with or friends with girls at Kenosha when you were in high school that were involved, or was that just not even really on the radar?

CA: Not on my radar? No, it wasn't with my friends either. We just were not involved in sports. And part of that might have been that we were country kids who were bused into school, in the city, because that was where the high school was. And we really needed to catch the bus to go home because that was the only option. So, I very seldom stayed after school for anything because getting a ride home was a challenge.

PR: Okay, but one quick, you did say that you played some kind of informal softball.

CA: Yeah. Just the backyard kind. You know, we knew enough to have bases and stuff. I sort of knew what softball was, but I had a really high learning curve the first few years. I don't know if you're familiar with the coach's rulebooks. I had to read that and read that and read that and study that. And then we had conference wide meetings to go and discuss the rules and the changes in the rules and yeah. Thank goodness there was stuff to learn from.

LS: Can you describe for me your kind of journey to teaching in Black River?

CA: Well, I went to college in Waukesha, Wisconsin, and I majored in Latin. I majored in Latin and I minored in English. And there were, I think, three openings for Latin teachers in the state of Wisconsin when I graduated in the spring of '71 and I interviewed for all three, and this is the one that I was offered. And so, I took this one.

LS: So how does one go from teaching Latin to coaching?

CA: Warm body. I had a few of the girls in Latin class and we had connected well, we were almost friends, you know, because I was only four years older. And they just kept saying, "Please, please Ms. A, come and coach softball. We'll tell you what to do. And that was sort of a key phrase through the years. "We know what to do." And they did.

PR: That story that you just shared has been all four interviews. Both from the young women that were wanting to play, and my wife and Kitty. This idea of going to a staff member and begging them to be the coach. And isn't that interesting, imagine where that was at that time.

CA: Well, that was sort of on the back of the girls. I mean, it had become federal law, but the establishment was not really highly motivated to expand to girls' sports, you know, because they were focused on the boys' sports and we didn't have facilities that were going to easily handle two sets of sports. They had no idea who they would get for staff. And so, I think that the girls really took hold and pushed the development of the teams.

LS: Leading off of that, what was kind of the picture of what women's athletics looked like in the locker room when you first got here?

CA: Well, I went back to the yearbooks. And I came in the fall of '71. And so, my first yearbook was the '71 yearbook. So, I can only tell you that in the 1970 season there was girl's track. And then in '73, they added girls' golf. And I found it interesting looking back that the girls golfers included the daughters of the school board president and the daughter of the principal. And I thought, okay, little parental pressure there, you know. Like "We could golf, dad." You know. And other than that softball was added in '74 and I did not track volleyball. I guess it didn't go through my head this morning when that happened. But I did see that at one point, a friend of mine who was a guidance counselor here, probably had less sports experience than I had, coached volleyball for a while. So, it was another case of warm body and who would say yes to the girls.

LS: So, it was definitely driven by the girls.

CA: I believe so.

LS: Who would you say were some of the girls actively seeking you guys out? Were they the same group of people?

CA: I think Mary Mack and I have shared some students, but they were a little later on, actually a few years into it. So, Debbie Engebretsen is the key name that I come up with in that first group.

PR: Would Kathy Bell be in there?

CA: Kathy Bell was there. Yeah. I should have brought that yearbook.

PR: We're going to get those names.

CA: Yeah, it was. They were kids, girls that I knew.

LS: And when Title IX was first put into place, did you have an initial reaction to it or initial connection?

CA: Well, I think as a woman, I thought it was a wonderful idea because it was something that had been not available to women and girls my age. Yeah, it was an equity thing, and my generation was big on achieving equity. And we weren't sure it would ever happen. And so, it was a real positive that it came down from the federal level. That they were going to recognize girls and give girls those same opportunities. I think I was pretty positive with everyone else.

LS: And as you said, the girls were seeking a warm body. So, what did that look like when they first sought you out? What were they saying?



**Debra Engebretson Sanberg, Class of 1975, Age 68**

I have given your first question considerable thought and have been unable to come up with a concise event but more or less a definition of my person. I always enjoyed playing active games but it was in Jr. High School when girls were afforded the opportunity to participate in organization basketball and track and field. This brought me a new recognition from my peers, teachers, and eventually the community as a legitimate athlete. I was no longer just an overweight, mediocre trumpet player who talked too much in science class. Sports is where I excelled and others noticed. Self assurance is a necessary component of lifelong success and happiness.

In response to your second question I believe that the progression of girls athletics at the time of the Education Amendment was strongly supported by the little noticed "gym teachers" who stepped up to promote and support girls sports extending their work days and time away from their families with little or no compensation. Ms. Fredrickson, Mary Mach and Carol Anderson were instrumental in my academic and athletic success. My children remember the days when they tagged along to recreational volleyball games when I was in my mid to late 40s. Those early coaches made that possible for me.

CA: "We want to play softball. We want to play softball, and we need someone to be the coach."  
And "We know what we're doing."

PR: Did they go to the admin? Or did they come directly to you?

CA: I think they came directly to me. They may have talked with Mary Mack. But I think they came directly to me. And then I don't remember what happened when we actually ended up with a team. I do know the girls took lots of responsibilities. That girls today would not even think about. They had to prepare the field when we had a game. They had to get the lines on the field. And we had to beg and borrow and steal on equipment. And we had to find somebody that would be the umpire and the girls knew what they were doing and they took charge. They were not shy.

LS: Yes. And I know as a softball player, coming across softball equipment is not an easy task. Especially when you had to share all that stuff back then.

PR: Did you have advocates on the staff? I'm interested in that. Were you on your own?

CA: Looking back, I felt sort of on my own. Because I know that I had study hall in the old library, a really old library. And I knew I would sit during study hall and go through books to find schools that maybe had softball teams. And I wrote letters. "Do you have a team? And would you be willing to put this in your schedule?" And so, I know I created the schedule and arranged for facility and arranged for umpires. That first year we had three games and we lost all three.

PR: Did you travel? Did someone come here and play, or did you travel somewhere and play?

CA: I think they came here to play that first year. We traveled after that.

PR: Were there teams, if you can remember this, were there teams that you played that were already established?

CA: Yes, Taylor. They were a tough opponent very early on. They were more rural than Hixton, and more organized. Farm girls with a lot of strength. And when you look at that '74 yearbook, there was a team, the name of the team is written in the yearbook in Ho-Chunk. I honestly do not know. The tribe must have had a softball team that came in to play.

PR: They had a basketball team, too. And isn't that interesting?

CA: That is interesting. So, they had a team before we did. I mentioned that to a friend of mine this morning and I said, "I discovered that we played a Ho-Chunk team" and she said, "Well they should have been on the high school team." I said, "Yeah but they weren't." Yeah, they had their own team.

PR: Mary Mack talked about that as well. It's very interesting.

CA: It's a whole other dynamic.

PR: That was also true at that time with the boys. We would go play a team at the Ho-Chunk, just informally, but there must have been more of a separation at the time.

CA: So, there must have been a conference or some organization of the culture of Native American tribes that we played.

PR: So, that was an important part of their culture -- sport.

LS: Were you able to see a lot of this impact on the girls or how would you say the girls were impacted by Title IX?

CA: I think they were proud to be teams. There was camaraderie that had not really existed before. They had a sense of belonging to a group. Those early teams took about three years in, and my numbers went from 17 to 30. I had 30 girls, and we were playing one team, so nine at a time out on the field. So, they had an awful lot of bench time and they hung in there. There were girls in those 30 that looking back would never be on a sports team today, because they just didn't have the, you know, the fitness or the drive. But there was a connection there that really made it.

PR: Did anybody come and watch the games?

CA: Parents. Ron Perry's mom. And she took me to task a number of times about my inabilities. "Why didn't you do this?" And of course, I didn't know. She was a strong advocate for the girls. She was at every home game. So, I know that there were some.

PR: She didn't have a daughter playing?

CA: No, her daughter was not high school age when they moved here.

PR: But that was part of her family culture. Oh, that's interesting.

CA: So yes, we had some spectators.

LS: Were there any challenges that really struck you during that time period of the implementation of the teams?

CA: Acceptance through the culture of the sports culture in the district was very focused on the boys, which they'd had... What? 50, 60, 70, maybe 100 years of practice. And they were not really happy to figure out ways to share space or funding. I think we had challenges finding places to practice and challenges affording the equipment that was needed.

PR: Would that have been in the form of not giving funding or just getting in your way, like roadblocking?

CA: It was more begrudging. "Oh, well, I suppose we could do that." You know, I specifically remember when we had gotten up to 25 or 30 girls, Mary Mack, and I said, "You need an assistant coach in here." We really had to struggle to get funding for an assistant coach. That was not considered a necessity. I don't think they were. They weren't against the girls. They just didn't know how to... they didn't know how to go forward. I didn't know how to share the space and time.

PR: An interesting dynamic just to throw this in there is that one thing we've learned in the other interviews, and I think it bears out. It was that initially women were coaching, but then when you get about 5 to 10 years in.

CA: Men took over.

PR: Yeah, men took over. Many of the sports, not all of them.

CA: Yeah, I didn't remember exactly what years I had coached so I'm going through my yearbooks like crazy yesterday and today and I got to the 1980 yearbook, and I read the blurb on the softball before I did anything else. And it said, due to a lack of statistics provided by the coach, and I thought, "Oh my gosh, what did I do?" Then I looked at the picture. I was no longer the coach. Thank goodness I escaped that one. But there was a man there and they'd only given the last name of Yeager. I have no idea who that was. And I was here, but I don't know who that was.

PR: Do you remember voluntarily saying, I'll step away because someone else wanted to do it?

CA: I remember asking to step away.

PR: So how many years did you coach?

CA: '74 to '79. I did it for five years. And I had school newspaper and I had Latin club and I had five or six preps per day. So, I just couldn't do it. And I realize, too, that last spring, in the spring of '79, when we lost the sectional final for the second year in a row, and Mrs. Perry was really happy about what I wasn't doing. I thought, you don't have the skill to take them any further. You don't know the specifics of how to tell them to hit a tough pitcher. You don't know anything. And so it became clear that I was sort of a hamper. I was the warm body, but I was in the way. I was not helping. So, they needed somebody with more expertise.

PR: But it sounds like you had some successes.

CA: The girls had successes. Those were the years when Kris Yeske was pitching. I don't know if you're going to talk to any former athletes, but she was involved with track and softball at the same time. And so sometimes she'd do track and sometimes she'd do softball. If we were both at home, she'd go from the field to the field. There were really good kids... Annette Tanner Waughtal was another one of our stars. And I think they have moved toward West Salem, but I'm not real sure about that. And Susie Brown and Annette were tied with 17 RBIs. Susie had 28 stolen bases that year and 22 runs. So, there were some very skilled athletes, and they literally knew how to play together. And things that I know now, how to get it out and all that stuff because I've been watching. I didn't know then. And so, they needed the knowledge and they needed a coach that could capitalize on their knowledge.

PR: One thing that Mary Mack did that we found out by looking at some of the newspaper stuff and we'll do this with softball, too. But she had the girls take a test before they could play. A basketball test on the rules. Which is, you know, she was a P.E. teacher. But it's the same vibe. We're learning this together.

CA: Yeah, we were learning together because Mary was Phy Ed. She had more physical skills and more experience than I, but also not, probably not, playing in high school, you know. Or seeing a woman coach in action was not something that she'd been trained for either. The kids were good.

LS: Are there any mentors or allies or individuals that stood out to you during this period of time?

CA: Well, Mary Mack for sure. I would go to her with all my questions because she just had some more common sense about it than I did. I was lacking that as well. I was trained differently. And so different group of skills that didn't include the coaching. And the assistant coach that I had the last two years, her name was Ginny Gribble. She was a, I think, Title I math teacher at the elementary. She was a natural athlete too, and she had experience. So that added to the coaching for sure. Interestingly, we still played one team. I mean we were down to 15 girls each and maybe we did some eliminating of girls. I don't remember that.

PR: But there was no JV?

CA: There was no JV. Yeah.

PR: Just out of curiosity was there a conference that you played in?

CA: Yes. It was South Central. But we played a lot of non-conference games, too, because not everybody in South Central had a team. I think we played Taylor almost every year and they were close enough. That was easy.

PR: And that was before they were Blair-Taylor.

CA: That was before they were Blair-Taylor. They were just Taylor. And Onalaska showed up often on those lists of games. So, there were some close. But we played Sauk Prairie in that second to last year. I saw that on the list. So that would have been the South Central conference.

LS: What were some gradual changes that you saw made in the school during this time? Did you see some transformations of form in response to Title IX while you were coaching or afterwards?

CA: Well, I think it became to be more working together to find a place to play. When we started in '74, actually, our baseball team was also playing on the hard rock of sand that existed where the ice arena currently is, there was a field there and it was such hard sand that it could have been concrete. And so, we went from that and I don't know when the boys got a field here, but I know that we were sent down to the field on the end of tenth – Marks Field.

PR: Mark's field. That became the home of softball.

CA: And it was a much friendlier surface to play. And that was not my... I know I didn't create that. So that came from somebody else. "Why don't you try Marks Field?" And that took some politics between the district and the rec department to make that happen. So, I think there was yeah, they were saying, "Okay, they're here, it's not going to pass." Nobody's revoked the law, and they seem to want to stay. So, we better work with them.

LS: So that acceptance really started to surround you guys as time went on?

CA: Yeah, I think so. I think so. And all the teams were seeing success. I mean, the track team had gone to State or some of the track team had gone on. And yeah, I think the teams were being successful and I think it was making a difference for the girls.

LS: Yes. Is there any advice you would like to give to advocates or coaches or educators in women's sports right now?

CA: Yeah, I don't know how. I am not qualified about that. I think they probably have challenges that are different than the challenges that we had. And I think they just need to hang in there because their cause is important, maybe more so in 2025 than in 1975. The girls need the support, and if the team can provide that structure of activity and that connection with the coach. One more adult in their lives, I think that's important.

PR: Absolutely. When we're talking about that subject, you were getting some parental involvement, but the heavy parental involvement comes later. And that unfortunately, I think has not helped athletics.

CA: I think that makes it much tougher to coach, because instead of just, I mean, I know I had one very verbal critic. And a coach today has numerous verbal critics, and everybody's child is the star. But that's not true in life. Most of us do not become stars. We just chug along, we're workers. And that's something that needs to be. I don't know. I think it needs to be taught. I think you need to experience that you're not going to be good at everything. Our world is not heading that direction to make people see the reality of who they are and what they can give.

PR: You know, one of the things is you were getting emotional in that last question. Which I understand. And it made me think how important it is for young women today to understand what it was like. Yes, I think that's important. And I know that's an old person talking now.

CA: But this is a very old person talking. I don't want to get political because I'll just get crazy, but watching daily things evaporate and slide away that we worked for years and years and years to accomplish is really scary because I think these young women are and not you, but the 30 somethings, maybe. And that's a generalization. I know. But I think they are so involved in their own world that they're not seeing that the things that they take for granted, like equal pay and equal rights and the sports opportunities for themselves and their kids, that those could disappear overnight, that women could easily become lower class citizens again.

LS: Because this really wasn't that long ago.

CA: Well, no. I mean it sounds like ancient history, but it really is. I mean, we lived through both of those times. And when I came to work in 1971, I think it maybe was the first year of a negotiated contract here in this district that did not pay men extra because they were heads of household. Even if they were single, they were the head of a household. But a single woman before that did not qualify. That was really a very visible thing to me. I knew that, I mean, that was just last year, just around the corner, you know, and it could be that way again. I hate to see things that have to be flat for a second time.

PR: Anything else you want to ask or anything you want to add? Anything you got that was left out that you feel like it should be part of the record here?

CA: I realized in looking through the yearbooks that the Girl's Athletic Association, which was the pacifier for the girls before Title IX, existed until 1977 in the yearbooks. So, Mary Mack, bless her heart, coached one or two teams a year and took those girls every Monday for some kind of physical fitness activity. They played tennis on the new courts. They played flag football. I thought that was really great that she kept that option for so many girls.

PR: That was like intramurals. And my sisters were all in GAA. I've heard them talk about that.

CA: I'm sure they had a great time. Yeah. It was a different time because all the clubs were big. Yeah, school activities were a social thing. Which is a long... I think that's a little past too.

PR: What would you say about that? Like school clubs -- are they holding their own?

LS: Well, attendance for clubs isn't great. And it's hard to get members to join. And kids are now having more, like a lot of boys, particularly like their social activities might be playing games together outside of school, or social activities like going downtown. There's just a lot available. That maybe wasn't before.

CA: And the connection via the phone, you can connect with some friends really quick. And it wasn't that way back in the seventies we didn't have any cell phones.

PR: One of the interesting dynamics in teaching, Carol and I talked together for a long time. Carol was also a teacher of mine. You as an English teacher were outstanding. Anyway, I don't know. One of the things that was interesting to watch over the years was that change occurred. Just that people the kids became more, there was a little more isolation kind of that came in and that socializing through, as she mentioned, with clubs went away. Certainly toward the end of when I was teaching.

CA: Toward the end of when I was teaching, it was very hard to get anything going with a club activity. They would say, "Yes, I'll be there." And then, oh, something else came up.

PR: And one of the dynamics of teaching that's so interesting is that the parents think education is what it was when they were in school. And they can't understand those changes. They go, "Why aren't you doing floats anymore? And, you know, that kind of thing, you know." They just do it because they think that nothing ever changes in schools, and schools just evolve constantly.

CA: And they must know that things in their house are not the same as they were when they were a kid.

LS: And with that isolation piece, there's definitely been an increase since the pandemic. Especially with clubs and kids going back out after that experience.



PR: I talked to somebody this week that told me that they felt like the high school was starting to come back the way that it was pre-pandemic. So interesting. So that still, I think, is in effect, it certainly changed us more than we thought. This was a great interview.

CA: Well, it was fun. Thank you Lily.



*The 1978 Tiger Softball Team*

## Biography: Kathryn Kopp Young (Kitti)



Kathryn “Kitti” Young’s story begins in the small southern Wisconsin town of Albany, where she was born on July 24, 1955. The ninth of eleven children—six brothers and four sisters—she grew up in a household where chores were plentiful, responsibilities constant, and competition unavoidable. Everyday tasks became contests, and with so many siblings, there were always enough players to form teams for games and adventures. Even picking up sticks in the yard turned into a race to see who could finish first.

As she grew older, Kitti’s brothers, both cross-country runners, inspired her to enter the town’s summer road races. But her deepest passion took shape in the loft of a friend’s old barn, where she spent countless hours playing basketball. When she entered high school, girls’ sports still did not exist at Albany High School. She and five classmates pushed hard for change, and in 1971—one year before Title IX—the school launched its first girls’ basketball team. Community enthusiasm grew quickly, and the following year the same group successfully advocated for a girls’ softball team, which began competition in 1973.

Those early seasons ignited a drive that carried Kitti into college athletics. She enrolled at UW–Platteville intending to play basketball but soon discovered a wider world of opportunity, ultimately competing in five different intercollegiate sports. She earned her bachelor’s degree in physical education and health and, during her senior year, accepted a teaching position at Iowa-Grant High School. There she taught, coached volleyball and basketball, and launched the school’s first softball program. Kitti’s coaching career at Iowa-Grant quickly distinguished her as a rising leader in girls’ athletics. Her volleyball teams captured one conference title, two regional titles, and two sectional championships. They reached the pinnacle of Wisconsin high school volleyball as **State Champions in 1978** and returned as **state runner-up in 1980**.

Her second teaching position brought her to Black River Falls, where she continued to shape young athletes through volleyball and softball. During summers she completed her master’s degree in physical education at UW–La Crosse. At Black River Falls High School, her volleyball teams built a legacy of excellence: **six Coulee Conference championships, five regional titles, and a sectional championship that sent the Tigers to the State Tournament in 1994**.

Kitti’s impact has been recognized at the highest levels. She is a **two-time Hall of Fame inductee**, honored both by her home school of Albany and by Iowa-Grant for her contributions as an athlete, coach, and pioneer in girls’ sports.

During her early years in Black River Falls, Kitti met Tim Young; they later married and welcomed their son, Ethan. Now retired, she remains active—and still unmistakably competitive—presence at the Lunda Community Center, where her lifelong commitment to movement, teamwork, and opportunity continues to shine.

## **Kitti Young: Player Turned Coach**

Paul Rykken: Will you give us your name, and when and where you were born?

Kitti Young: My name officially is Kathryn Kopp Young, but I've been known as Kitti forever, so I go by Kitti. And I was born in Monroe, Wisconsin but I grew up in Albany, which is just about 15 miles east of there. I was born in 1955.

PR: So, what were your earliest memories of participating in sports, formally or informally?

KY: I'm from a family of 11, so sports to me meant which team of my family members was I going to be on, because I had six brothers and four sisters. So sports, as the term you probably are looking for, and I'm not saying this on your behalf, but I had a brother that was older, that was a runner and one that was younger and cross-country was really big in our town, for a small town. I mean, we're talking small town. You think Black River is small, we're under a thousand. And since Cross Country was so big, we had some road races in the summer, people from Madison would come down, and these guys were all participating. I said, "Wait a minute, I can do that too." So, I started with the road races in the summer as well, and there was a mile run for the girls and then an open 3 to 10 just out in the country. Literally, sometimes we got lost. We didn't know where we were going or how far we were going to go. And so it ranged from 3 to 10 miles and we did that.

PR: Did you say how old you were when you were doing that?

KY: Not in high school? So, we were in, I would probably say, middle school at the oldest.

PR: So, we're talking about late sixties, early seventies.

KY: Yeah, for sure. But running wasn't really I mean, I did that, but it wasn't my passion. It was basketball. And there were six or seven of us in my grade that just loved to play. And we went to a friend of ours, who had a barn and it had a loft, wood floor, hoop at each end. We go there every time we can. I have to say, I skipped school once to go there and play. So that's what I did, was play basketball and I got good at running because I had to run home and run back and do all those things. So that's probably the two things that influenced me the most.

PR: Now when you're growing up, does Albany have girls sports at all in the school? Anything

KY: None. You know, I think there's some history, if you will, of way back when, probably when they had women's baseball, that they had a girl's basketball team. But it's never been acknowledged, to be honest with you. Our team, when we were juniors, was the very first one. And we were recognized as such, in that we've been invited back because of that. And we were in a parade just two summers ago, because we were the first. And that was 1971. And we, the girls that played in that loft, pushed to get that team. You know, everybody thought, "Well, that's a guy's sport." You know, it was. And then, "Wait a minute, we can play." And of course, when that first question you talk about community, they thought it was funny that we wanted to play. "Wait a minute. We can do this and we've been playing." And of course, no one knew how much we had been playing. And not that we played skillfully. We just played. There was a hoop. The ball goes in it. We figured out how to do that. So, in 1971, before Title IX actually came into effect, we got our first basketball team in Albany.

PR: When you were coming through school then, let's say middle and high school or junior high, did you have GAA?

KY: I don't remember GAA until high school, and I have a picture of that. But it was kind of funny, you know, this is down the road probably, but in college I played badminton, and in this GAA photo I have a badminton in my hand. I'm just like wait a minute, I didn't know what badminton was until I went to college, and I had one in my hand. It just shocked me when I saw that picture. And of course, you know what that's like. But you went there to play whatever game it was. I mean, I can't even remember what games. Just give me a ball and I'll use it.

PR: So as a junior then, you have this basketball team. Were there any other sports that were brought in at the same time? Like track or volleyball?

KY: Just basketball, because of this particular group? Actually, I back up a bit, when we were freshmen, we challenged that group of girls. There were seven of us in my class. You know, we challenged any upperclassmen: sophomore, junior, or senior. "Can we play you guys?" We just wanted a game and they didn't let us have one. So that was before junior year that we had that, but there were no other sports.

PR: So, when you were juniors, did you play other schools?

KY: Yes, and I do think the whole thing of Title IX would've been ahead of the game, because we did have a conference. And to this day we have a banner in our gym that says, "1972 conference champs." And so, we actually won that. We thought we were pretty good, and maybe we were. But there were teams that played in our area.

PR: Who coached you?

KY: Well, that's another thing. Actually, I just saw her a few years ago. She was a Phy Ed teacher from Lacrosse. She didn't want to do it. And I just went to her, and we were kind of buddies, you know. And I said, "Lois, you don't have to do anything. Just put your name on that paper. You're going to be our coach, and we'll take care of it." And she was fine with that. I mean, she goes, "Oh, I could be a good cheerleader." Cuz' she was. And to be honest with you, she really didn't know anything about it. I go, "You graduated from Lacrosse and you don't know anything about basketball." I was just kind of dumbfounded about it, but it worked out great.

PR: Was she teaching at the school?

KY: She was our Phy Ed teacher. K-12, taught it all, and we talked her into it, because they said we couldn't have one without somebody doing it. She came there single, was going to get married and the whole nine yards. I said, "We will run the practice. We'll do it all. Just let us have the space, and you will supervise basically."

PR: Did you have trouble with getting gym space? Did you have to finagle to get that?

KY: We actually had an old gym that we played in. So, the boys had the new gym, which we called it then. And then we had the old gym, which was fine for us. So, there was no other team. Wrestling, I think they did that on the stage. And so there wasn't a conflict that way.

PR: So, did this continue into your senior year?

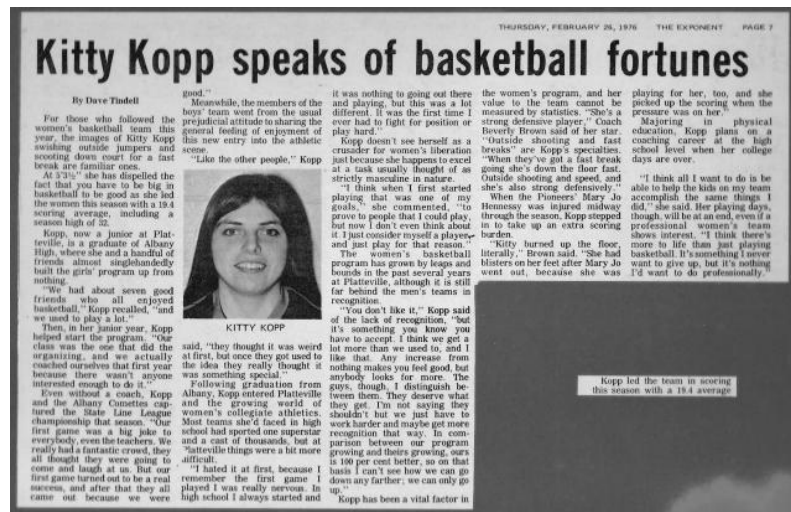
KY: Yeah, our senior year, actually. And then in '72, which was the spring of that year, Title IX came through. And more and more schools got teams. So we got a broader sense of teams. And then our senior year we also, I just read an article, it was kind of fun for me to dig out. Because I had something special to show you. But in my senior year, there was an article in the school newspaper, "They're at it, again! Those same girls that started the basketball team started a softball team." And they let us have one. So that happened in our senior year.

PR: And that would've been spring of '73?

KY: Yes, spring of '73, we had our softball team. Those are the two that we had, I wasn't a cheerleader. That wasn't my thing. We did have cheerleading, but it wasn't something that when you say activity that's not me.

PR: So, Title IX did affect you in that earliest phase because it brought a broader number of teams. But then you were off to college at that point.

KY: I'll say this: if it wasn't for high school basketball, I honestly believe I would not have gone to college. I didn't have the confidence, didn't have the money. You know, I didn't push for it. But that whole thing that somebody thought I was worth something. It kind of helped me to fill out the forms, and all that kind of thing to get to college. And I don't know if I didn't answer your question there, but I went to college and a lot of people say I got to get a scholarship to go play basketball. I just wanted to play. We only had two years of it and it just wasn't enough for me.



PR: My wife would say exactly the same thing. That's what she said in her interview, that same exact experience. So, I'm assuming Platteville, at that point, had some development of athletic programs for women.

KY: They did. But I do think that Title IX had a big factor in that, because, and I don't say this egotistically, but I did have the opportunity to play five interscholastic college sports, and not too many people did that. One friend of mine played field hockey in high school. And I was like, "Well, C'mon let's do it!" And I know Mary played some field hockey, but I didn't. When I went to college, I knew what it was. I mean I did, and I ended up being the captain by my senior year. I still have my stick because I keep things. And I think that with Title IX, we were kind of the freshman group that didn't have these opportunities and wanted them all. We were just like, "Sign me up, sign me up to go. I'll do it."

PR: It must really have been a thrill for you to just have more structure, more coaching, and more opportunities.

KY: I was like in a playroom. I couldn't stop, you know. I had badminton in the morning and basketball at night, and it didn't bother me. That was my job. I mean, they entertained me, they fed me. I did study, too.

PR: Thinking back and just the memories of that moment for you, was there a specific thing you could point to that says, "Wow, this really feels like we've arrived here. This is really different." Is there somewhere you had that moment, especially in the collegiate phase?

KY: I didn't know that I could be a part of something so big. Going to college was like I said, kind of like off the radar for me. Yeah. But then to play all these sports in addition to that, I guess I was overwhelmed with the idea that it made me feel a part of things because, you know. Growing up in a big family, not so well off, I felt almost equal in the sports arena, and it helped me do that.

PR: I'm assuming you were with other young women that were of a similar mindset?

KY: Yeah, that hadn't played. One of my good friends still today. I still talk to her probably every other week, if not every week. That I had played against her in high school is like crazy. And then, we didn't room together in college, but we were right next door. So, I do think that her in particular, it created a lifetime of memories and obviously being a part of that special community that we kind of came in as a freshman in Platteville. There wasn't a lot of people that, I mean there were some in each class, but not as many as we had in our freshman class that got involved.



**U-W Women's  
Team**

All five of UW-Platteville's basketball players are shown in this picture. They are Kitty Kopp (30), Joyce Wellhoefer (35), Jo Hennessy (12), Jane Ballmer (33) and Kathy Bresnahan (24).

PR: So, let's just turn the page a little bit on that, unless you want to add anything else or unless you have anything else. I'm interested now about when you started to think about becoming a coach.

KY: To be honest with you, I was so overwhelmed in participating. I didn't even think about teaching until I was like, "Wait a minute." When we started these methods' class like crap. Because I have to admit, I was pretty shy. I mean, being in the gym was my only freedom of who I really was and the rest of it. I didn't want to talk to anybody. I didn't want to be in front of anybody. I was like, I'm going to teach? I mean, I know you said coaching, but to me, coaching is teaching. I think the part of being in those five sports and having so many different coaches. I can take this from that one and that one from this. And that helped me build the fact, I know this is maybe a question down lower, but I think being a coach was the way I could still participate. That was my idea. Like, "Wait a minute, I'm too old. I can't do it anymore. They won't let me." And this is my way of playing, which, to be honest with you, I did for many years. Get out there

right with them.

PR: I think that was a good answer to this question was: how did your experiences of female athletes shape your approach to coaching? You just kind of said that you were pulling things from different coaches. Were your coaches predominantly men?

KY: None.

PR: So, the women that you were playing for, let's say your basketball coach at Platteville, was this a woman that was someone who had experienced playing herself?

KY: I'll say this: yes and no. She played six-player basketball at Iowa, which she took us to a game. And I went, "Wait a minute, you did this." You know, I was like, I want to go up and down the floor. I don't want to stay here and then go there. So, we had her for three years, so that was a different experience. So yeah, all women, the rest of them were, there were some that were little recreational like, and others that were more rigid. I can't remember the end of your question.

PR: Just did these people shape the way you were going to coach, and you indicated that they did. And I was curious about men versus women. That's interesting. I guess to me, it was initially women that did the coaching, and then it sort of started to shift to men getting in it, when it became more "competitive."

KY: Yes, I find that really true in volleyball and basketball. Even more so in basketball initially, but in volleyball now, I mean, when you look at college teams, you know, did he play or what did he have to offer? I think that is true.

PR: I remember men because we're about the same age. You're two years older than me, so we're about the same era. A lot of this is. But I remember men who had been coaching but were now out of it, suddenly jumped into the women's side. That was a whole different dynamic going on.

KY: First, I didn't like it and then I like, well whatever, if they have something to offer and they can push the girls in a different capacity. And I think there was some truth to that, that sometimes women aren't so easy to deal with and it takes a little more of a stern hand to do that. So, they accepted men's criticism and stuff like that a little easier I think then. Because my first coaching job in basketball, I was the JV coach and I had a male head coach, and I didn't think anything about it. I liked him and I thought he was good at what he did. And he was ready to hand me the job when he left.

PR: So, let's talk about being a woman in coaching. So, you did this from day one of teaching?

KY: I did, yeah. I had a teaching job before I graduated from college. So, I just turned 22 when I first started coaching. I coached volleyball and basketball and then I started the softball program. So, it was like going over it again, starting as a player, a program, and then starting as a coach. So that was kind of interesting, to be honest with you, we thought: we can do this, and we can have a team. So, it was kind of going through the same phase, but as a different capacity.

PR: So, you were coaching three sports. How long did you do that?

KY: Well, I did four years at Iowa Grant. When I came here, I coached two sports, just volleyball and softball. I did not coach basketball. They didn't need one.

PR: Did you feel like when you were coaching as a woman in that era, were you facing discrimination? Or was it difficult to be a woman doing that, being in a competitive atmosphere?

KY: It was, the two schools were so different. Iowa Grant, when I first went there, like I said, I was a young pup, nobody needed to tell me what to do. I was going to go do it my way. And if you liked it, you did or if you didn't. And it just happened to be turned out pretty good. We went to State two years out of the four, and so that acknowledgment that maybe, and I don't say this, because it's hard for me to say that stuff that maybe she knows what she's doing, even though she's as young as she is. But it was a big deal because that volleyball state started, like in '73, and we went in '78, my first year in the school and never



won anything. Nothing. Then, woah, we went and we won. And so that was a big deal. Was a big deal. It was a real big deal for the community, for the players, everybody. Then we didn't go in the next year, but we went the following year, and we ended up beating everybody, but one team. And we had a playoff and we lost it. So we took runner up that year. But anyway, that was a big deal for that community. And I have to tell you, when I left there, the head football coach and the head volleyball coach got paid the same salary. And I strongly believe it was because of that because that wasn't true when I came here. And I tell you, I mean, I got the support there, that was crazy. And Iowa Grant, I don't know if you know, it's near Platteville. So it wasn't like they hadn't heard of me. I didn't student-teach there. Actually, my roommate did. I didn't get the job. So that was really interesting to me that they did award the same salary when I left.

PR: What was the reason for the switch? Sounds like you were having a ride.

KY: Yeah that's, I don't know. Okay. I got to tell you, I love teaching. You know, way back, when I graduated, I said, "I've got to be a teacher." And I told myself, okay, I went to school for four years, I'm going to do it for a year. That's what I told myself, I kid you not. And then, of course, it ended up 30. But after four years, I thought, and it was a small town, and I was still in the Platteville area, and I just felt I was personally missing something. And I just don't know what I was looking for. Don't even ask me. Quit my job without one. And I had everything going for me. I mean, the volleyball was terrific. Good kids coming back. I mean, it was very sad. But for some reason I did it, like I can't even. If I had to do it all over again, I would've stayed. But back then, when you're young and foolish, and you had all this to start with. Maybe it all happened too fast for me. I don't know. I can't explain that one.

PR: So, when you came here, you said you were the volleyball and softball coach. And who was the softball coach when you came? Because Carol Anderson started.

KY: She was a special ed teacher. Now, you're really going to try my memory here? I should look that up. She was my assistant volleyball coach, too. I can't even think of her name.

PR: And did she do it for too long?

KY: No, and I only did JV for one year. It was the toughest gig I ever had. Oh, it was tough. I mean, you needed to play catch the kids didn't want to play catch. You know, they didn't want that kind of stuff. Yeah, so it was tough. It wasn't like it was below me. I just wanted more advanced type of strategies.

PR: How about the volleyball program when you came? Was it a good program?

KY: It was Jeff Polzin's friend he went to South Carolina. It was in good hands.

PR: So, it was a program that was developed.

KY: The only thing he left me that was hard for me to change because he did have some good things going with it. They had to earn their kneepads. I remember that, thought it was the strangest thing. You wanted them to get bloody knees before they got their knee pads. You got to go and get everything off the floor because he took me around and kids just hated that. God, it's really weird that I can't remember his name.

PR: I know of who you are speaking, but I can't remember the name either. Cause I've heard of the name. Okay, so we're switching gears a little bit here unless you want to add anything more. You had, let's just say that I came here in '90 and your program, the volleyball program, was well established at that point. I mean, it was a highly respected program, in the area for sure.

KY: Never finished less than third.

PR: But I also know that it was a challenge every year, and it's a tough business being a coach.

KY: It was. I mean, I think I had a reputation for my way. And the outside world I can't control what they think. But I told the kids we're a group, and if you have it your way and you have it your way and whatever, there's going to be a conflict. If you accept what I'm saying and have it my way, then I'm the only one to blame. I'm the only one you have to look to. You can't go amongst yourselves. It's going to be this way. And kids later like, "Oh yeah, you had this rule." I was on their list and I won't use the word, but I said, really? There was a list. Who or who I was going to hold accountable the most on that particular week or whatever. But I did feel strongly about that. One of the things I did after a match, and this is off the cuff, but we would talk about previous matches. I said, "You guys can say anything about each other in a positive manner that is a highlight or maybe something they did in practice that helped them get ready for the game. And then you saw them actually accomplish that. You can't criticize them. That's my job. And I'll do that." Constructive, of course. I'll take care of what we need to do to better our team. And that's the way I kind of handled things that way. And I have to admit, things did not end well for me here coaching wise, as far as volleyball, not the way I wanted it. I mean, Ethan had a big effect on that. I was pregnant with him. But that wasn't the only thing. And maybe they got tired of my mentality in that.

PR: But let's frame that one this way. If you were going to tell somebody what was the most gratifying part of being coach for you, what do you look back on and say, this is what it really meant to me? What would that be?

KY: Well, I got a few things there. I had a number of kids and not on just one occasion, but after practice come and thank me because they learned something today. And you know, you can hear people say that, but you really felt they meant it. Or one time I had that special group before we went to stay here in '94. And I had them for three years, some of those kids. And they said to me, can we run our own practice? And I was kind

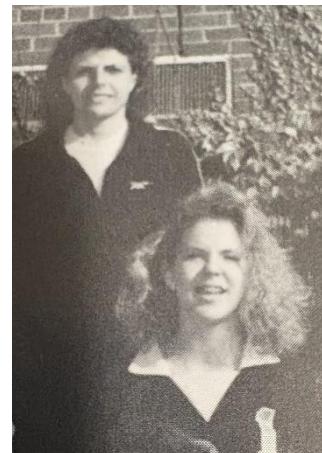
of a practice nut. I mean, I took more time planning my practice than it would take to do it. And I said, "Oh, okay, go ahead." Why I let them run the practice? And it's the only time they wanted to do it. They had no idea of transition, what you do and what you have to fit in. And so I appreciated giving them that opportunity. But I also thought it was important that they acknowledged that there was more to it than just coming in and setting up the net. This is a kind of a bad example, but the state volleyball team that we had in Iowa Grant, speaking of age, I think she was 60 and she passed away, one of the members of that team. And I went back for her visitation and read her eulogy and her obituary. You should see her obituary. And on the second line of that was "I was a member of the state volleyball team." I just, for her family, which I'm sure I probably wasn't high on their list, for her family to acknowledge that. I mean, she was gone, it was just overwhelming for me, for them to include that. PR: There's a lot of research about that, that the athletic experience for young people will affect them the rest of their life. Negatively or positively.

KY: And she wasn't even a major contributor, but she just the sense of belonging to that is just. Even in Black River when we went to state and we didn't do well, we won one game, I think. But we were sitting in the hallway at two in the morning, after getting beat like crazy and everyone was disappointed. But the sadness was I mean, one kid just said, "We're no longer going to be together. This is reality. Tomorrow we're moving on." But yet, to this day, you talk to some of those at the parade. You know, I wore my state in '94, and they come to me and say, "You know, you were tough, but they said, thank you for it." You know, not everybody can do that.

PR: What about the other side of it? What was the most challenging or difficult part about coaching?

#### From Kirstie Danielson: Received 8 May 2026

My memories of Coach K playing volleyball are numerous (for example, see picture of Coach K driving our Homecoming "float"). She made us WORK! "Danielson...move your feet," "Danielson...get under the ball," "Danielson...get over here!" She made you leave your ego at the locker room door and get your game on, pronto. Over the four years that I played on varsity for her, the teams kept getting better and better. Individual athletes were progressing and excelling in their own skills within a team environment that nurtured the common goal of excellence and winning. My junior year in 1990, the volleyball team won the conference, and we were headed into the post season strong. However, my saddest memory was when Cindy Rosin and myself (as the two setters in a 6-2) both severely sprained our ankles in the same game. We both ended up at the ER knowing we likely couldn't play moving forward. Coach K, however, was able to adapt the team's strategy and kept the two of us directly involved with the team and supported our recovery. My favorite memory was in my senior year, when she coached us to winning one of the three sets over that year's conference winners (West Salem) 15-0, and winning the game overall! (see picture of myself and Coach K).



KY: I think not being understood that I really wanted the best for that individual. Development as well as I mean, I wanted them to value themselves. And sometimes I think the communication with parents, I'm not sure they valued the kid as much as I wanted them to, you know. So, there was a sense of sadness for them. I had one kid that was a terrific defensive player, and the parent didn't think she was good enough, wanted to pull her out. I was just shocked. What do you mean? We can't play without her. It wasn't good enough for her. And yet that's what I got accused of. I wanted people to be prepared. You know, if you're not, anybody can stand on the floor, but what you do on the floor, you should be ready to do, and you don't want to put them in a position they can't handle.

PR: So, let's shift it one more time. What differences have you seen in the experiences of young female athletes today compared to your generation? What do you see today that is so dramatically different for young people than what you had?

KY: Well, you know, I'm not going to, the word entitled bugs me a little bit to use that. But I don't think they value the opportunities that they have. I mean, I think every season goes so fast. And, you know, they're looking ahead like what do they get out of it versus what the team has accomplished, those kinds of things.

PR: How about your attitude about the single focus on one sport? What's your feeling about that?

KY: Well, being in those five sports in college, Jane of all trades, master of none, it's always my feeling. I wanted the variety, and I really think that helped me in teaching. Because, you know, I never asked anybody in my classes to do something I hadn't done, but the specialization, I'm not a fan. I mean, there's that whole thing that not everybody's going to be a pro sport athlete. And I do think that I'll use the example of when I first went to college, we had a boys volleyball team in high school, not a girls. And just because the boys basketball coach wanted to coach it, you want to have a handle on these kids, you know, get them prepared for basketball. But when I went to college, oh, I can play volleyball. Well, I couldn't. I didn't know anything about it. I mean, I went and tried out. Yeah, I got cut. I did not make it the first team first year. And I thought, well, I'm not going to play volleyball. Well, I decided, "Wait a minute, I can learn this, I can do this. I can understand this game." And so, when I tried out again, of course I made it. But I feel because I coach more basketball or volleyball than anything. Having to learn things from the ground up myself and know that, "Hey, I get that ball over the net?" I mean, kids go through this and they're just struggling and you see the heartache and they're like, "Wait a minute, I can sort of sidearm, underhand, who cares?" You know, get it over the net. But I really believe that the developmental stage that I went through helped me tremendously not only physically to learn the skills, but to understand those that didn't.

PR: That's a huge part. Let me bounce back to when you started back in the early seventies? What was the role of your parents in that experience?

KY: Absolutely nothing.

PR: And that obviously has changed a lot. We now have the helicopter parent that's hovering over every move that is made. Were you experiencing that as a coach by the time we finished that you had the parents hovering? And I don't want to be nostalgic about it, but I feel like that was not a positive development for this.

KY: I don't think it was good for the kid. I don't think it was good for the parents. I certainly don't think it was good for the team. Because it kind of isolated that kid and didn't help them want to get better at things they needed to get better at in order to be a part of. But I got to tell you, I had parents that were critical of me back then. I go to the stands now. They come up to me. The same parents. Would you coach? How come you're not coaching? I had kids that quit because they weren't getting playing time and they wanted me to coach their daughter. So I don't know if that answered your question. That's yeah, that's true. I mean, even this year, I walked into volleyball and someone said that to me. I go, "You know how old I am?" You know, it's like, I'm not going to be coaching anymore. So but that is true. So no, my parents, other than recreational softball, my dad saw me play. My parents never saw me play anything. I was one of the younger ones. So I give them that, you know.

PR: How about let's talk about this group. You obviously mentored people as a coach, young women that you were coaching. Did you mentor anyone in coaching?

KY: When I had my student teachers, they volunteered to come with me. One actually wasn't even interested in coaching and just wanted to be in the facility with me kind of thing. Just, "I just want to watch what you do." So I guess in that respect, yes.

PR: Did you seek that out at all or was it just something that happened?

KY: I would say it's the student teaching part or coaching.

PR: The mentoring of a younger person that's going into coaching. Did you ever really like consciously seek that?

KY: Probably not. When I first came here, I think it was forced on to me by one particular individual that had some we thought was ineligible to play in. Our principal at the time said, "You're going to have her do your stance or something. She's going to be with you." She's going to be part of your program even though she's not eligible to be. So I was like, "That's fine." It's kind of like when I first came here, our principal said there would be no dodgeball. I go "Fine. I've never played it or battle ball, whatever. That won't happen. I'm on board with you on that." But this person told me that she was going to be a part of our team some way because she needed to be a part of that. So, I was accepting of that. I guess I wouldn't say I went out looking for it. And again, probably because of my single demeanor, handling things myself like I wanted to do things the way I felt was right. But I necessarily didn't want to say this is the only way to do it. I wasn't like, I'm going to take you under my wing and make you do it the way I do. I don't think I felt comfortable doing that.

PR: That just reminded me. I wanted to ask this: did you ever aspire to coach at the college level?

KY: You know, I went through that. I did go down and interview once at Viterbo. There's nobody in the stands. When I was going through that, because when we were in college, your brothers came or whatever. There was nobody watching you play there either. And the high school was just so much more fulfilling, I thought as a coach and to be honest with you, you kind of lost your shirt financially if you did it at that time, especially for women. Not that that was a big deal, but you know, I was single, so it was a big deal. You're supporting yourself. So, I didn't really have an urge for that. Because the other thing is, I traveled so much during college. I mean, with all those sports, I was kind of, and I got carsick, so I was kind of sick of it. I was literally sick of it. And I thought in those small colleges and stuff that you'd be coaching in, I mean. And we got to

play Madison. One of the articles I was reading when we played Madison in basketball was like, whoa, Platteville's playing Madison, lost by five points, you know? But the travel that these bigger schools do, it's just not my cup of tea. I just didn't have that desire. It's not that I didn't think I was really qualified, but that's your own perspective of that word. But I didn't really have a desire. I thought the high school game was, this is where enthusiasm is, this is where the development is. And I was more of, and I don't say this to praise myself, but I like the teaching part of it.

PR: So what would you say that you're the most proud of your athletic career? What would be the first thing that you would want someone to know about your career as an athlete?

KY: Making that volleyball team after getting cut. Same thing with badminton. I mean, people laugh at that, but badminton was phenomenal. And I went there thinking, "How long can we keep the bird in there?" But I became an all-conference player in badminton, and played nationally ranked players. Janet Wigglesworth. That helped me in our Badger State games as you know, we played that stuff, and I just thought that was terrific. Basketball, obviously. We played with men's balls. No three pointers and I still think my junior year, I scored a lot, so that's an accomplishment. I enjoyed what I did and I was kind of self-taught in basketball, so I thought, oh, that was me doing that as opposed to some of the others. I don't know if you answered your question there.

PR: How about as a coach? What's your proudest moment, or achievement?

KY: I mentioned that in the 12 years that I coached here, we never finished less than third. But the team that we were seven and five, we had some players that were just still learning. But we went one and six in the first round and lost to teams that you just never lost you in the second round. We beat them all, including West Salem, which was a big rival obviously. So the development and you kind of getting those kids on board that.

PR: Who are some of the kids in that?

KY: Nancy Moldenhauer, Amy Hornby. Let me think who else.

PR: But so the idea that you took them from point A to point B and what was that feeling of getting them to point?

KY: My feeling was always, we can get better the next day. And just even this is a dumb example, and not just with volleyball but team wise convincing them that when you play a ball, the next player wants to make that ball do better things, and then the next one better things. And if you take care of the ball on your own side you control what you do. I mean, Eve and I were just talking about this this morning, nobody goes to a game thinking you want to lose. You go there to win. And I've been accused of like you always want to win. Doesn't everybody? It's just winning, there's lots of definitions of winning. Of course, winning is being successful in what you're attempting and if you only get five points last time. Do you get seven this time? But I think that year in volleyball to take that group. There was another group that I started. Five kids shorter than me. What are we going to do? And you found a way to be successful. You took the best of what they had, and put it together.

PR: And that goes back to your interest or your excitement about staying with high school sports because there you don't have the ability to go find your people that fit your system. You have to change your system.

KY: You have to do with what you have.

PR: That is a fun aspect of it for sure. One more thing, unless you have anything you want to add, feel free. What are you seeing in the current climate with women's sports, what has really changed in the last five years? What are you seeing that you really think is great? What are you hoping for? What would you like to see with women's athletics in general or in our country or in our schools?

KY: Well, my first thought of that, obviously the Caitlin Clarke thing with the little kids going there and they're just like so excited. But to me that, though I'd like to see them get out in the backyard or get to a barn and shoot more hoops, instead of waiting so long to say, well, maybe that's for me for the true enjoyment of it. And not just because your parents want you to or whatever, you know? But I mean, I never even watch professional basketball, I have to admit, prior to her. I really didn't.

PR: Do you think that a lot of people would say that

PR: Yeah, there's runners now high-level high school runners that have their own nutritionist, their own trainer, and the parent is affluent. And that just, it feels off to me.

KY: Yeah, it does. It's overwhelming. And coming from self-taught, so to speak, nobody is pushing me and all that kind of stuff. It's like, do you really need that in order to succeed?

PR: One statistic I want to share with you, and I don't know the exact number, but clearly I know this. I've seen this in a few studies, and a high number of young women are done with athletics at age 13. They're out. And I feel sad to hear that. And that's because of the high level of intensity and pressure that they've started to have on their kids at five or six years old. They're just tired of it by 13. I keep thinking about everything that happens to you after you're 13 years in terms of physical growth.

KY: You don't even know what you don't know with your body. Well, that happened to the setter for Penn State volleyball. She was done, she mentally couldn't even go on. Yeah that's a lot.

PR: So that part of it seems wrong to me. Caitlin Clarke part feels fun and exciting and all of that. And that other part just seems like a cloud. I don't know what the answer is on that.

KY: Yeah. One of the things I brought actually it had something kind of corny. I mean, you don't have to read it now, but I can leave it with you. But I was 21. I answered these questions for the interview, but it talks about the future with professional basketball and stuff like that. I mean, some of it in here I had Tim read it, I go, should I take this because it's like, I feel like I've been through that transition. No Title IX sports, unless people are specializing and do they not want to be in it anymore? I mean, you go through all of it and it's like, what did we do wrong along the way? Some survived, don't get me wrong. Some really prospered from everything they did. But others, it's like, but maybe I was one that just wanted to play, right? And anyway, like I said it's kind of funny when I read it, I go, "Wait a minute, that what you are asking me is what I said." Like I said, sometimes when you answer questions and you're twenty you don't know what you're saying. Because Ethan read it and he said, "Oh, you didn't have to work hard until you got to college." He read that right away. Well, it's like everything was kind of natural. Like, I was as good as I wanted to be. You couldn't show off. You couldn't score all the points. So part of

that, that's what he got out of reading that. So when you read it, but again so old. But that's when I was in college.

PR: I have just one last question then. Then, anything else you want to add. When you stopped coaching, did you struggle with that or did you have any regrets? Or was it just, I'm done and I'll move on?

KY: Well, like I said my ego probably said, how are they going to do without me? You know? But even with the void, there was no doubt. I mean, I was an older mom for sure. I do have to show you one thing. Well, maybe I don't have to show it. I'll just tell you. I wasn't married until, like, I was 37, so I was an old wife, old mother, whatever. But when Tim was in high school, he was an all-conference player. And on the backside of a newspaper that his mother gave us from the Dodgeville Chronicle. We had runners up that year. I was on the other side. So, fate brought us together. So, I'm thinking that I had my time with the coaching and I didn't like how I left it, but now I have time with my family. And that kind of calmed me in that regard for you. Do I feel I could have done it longer? You bet. And I left things in my mind better than I found it. Even though I didn't hear it. A bunch of seniors. But I got to tell you, when I inherited those seniors my first year, I remember in the locker room downstairs having to read them the definition of athletics, because I had eight seniors all knew everything. Even if all eight of you are equal, you all can't play at the same time because there's only six spots. So, I did read them the definition of athletics. So, I had fun, and I was at peace with that. I mean, I go there now and you know, it's hard for me to watch some things. And at first, you know, you don't want to be because like I said, how are they going to do it without you? But they did.



*The 1994 Tiger Volleyball Team  
WIAA Division 2 State Qualifiers*

## Biography: Mary Schultz Rykken

Mary Schultz Rykken was born on September 14, 1958, in Jamestown, North Dakota, and grew up in Valley City as the youngest of four siblings. She attended St. Katherine's Elementary School through eighth grade and entered Valley City High School in 1972, just as athletic programs for girls were beginning to take shape. Even before that shift, she had found her way into competition—running track and field as an eighth grader and playing slow-pitch softball during the summers. Mary was 14 years old when Title IX became law in 1972.

By 1973, she joined the emerging girls' basketball program and quickly became a starter on that early team. That same spring, she ran on Valley City's mile-relay squad that captured a state championship as part of a dominant girls' track and field team. As a junior in 1974, she played in North Dakota's first State Girls' Basketball Tournament and was named the Most Valuable Player on her Valley City team.

She transferred to Fargo South High School for her senior year, where she played basketball for Collette Folstad, who also coached at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. Her first coaching experience came during this period as well, working at the Otter Tail Basketball Camps in Fergus Falls. Coach Folstad later recruited her to play at Concordia, where she majored in physical education and health. She became a four-year starter on the basketball team and the second woman in school history to surpass 1,000 career points. During her time there, her teams won two Minnesota collegiate championships, in 1978 and 1979, qualifying for the Division 3 MAIW Regional, where she was selected for the All-Tournament Team in 1979. She also competed in Field Hockey for four years, serving as captain during her senior season.



Mary began her teaching and coaching career at West Fargo High School in the fall of 1980, assisting in girls' basketball and track and field. During the early 1980s, she also played amateur fastpitch softball in Fargo as a first baseman, competing in a national tournament in Phoenix, Arizona.

Over a 31-year career, she coached at West Fargo High School (ND), Moorhead High School (MN), and Black River Falls High School (WI), guiding basketball and track athletes at multiple levels. From 1991 to 2011, she also led the Black River Falls softball program, including devoting her summers to coaching. Her teams compiled a 275–156 record, captured six Coulee Conference championships and four regional titles, and advanced to WIAA Sectional play four times.

Mary met her husband, Paul Rykken, in 1977 when both were playing basketball at Concordia College. They married in 1980 and raised three children—Kathryn, Jake, and Megan—and now enjoy nine grandchildren. Among her most meaningful experiences as a coach was the opportunity to coach both of her daughters in basketball and softball, weaving family and sport into a shared legacy.

## **Mary Schultz Rykken: Player Turned Coach**

Paul Rykken: We're here doing the Falls History Project for 2025. It's our 25th anniversary and our topic, in general, is Title IX. That was legislation passed in the early seventies that made it possible for women to have sports programming that was somewhat equitable to men and so we're interviewing for people, and this is our first interview today. And would you start by just giving us your full name and your date of birth and place of birth?

Mary Rykken: My name is Mary Beth Schultz Rykken, and I was born in Jamestown, North Dakota, September 14th, 1958.

Paul Rykken: So, we're going to talk first about your earliest years and some memories about sports from your earliest years. Take us back to your earliest memory of participating in sports and if you can remember, you know at the same time, giving us the perception that girls sports might have had at that time.

Mary Rykken: The only sport that was available was summer softball. And I don't remember what year that came about. So the athletics was very limited at the time.

PR: So let's go back a bit. You would have been in elementary school starting in about 1964 and you were going to a Catholic school, and did you do anything sports-wise, like even if it was just informal recess?

MR: We always competed with kickball and things, but I guess we got a female Phy Ed teacher.

PR: And what year in school would you have been when that was happening?

MR: Middle school. And it was Mrs. Rounds

PR: I've heard about her before. So, you're in now what we would at that time have called junior high. And you had this Phy Ed teacher at a Catholic school. And I think you've told me before that she was not a nun. And what was it about her that you remember? Why does her name, you know, stick with you all these years later?

MR: She wasn't a nun, and she brought basketball in.

PR: Was she young?

MR: She was very young. She was probably in her mid-twenties, I suppose.

PR: And did she play herself?

MR: Oh, I don't know about that because, well, she didn't play with us. She brought in the Iowa system.

PR: Three and three kind of thing, or?

MR: The Iowa rules where one or two could go the lane and the other people played defense.

PR: Gotcha. Okay. So this would have been in the late sixties, early seventies. So not a lot in your junior high. So then you go to high school. And where did you go to high school?

MR: I went to high school at the regular high school in eighth grade. They shut down the high school at St. Kate's where I was going before, so we went to the public school. Valley City High School, North Dakota.

PR: Okay, so now you're in ninth grade and that would've been about 1972. So 1972 is the year that Title IX passed. So you're in your ninth grade year. What, then, do you remember from that part of high school? Were you immediately involved in sports?

MR: They had basketball and track, I think that year. Okay. But they also still had the GAA.

PR: Okay. Tell us about GAA. What was GAA? What does it stand for?

MR: Girls Athletic Association. They did a lot of gymnastics, which I was not flexible and could not participate in. I think we played a little basketball.

PR: So, what would you do? Just meet at night?

MR: Yeah, it was just a certain time at night that the girls would come and participate in some different thing.

PR: Was there a lot of participation?

MR: Not with the gymnastics, but once basketball was there and track and then they did cross country also there was quite a bit of participation.

PR: So did you first experience playing basketball, organized basketball as a ninth grader? 10th grader -- do you remember?

MR: I played right away. As a ninth grader for Ted Nathan.

PR: Okay. So they had a girls basketball team at Valley City High School in 1972. And I wonder if it was one of the very first teams.

MR: Well, at Valley City. Oh, I'm sure it was. And it wasn't real, it was organized enough, but we didn't have that many games. Our first game was in Sharon, North Dakota.

PR: You remember that? Were you one of the main players?

MR: I remember playing a lot, but we had to dress. We dressed in the cloakroom.

PR: So there was no locker room?

MR: No doors, either. And then the gym was a quonset, a square quonset. So the people's feet were almost on the floor.

PR: Were there spectators there?

MR: Yeah, there were a few. And I had to guard a 6'3" girl.

PR: You know, you were how tall? 5'8"? 5'9"? But you were like one of the taller ones on the team.

MR: That's true.

PR: So you said you had a few games?

MR: We had a few games. Probably the next year they added like a district tournament. And that was it.

PR: Okay. No state tournament?

MR: No state tournaments, nothing beyond that.

PR: So as you go up the line you also in that same year, which would have been your freshman year, you were in track. And do you think they had track before that year?

MR: They didn't have it for the girls before that year.

PR: So you're right in the opening gate. And who was the coach?

MR: Bill Jansen and Tim Schilling. They were there for years and years. On the boy's side, they were legendary.

PR: And then they brought in the girls. And I'm just curious about that just because it's different from the basketball story, were your practices coed? Like were you practicing with the boys or how did that work in track?

MR: I think we would all run up to, trying to think of what it was, Cemetery Ridge. So we had a long run. And then there was a road up on top around the cemetery where we would do workouts.

PR: And the reason I ask about that is that that really changed the dynamics for sports to suddenly have girls and boys participating, together.

MR: Well, the first year I was there we ran on the cinder track. And there were a few meets, or a few contests, but not a lot. By the time I was a sophomore, there were state titles.

PR: Okay. So that's interesting to me because again, that's 1972 and that's the year that the title IX passed. So, you were able to see an immediate impact. And I'm sure no one was saying anything about Title IX or, you know, using that expression. But things were happening behind the scenes that were changing your career. You mentioned the cloak room, you know, getting dressed there and obviously that was different. Did you feel like it was unequal between the boys and girls? Were you thinking about that or were you just going along with what was happening?

MR: We were just happy to be competing, to do anything.

PR: By the time you get to be a sophomore, or junior, then you're certain to see things flesh out a little bit more. There are state tournaments. Did you play in a state basketball tournament at Valley City?

MR: I did. But that was, I think, as a junior.

PR: And you also ran the state track meet.

MR: Right. We won that title.

PR: You won the state championship as a track team. And didn't you run on a team that was a state champion? The four by four?

MR: Yeah.

PR: So you were this girl that was ready to do this kind of stuff. You were excited about it and jumped into it. Valley city, it sounds like they were progressive, a little bit, like they jumped in quick. Cause I'm in high school at the same time. And I don't remember a lot of things happening yet. West Fargo. Then things shifted for you because your family moved and you ended up in Fargo, and you had a choice of schools to go to. Tell us a little bit about that. You chose to go where?



MR: I went to Fargo South because I knew a couple of the girls on the team. I probably had 120 in my class in Valley. And then going to Fargo South. That was over 500.

PR: Correct. So you were now in a bigger venue. And much more competition, etc.. At Fargo South, did you compete in both basketball and track?

MR: Yes.

PR: And it was there that you got connected with a woman that I think we should mention here, because she was certainly one of the pioneers of Title IX in North Dakota. That was?

MR: Collette Folstad. She came from Ayr. Ayr in North Dakota. The Ayr Riflettes. And they would go do clinics at schools. And then play those schools. So, their record was very good, obviously. And then she had that connection between Concordia and Fargo South.

PR: Yeah. And we should explain that because basketball in North Dakota for girls at that time was played in the fall. And so, she went from that, and then she also was the head basketball coach.

MR: At Concordia during the winter.

PR: And Concordia (Moorhead) is a Division Three school. So at South, you had that experience with her and then you?

MR: I went on and played at Concordia for her.

PR: And I got to go back to South for a minute. Did you have state tournament experiences at Fargo South? You were there one year.

MR: Not in basketball but in track. I was in the state tournament. I qualified, and they opened 400, the 4 x 400 relay and the high jump.

PR: Who was your coach if you remember?

MR: Ms. Cassette, I believe.

PR: And that was a separate program from the boys.

MR: Yeah, theirs was separate, but these were bigger programs.

PR: So, you've gone from nothing except a little bit of informal summer softball to GAA to some fledgling programs, to a stronger program, and now you're recruited to play college basketball. And that must have been a big deal for you to be taking it to another level.

MR: Yeah, I think so. I was pretty excited and I think there were eight freshmen that came in with me. And they displaced older kids.



**1978-79 Concordia College Basketball Team  
Minnesota Division 3 College Champions**

PR: Ironically enough, you would have had more experience, even some of the older ones. It is interesting. So at that point you also, if I remember correctly, you were working in the summer at basketball camps. And did that start right away or were you in high school, and that started or?

MR: I think as a senior, after my senior year in high school, I worked at Otter basketball camp and then I continued through the four summers that I was competing in college.

PR: And that's another interesting thing because now you have summer camps for where they are going to develop their skills. And I mean that that tells me it's starting to ramp up. So now we're talking about 1975, 76, 77. All right. Again, you guys weren't necessarily having discussions about Title nine and everything, but could you feel that things were changing? Could you sense that there was a movement or momentum for this, or were you just doing it?

MR: I guess I was just doing it. I wasn't thinking a lot about it. I know when I got to myself teaching, I could see some of the inequities.

PR: Let me back up first. If you're going to tell somebody now about your accomplishments, we know that you had some high school success for sure, but what about your college experience? Tell us what your athletic experience is like in college. You didn't just play basketball, right?

MR: I played field hockey to get into shape for basketball.

PR: And I'm guessing you'd never experienced field hockey before?

MR: No, never.

PR: Did you play for four years?

MR: Yes, I played for four years.

PR: So that sport was a new thing for you. Then you went through four intense basketball seasons, played varsity all the way through.

MR: Yeah, I was a four-year starter.

PR: And what other accomplishments would you cite? And I know you're not a person that likes to brag about things, but as a college basketball player, what else would you say?

MR: I was one of two first to reach a thousand points.

PR: Okay. Who was the first one?



MR: Coral Beske.

PR: I didn't know that. Interesting.  
So that was a big accomplishment.

MR: That and for two years I led  
assists.

PR: Which is something to be  
proud of. And then you were on to  
Minnesota Collegiate to state  
championships.

MR: To two state championship  
teams. So, we went on to regional  
tournaments. Yeah, but we got  
beat in those.

**Player of the week**

This week's player of the week is field hockey co-captain Mary Schultz. Mary, a senior and fourth year player from Baker, Minn., earned the honor with her outstanding offensive play and defensive efforts in last weekend's tournament.

As center thrust on the women's team, Mary scored two goals in Saturday's victory over South Dakota State University. Coupled with her consistent defensive performance, Mary has played a large role in the Cobber efforts this year.

**Mary Schultz**

Looking at the team this season Mary says "We've got a lot of potential; we just have to put it all together."

Coach Nellermoe attributes Mary's field hockey success to the fact that "she's a very competitive person." She adds, "Mary has good ball sense, she knows her position, and she knows what to do because of her experience."

Mary is a physical education and coaching major with a health minor. Her future plans include graduation this spring and a May 10 wedding.

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PR: What I'm getting at here is you had developed at that point into quite a skilled athlete who had come from the pre-Title IX era and transitioned in at the very beginning of it and now it's starting to accelerate. Now, when did you start thinking about being a coach? I want to make that transition. You went to college and what did you study?

MR: I got a Phy Ed and coaching degree. And because of Phy Ed, I just figured it was natural to also coach.

PR: Was there anybody, or was there like an inspiration for coaching? Did somebody get you excited about that?

MR: Collette, you know, was probably a role model for me (Collette Folstad).

PR: And there was the track coach there at the time (Joyce Prokop). I remember her, and it seemed like she had an influence on you for coaching.

MR: Yeah, definitely. And she was more of an inspiration to do well and have confidence.

PR: And, you know, the interesting thing about her is that I remember her very well, and she already was older. I remember she wasn't as old as I think she looked to me at that time.

MR: She had been at it for quite a few years, I think.

PR: She wouldn't have had much of that in her background. So those women that were doing that were really, they were pioneers. That was the real thing. So were friends of yours that you were playing basketball with, were they also looking at coaching? Like were there several of you that wanted to coach?

MR: I'm not sure. We didn't talk about it. I'm trying to think if Becky Dooley probably coached beyond. I don't know if Cindy Hudson did, I could definitely see like Nancy Halda coaching beyond.

PR: Yeah, I'm sure several of them did, but I wouldn't know exactly which ones. So, when you get out into it now, I know your first coaching experiences were at summer basketball camps, which was great preparation. Your first coaching would have been in West Fargo? And this is where our stories that intersected before that we are going to get into that. But we were coaching together.

MR: Right, we coached some basketball camps in the summer at West Fargo. And then we ended up coaching together in track with some other friends of ours.

PR: Yeah, and I was a person because of my kind of unique experiences. I was also on the ground floor of a lot of women's sports, and I've never even thought about that until doing this project. I coached women's teams, you know, five years into Title IX.

MR: And during those summer camps, we had boys and girls together. At least the middle school and below.

PR: But our track coaching was the women's track there. And I had gone out as a coach myself coaching both cross-country and girl's basketball before I came to West Fargo. And anyway, that's part of the back story here. So we're at this early phase of your coaching and let's just talk about that a little bit. First, how long did you coach? How many years did you do it?

MR: I think it was 32 years. I believe.

PR: So, you went from pre-Title IX and then coached 32 years into a career. One of the reasons we wanted to interview you is because you are one that stayed in it long enough to coach your own daughters, which is a big deal.

PR: How would you describe yourself as a coach? What was your approach?

MR: I was probably a little bit too competitive, because I was more intense than the girls were at first. I had to get past that.

PR: That may have stayed that way for a long time.

MR: I think it did. And I didn't stay in basketball for quite a long time, maybe because of that.

PR: Yeah, and I think to go into coaching, you have to be competitive. But did you see your role with them as being a mentor, or were you putting yourself in this kind of trajectory of women's sports or just doing it?

MR: I was just doing it because I enjoyed it. I really liked the kids and I liked the sports.

PR: Now, as a coach, you did both assisting and head coaching. Your main head coaching was in softball. And how many years did you do that?

MR: I believe it was 22 years here in Black River Falls.



*Kate and Meg Rykken 2025*

PR: And if somebody asked you about your coaching career in Black River with softball, what would be the things that you would say you were proud of? What comes to mind?

MR: I think the biggest thing would be a role model.

PR: That's interesting. You didn't say that you won several championships. Which is interesting to me because I know that was important to you. But the idea that you were giving them a legitimate role model of a woman that was doing this. And you were often up against men when you coached. Right?

MR: At the beginning, there weren't a lot of females in coaching. When I got out, there were many more women involved in coaching.

PR: Did you ever feel like you were not treated well or not treated with respect by men?

MR: There were always a few that really didn't treat me well.

PR: And how did that come across? Like what would be the cue?

MR: I don't know. It took me a long time to get the acceptance from them. And when we were finally able to beat them, the respect came.

**From Kirstie Danielson: Received 8 May 2026**

Regarding Coach Rykken, my most poignant takeaways from those years were seeing a role model as both a great coach/teacher and as a mother of a growing family and balancing those. Showing us girls what Title IX was all about: ensuring equal opportunity in athletics, academics, and school services, while also covering sexual harassment and pregnancy discrimination. I also think I learned the most technically from Coach Rykken with regard to hitting and pitching during my last two years.

PR: Then they finally respected you. Did you ever officiate?

I know I can speak for hundreds if not thousands of young girls from BRF over the years who benefited from the daily commitment of these and other women to our development and future. None of these pivotal experiences and memories would be possible without our "foremothers." We would not be where we today are without them!

MR: No, no. I didn't want to officiate.

PR: You just stayed with the coaching. So by the time you were done, which was in the twenty teens: 2013, 2014, 2015. Right in there. You were done coaching at that point. This is a hard question, but what had changed from the experiences for women athletes at that point? What's different now by the time you're done from when you started?

MR: Lots of things had changed. We had more athletes involved in AAU, which took them away from the school programs. Just the amount of exposure that they would have because, you know, we go onto the TV now and we see the World Series softball, every game is on. The NCAA basketball tournament, every game is on. Now, the WNBA is big. Just the money that's put into them, and all the opportunities they have.

PR: And on balance, do you think that's positive?

MR: I think so.

PR: Because it also meant that some of the downside or negative side of sport comes in a little harder, too. Early on with girls it felt like it was fun. And it wasn't high pressure. It wasn't high stakes. Now, the young women coming through, are experiencing the same pressures that the boys are.

MR: Right. Some of the parents would be very competitive, and put a lot of pressure on the girls, and on me.

PR: How did you manage that?

MR: I don't know. I got lots of letters.

PR: Yeah, not always complimentary. Everybody knows how to coach softball, right?

MR: Right. Or thinks their daughter was... I mean, it's a team. It's not one person. So to get some of those ideas across, it wasn't always easy.

PR: Have you had any of your players that have gone into coaching that you're aware of?

MR: Jill Janke went into coaching. I think Kim Hegne went into coaching. I'm not sure about it. I really have to think about that one. And what became of them. I know I had players that went on and did really well in college playing softball.

PR: That's for sure. You had some kids that did well. Who else besides? I mean the first one that comes to mind is Jill. Janke, but is there someone else that played beyond that?

MR: Kim Hagne did. Four years in Illinois.

PR: Those two. And they were dynamic pitchers as high school players.

MR: I don't know if Jill pitched in college. She played first base and then they won the national title.

PR: With her hitting the home run to win it. Pretty amazing. What was it like to coach your daughters? How would you describe that?

MR: I enjoyed coaching my daughters. Sometimes not with Megan, but with Katie. They questioned, you know, why I was playing her, and that was frustrating, but she was a good first baseman.

PR: Was she aware of that when that happened?

MR: I think, as a senior, she found out about it and was really disgusted.

PR: Yeah, hard on her, made her feel self-conscious. But you had that opportunity and that's unique. In fact, Megan, if I remember correctly, Megan pitched a game that was the 250th victory or something for you as a coach. And that was a moment that I'm sure you'll never forget.

MR: Yeah, they didn't really question me playing Megan, which was a little easier, but just because she could prove herself.

PR: Well part of it was that she was pitching. Pitching is black and white. Whereas the other things become subjective decision making. And that's the hard part about it. So if you project out in the future, is there anything that you would like to see for women's athletics that isn't happening? Or is it all kind of coming to fruition at this point?

MR: I wish they would emphasize more multi-sport athletes coming into the college level, because it's just so valuable to me competing in other things and not spending 24-7 on one sport.

PR: Correct. Which is what's happening, right?

MR: We've had lots of athletes all of a sudden become one sport. And there's just so much more chance of burnout and an injury. And I think the school sports are, they're not benefiting from having the best athletes, they're losing them.

PR: Do you think that young women should be coached by women, or do you think it works for men to coach young women?

MR: I think it's nice if they can sometime during their career have a female coach. I can't say that males are a detriment.

PR: It's case by case. It's interesting and coaching, there's so many intangibles in coaching that it's hard to pigeonhole. Well, last question. What would you say you're most proud of in your journey through athletics? Like, what stands out to you? Something you're just proud of. I know you did say earlier that you were glad to be a role model.

MR: I think the State Titles as a college player is unique. And scoring a thousand points without a three-point line. And they didn't have that maybe until I was a senior in college. I don't think I ever took a three-point shot. In high school, I think it was that I was able to do it as long as I did the coaching. Through babies, you know. And teaching and family.

PR: That's a valid thing that we didn't cover earlier. Many of your contemporaries.

MR: As soon as they got married and started having babies, they quit.

PR: Correct. And that you were able to kind of power through that. Part of it was our household was a coaching household. We had a lot of you know, because I would say this and I'm sure you would say it as well. You can't coach at the varsity level if your spouse isn't supportive of it.

MR: Right. So, you need a supportive husband and in-laws.

PR: Because you just can't do it because there's too much time away. People don't understand the amount of time that goes into coaching. You didn't say anything, or I didn't ask any questions. But you spent 20 summers or more running around with girls softball. You weren't being paid a dime for that.

MR: It was assumed that you'd take the summer program. And luckily, I had people along the way that would help. Linda Janke took the reins for a couple summers. Who else did?

PR: I think Mike Kappen stepped up. You had others along the way. Parents did get involved. But the bottom line was you were the one that had to organize travel.

MR: Right. Make sure we had enough players. That was hard during the summers to communicate. And make sure we had enough players going.

PR: Well we thank you very much for this interview and we will keep you posted on the progress of the project throughout the way. So thank you very much.



**2004 Tiger Softball Team**  
**Coulee Conference Champions: 4<sup>th</sup> Straight Year**

## Biography: Holly Smith

Holly Smith was born on December 20, 1954, and grew up in Glenview, Illinois, the third of four children. She was the one who carried her love of athletics and education into a lifelong career. Always active, she spent her childhood outdoors with neighborhood friends and attended a Catholic grade school where gym classes included roller skating, swimming, and even marching—early hints of the physicality that would shape her future.

High school opened the door to organized competition. From 1970 to 1973 she served as a Physical Education Leader and participated in the Girls Athletic Association, playing volleyball, badminton, bowling, and softball. Her senior year coincided with the arrival of Title IX, and she stepped immediately into interscholastic sports. She competed in volleyball, badminton—winning the conference championship at #1 singles—and track. That same year, she was named the school's first Female Athlete of the Year. Holly attended George Williams College in Illinois, earning a bachelor's degree in physical education. After graduation, she returned to her high school to coach volleyball, basketball, gymnastics, and track from 1978 to 1986.



She moved to Black River Falls in 1986 and began a 23-year run coaching middle school basketball. In 1987 she joined the high school volleyball program as an assistant coach, later moving to middle school volleyball in 1996, where she remained until 2017 to help prepare younger athletes for the high school program. She also served as an assistant softball coach at the high school until 1988, becoming head coach in 1989 before transitioning into the head track coach position.

Holly's coaching career is marked by significant accomplishments. Her softball team qualified for the state tournament in 1989, her first year as head coach. In 1991 she became the head track coach, a role she held for 24 years. Under her leadership, athletes earned 88 All-Conference awards, competed in 112 sectional events, and captured a regional championship in 2016. Nineteen female athletes qualified for the State Track Meet during her tenure—many of them multiple-time qualifiers and medal winners.

She credits these achievements to the athletes' work ethic, the unwavering support of families, the dedication of exceptional assistant coaches, and the expanded opportunities Title IX created for generations of female athletes.

### Holly Smith: Coach

Lily Sullivan: Can you please state your name, date of birth, and place of birth?

Holly Smith: Holly Smith. My date of birth is 12/20/1954. So, I am 70 years old, almost 71. And I was born in Glenview, Illinois.

Lily Sullivan: Awesome. Can you tell me your earliest memories of participating in sports?

Holly Smith: I have a very interesting story because I was in a Catholic school until high school and it was mostly nuns. We did have a Phy Ed program, except that it was an ex-military man

and the complex had a roller rink and a swimming pool. So, the only athletics I did until high school was swimming, roller skating, and I learned how to march. We did a lot of marching.

Paul Rykken: A disciplinary type of thing.

HS: Yes, exactly. And so, until I got to high school, I had four siblings and it was too expensive for my two older siblings, for my family to put them into a Catholic school. So, I went to a public school. So it was my first chance to really become athletic because it was a real Phy Ed program. You did different sports. I was very lucky because the school had a program that students that had more ability and that were helpful could join a student leadership program. So I became a Phy Ed leader from sophomore year through the rest of high school. So, I assisted the teacher with the classroom or the Phy Ed class as we went along.

Paul Rykken: That'd been about 1970?



HS: I graduated in '73, so '71 was the first year that I did that and did it for three years, and it was very hand-picked. So that's where I first got a chance to start really learning about athletics and helping people with athletics. So it was a really nice program for me because I was athletic to begin with.

PR: And I'm assuming at that point it was male Phy Ed classes and female Phy Ed classes.

HS: Very separate. Yes. It was a huge school. And we had many gyms, so we never saw the boys. We did have a Girls Athletic Association for the first three years of my high school, which also got me into athletics, but it was an intramural program. So we competed against just our own class, you know, different classes and things. My senior year is when Title IX came to our area, to Illinois. And so it was the first time I was able to compete interscholastically. The one thing about the area I went to school in is that badminton was a very big sport. So even though it was intramural, we did compete against other schools for my whole four years. So when it came to Title IX then it actually had a conference championship. So I was the number one singles conference champion the first year that Title IX started, in badminton. And I was also the first female athlete for North High School where I went in Skokie.

PR: Explain that a little further.

HS: So boys always had a male athlete of the year. I was the female athlete of the Year, first female athlete of the year because it was the first official year that we had sports. I played other sports. I played volleyball, badminton was during basketball, and I played softball during intramurals. But my senior year I went into track, which is how I got interested in track, and held the records for throwing in track because I was the first. So that's how I got started, really going from a Catholic school into a public school where you had many more opportunities, too. And we had I mean, I was president of the Girls Athletic Association. It was pretty big, my graduating class was a thousand people, so there were a lot of girls that were involved in different sports. And my different weird sports bowling was one of them. It's not something you hear very often.

LS: And so when you graduated high school, what did that shift kind of look like? Or when did you start to realize you wanted to be further involved in women's sports?

HS: I went to George Williams College, and I chose that college because it was geared more towards teaching special education, although it had other things, it was a commuter college. It did have a small place where you could stay. By that time, I had a single mother, so I traveled an hour to get to school and back because my two older siblings were out of the household and I had a younger sibling, so I was traveling so that it could help at home. I did play softball one year there, but it just became too much to do athletics in college because I needed to help pay for my college. It was a small college, so it was expensive. So it wasn't until I graduated with my Phy Ed degree that I went back to my high school and became a coach there.

LS: And when you became a coach, what was the process for that or how did you get into coaching?

HS: That was simple because obviously they knew me. It wasn't something that I had to sell myself. I was their first female athlete of the year, so they knew I had experience as an athlete. I was in the program that helped in the Phy Ed class. So I had no problem becoming a coach. And at that time, when they hired people, it was very easy to get coaching because girls' athletics was still pretty new, and there weren't a lot of people that wanted to spend as much time coaching as it takes. So I really did not have to fight my way into coaching. I coached volleyball my first couple of years. I was a gymnastics coach, which I knew nothing about. It's hard to believe. And I was a track and field coach, and I was very lucky that I was an assistant coach in track. And I, obviously, became a throwing coach and was lucky enough to coach a couple of girls there to State. But because I started out so early when I was still in high school as a track athlete, I never had a coach who knew how to teach throwing. So I actually self-taught myself. I would read it in books and become pretty successful.

LS: And once you had become a coach, what were some of the challenges you faced, whether by the community or institutional support? Recognition?

HS: I always had support from the school, obviously, because we were a big school. Winning was rather important. And the athletes I never had problems getting enough athletes ever, because there were always plenty of those. I was blessed with some very good coaches in basketball. I was an assistant coach and had a gentleman that was a very winning coach, so I learned a lot from that. So as my career went on, I was lucky enough to have people that could enrich my understanding of different sports. And so in my mind, I became a better coach because I was able to listen and learn from them because I, you know, like a lot of people, I thought I knew everything. But you don't know what you don't know.

PR: All right. Wow. So you're there for eight years? Seven years?

HS: I graduated in '77 and I came here in '86.

PR: So, a solid eight years. And that was your high school that you had graduated from?

HS: Yes.

PR: Okay. When you came here, there's a couple of things. I'll check some dates with you later.

HS: Yeah, thanks I might be off on some of them.

PR: That's all good. But you came in immediately here. And what were you doing in the school system here?

HS: I was coaching. I was subbing my first year, and I'm pretty sure that they needed some basketball coaching. It was the Rosine era. And so, there were more traveling teams than school teams. So, I started out that way and then transitioned with that group, I believe, into the school system itself.

PR: But were you working in special ed?

HS: The first year I was just a sub, then the second year and on I was in special ed.

PR: And it looks like you were also working with middle school volleyball or high school ball?

HS: High school volleyball. First, I was Kitti's assistant volleyball coach for several years and then we decided as a group that it would be better to move to the middle school and help prepare them to be more acclimated to what happened at the high school then just come in. Because at one point in the high school I went from J.V. to freshman and Deb took over as the JV coach. And it was too frustrating because it would take a third of the season just to teach them how to play high school volleyball. And so that was a joint decision that it would be better to have. And I agreed to go to a lower level and help. I mean, it's not that they couldn't learn what was going on. They just needed to be encouraged to learn.

PR: Was that the start of the middle school volleyball or did they have it?

HS: They had Mary. I believe Mary Mack was a coach at that point. And I think she was wanting to get out of it.

PR: Think ahead on the next question. But I want to drill down on one thing here. Who was the softball coach when you came?

HS: Kitti. I worked with Kitti.

PR: And you assisted Kitti with softball. So, you were working with her both volleyball and softball. And by the time of this event?

HS: The year before this, Kitti retired from softball. So, I inherited this lovely team. And took them to the state tournament.

**From Kirstie Danielson: Received 8 May 2026**

My favorite memories with Coach Smith were going to the State Softball Tournament at Carroll College my freshman year in spring 1989. That year she helped build a team that quickly bonded over the common goal of improving, supporting each other, and winning. As a freshman, it was quite overwhelming to be on the varsity team, but Coach Smith saw potential in me . . . so much so that when our catcher was out of the first game of the season, she put me in to catch (fyi, I had never caught before!). Fortunately, I had caught for Mary D for years in the yard or street growing up. I was thankful to quickly transition after that to left field! We didn't win our game at the State Tournament, but it was an amazing bonding experience.

PR: And what you had on that team was Mary.

HS: Mary D.

PR: She was a great pitcher.

HS: And great other players that could hit and everything else.

PR: And just one other thing and then I'll turn it over. But I'm certain that my wife replaced you as head softball coach. Because that's in '91.

HS: I asked her yesterday and then I couldn't remember when it was. I had the opportunity to coach track, which was my strength. Softball was not my strength. I played, you know, summer softball and things. But I begged her to take softball so that I could go to the track program. And I don't remember.

PR: I was with Cross Country but not track until 2002.

HS: Okay. But what happened was the track program was very minute, but there were not many people. To me, my first job was trying to build the program. And I was lucky enough to have Mr. Rykken recruiting athletes or non-athletes and convincing them that they could become athletes.

PR: I think what you're alluding to there is I was working with Distance Runners, so we were always looking for kids to get involved in track. But it took a long time to get that going. With the boys it was different, but with the girls, it was more of a fledgling situation at the time, although there had been some good track athletes.

HS: There were. Softball was a very big sport. And so, we lost a lot of athletes that went to softball instead of going to track. And you know, unfortunately, at times softball would struggle because it's two different sports.

PR: All right. Let's shift that. We've got that. I get that timeline. Yeah, that makes perfect sense now that we laid it out there. But anyway...

LS: And then from your coaching journey, are there any younger women that you can point to as having mentored?

HS: My philosophy has always been, once I went to coaching, was that the athletes that I had on my team, they had to be able to learn how to teach younger athletes how to play that sport. And so there was, especially in track, the middle school practiced at the same time as the high school did. And so my philosophy was: you could learn how to be a better athlete if you knew how

## Sports



Black River Falls Track and Field  
Cautlee Conference Meet

### Laudon, Rockney pace Tiger girls at Conference meet

By Randy L. Herman

With the track and field season quickly winding down, it was time for the Cautlee Conference to hold its conference meet, this spring at West Salem High School.

Despite rain threatening the area for most of the day, several Tiger girls earned All-Conference honors on the day.

The Tigers finished third overall with 122 team points behind last year's Division Three state champion Arcadia. The top three finishers in each event earn All-Conference honors.

Caitlin Laudon grabbed the gold in the 200-meter dash and the triple jump. Laudon hit a personal best jump of 33'11" to win the event. She placed second in the 400-meter dash setting a new school record time of 61.02. Krissa Tomter set the

record in 1988.

Stacy Gates came up with two personal best efforts as well for coach Holly Smith. Gates was second in the discus with a throw of 94'3" and then she placed third in the shot put with a 34'4.25' try.

Another Tiger competitor, Michaela Rockney who hit a personal best throw of 35'7.75", won the shot put.

Brooke Stittsburg placed second in the 300-meter hurdles while Jordyn Marg earned Honorable Mention All-Conference with a third place finish in the long jump.

In the grueling 3200-meter run, BRF's Debrae Pettibone came from behind to finish third and Samantha Cooper finished third in the 100-meter hurdles adding a seventh place finish in the 300-meter hurdles.

The 2300-meter relay team

of Sami Smetana, Beth Wessel, Brittany Tortolison and Amanda Schmitz placed third also on the day.

Other girls also placing on the day included Katy Zahre, fourth in the pole vault; Anna Drexel fifth in the 3200-meter run; Mackenzie Mills fifth in the high jump; Annelie Schmittel seventh in the high jump and eighth in the triple jump. Beth Wessel sixth in the 800-meter run and Sami Smetana eighth in the 400-meter dash.

Three other Tiger relay teams placed in the top five on the day. Cooper, Marg and Jennie Teeple were fifth in the 800-meter relay event. Teeple, Schmittel and Katrina Pettibone teams for a fifth place in the 400-meter relay while Marg, Smetana, Stittsburg and Laudon were fifth in the 1600-meter relay.

#### First Teamer

Michaela Rockney was one of several Tiger girls performing well at the West Salem Cautlee Conference meet Saturday. Rockney threw a personal best 35'7.75 inches in the shot put competition to earn First-Team All-Conference honors. The throw was the best of Rockney's career to date.

Photo by Dave Meyer

to tell somebody else how to do what you were trying to do. And so that was always my philosophy, as the older ones had to be part of teaching the younger ones. Mary Danielson is probably one of the great examples of, you know, mentoring younger kids. My throwers, I mean, I can just name a lot of them that may not have been great throwers but were great mentors and had younger ones that did very, very well.

LS: And then when you were a coach and looking back on it now, can you tell me what you're most proud of?

HS: Oh, yeah, that's one that I struggled with when I read the questions. I've always gone back to, I try to teach the physical, social, and emotional part of sports. And I think the biggest accomplishment, right now, is the number of athletes that I coached that are now coaches in this district or in other districts. And there are a lot of them. And there are some great ones that are right here. Mary Danielson, Kayla, that's taken over for the track program. Even though she was one of yours, she was still in the same program of having to teach the younger kids what it meant and, you know, there's been others that have helped here. Cody Zahrt was a great thrower for me who has been working with the program, the track program. Now, when he was the coach at UW-Stout for throwers, he was helping my students there. I always believed that I was not the greatest coach in the world. There were others that were better than me. And I always encouraged kids. If you could find somebody that can tell you something different in a different approach, that's something you want to do. And so, I had many, many throwers, because I work mostly with throwers in track, I had many of them go and work with Cody at UW-Stout to become even better throwers. And they were ones that won medals at the state track meet. I mean, some of them didn't work with him. They worked just with me.

PR: Is there anything that you'd like to cover that we haven't gotten to?

HS: Not that I can think of.

PR: One of the things I didn't realize until I started doing this project was that when I started, the girls' sports were new. And for some reason, I didn't put that together in my brain until I was doing this. What would you say to or what would you like young women to know now about that period of time when you were coming up the line? And what would you think they should know about that period?

HS: Okay. So, I think the big thing to me is that you look at it now and women's sports are finally being shown on TV.

PR: It's true. And the last couple, Caitlin Clarke.

HS: Yes, Caitlin Clark is a big thing. But even if you go back to "Good Morning America," Robin Roberts. And you know, there's not a lot of them, but you're now starting, you know, it started back and with Robin when she started showing that an athlete could become more than just an athlete and be a female. And nowadays you're getting more and more you know, like right now you can hear people are watching more WNBA than they are NBA. And so, the women are finally starting to get more recognition for the hard work that they're doing. I think that's one of the biggest changes. I mean, I came from a high school where my graduating class, the boy's gymnastics team, was undefeated in the four years I was in high school. But they never mentioned anything about it because our girls didn't start real athletics until we were seniors.

PR: Girls wanted to play. When we get that story several times and, in our interviews, up to this point that girls went to someone. And said, "Would you coach us?" It's just such a great story.

HS: Well, and I mean, it's true, because when I started in high school, there was nobody that knew how to coach a thrower. So, I'd be out in the middle of nowhere just practicing, reading the book, practicing that.

PR: I have another question for you. How do you think the environment has changed with parents from when you started? Do you see a change in that over time?

HS: Yeah, the problem with that is I started not as a school affiliated thing. I started as, you know, the person they'd go to the tournaments with, and I traveled to tournaments all the time. And so, they felt that the fathers, felt like they knew way more than I could possibly have known because I was a female. And so, they were not helpful. And they were screaming across the gym at each other because their daughter should have been playing more than the other daughter.

PR: And so how did you deal with that? Like, how did you manage that? As somebody trying to cut your teeth in coaching?

HS: Well, it was only a couple of years of that. And then it became school involved. And then I spent a lot of time talking to the administration, tried to explain to them. Because I've had fathers ask me why I was coaching to lose. Instead of coaching to win. And so, a lot of it goes back to middle school. So, I spent a lot of time talking to administration that my philosophy was to teach them how to play so that they could be successful, because they were still young enough and didn't know if they wanted to be athletes. And so, I was giving them the chance to either prove to themselves or to their teammates that, yes, they could be helpful and they would continue to do it in high school. And so, the administration helped me, allowing me to continue to do what I did, whether I was successful or not.

PR: One thing that came to mind there and, we covered it earlier, but I think we might have missed out a little bit. Was there someone in your formative period pre-high school or high school female that was influential on you in terms of doing this? Who was that?

HS: My freshman year in high school, because I ended up in the student leadership program with the Phy Ed department, my mom became good friends with the female PE teachers socially because she was always there watching me. And so, they continued to mentor me even more and encouraged me with what school to go to.

PR: Okay. Now, this was in a public school? Were these young women or older women?

HS: They were younger women, yes. They were younger women that could have been great athletes. But again, there was nothing for them to do.

PR: Is there any one of them that stands out?

HS: They're probably all dead now. There were two of them that were the most influential.

PR: Okay. That's just important, too, because they were in a funny transitional position because they weren't able to offer expertise. But they were interested in seeing it happen.

HS: Right. And I think it helped they became such good friends with my mom, that I saw them socially outside of school as well as in school.

PR: Yeah. And I'm guessing your mother was a strong influence. Was she supportive of you?

HS: Very supportive, yes. And one of the things I didn't put on there, I had a younger sister that was a year behind me in high school, and she supported both of us. My older brother was in college by the time I got to high school because he's six years older than I. And he was a swimmer and we used to go to all his swimming things. And my older sister was not athletic at all. And my younger sister stopped being athletic. In fact, my brother and I are the only two that went to college.

PR: Gotcha. So, your mother was behind this, too, in a sense. I mean, she was supporting you in this endeavor because it was new. A lot of it.

HS: Exactly. And at that time, you know, I was too young to drive. So, she had my younger sister, but she still had to go and pick me up from all the sporting events. And my younger sister, for a couple of years, did other sports or the same sporting events that I did. Except for track.

PR: Well, Holly, thank you for this. Oh, this is very good.

HS: I hope it can be helpful. It is different, you know, because I really just sneaked in.

PR: But you made a career out of it. Anyway, thank you. And we'll keep you posted on the progress of the project.



## ***Concluding Reflection From Lily Sullivan (Class of 2027)***

**How do we define an experience?** For some, an experience is a fleeting moment; for others that same experience stretches over a lifetime. When I began this project, my friends and family said that it would be a “good experience”: it would be fun and look good for college. I never expected the complexity that we would encounter in this powerful exploration of inequality, resilience, and change. I had little understanding of the life changing effects Title IX held in the lives of these coaches and athletes, largely because in my own life, athletics have always been a given. This assumption held by many of those from my generation helps explain why, at times, it is a challenge for a difficult topic like this to hold weight among all the noise. Our world right now is so full of noise, whether it be technological or mental; so, it is more important than ever to listen. The goal of this project was not only to turn oral history into written history, but also to open our ears, and give these women a voice among the noise.

My role in this project began as the interviewing and transcribing of the interviews with five women: Mary Mack, Kittie Young, Mary Rykken, Carol Anderson, and Holly Smith. But this experience has expanded far beyond those tasks. The stories I anticipated included recollections of hardship, lack of support, and perhaps some lingering bitterness. While those elements existed, what surprised me more was the complexity of their experiences. I encountered anecdotes of the excitement of the time, the determination of young girls, and celebrations of victories—small and large. Even now I can remember specific victories during my involvement in sports. I remember winning a fourth-grade softball championship, a playoff game my sophomore year even as a non-varsity player, and my first tennis victory as a freshman. These victories built a foundation of accomplishment and pride that I believe is so important for young girls. Not many communities are able to provide this same culture that sports are able to, which is why a couple of moments from the interviews stand out.

The first is a moment in Carol Anderson’s interviews when asked if there was any advice she would offer to those involved in women’s sports today; she described the connection and structure that athletics provide. She emphasized the importance of teaching kids to see the reality of who they are and what they can contribute to their team and to their world. This statement reflects the women who, often without pay,



dedicated their time to creating opportunities for these young girls. Each of these women built a culture of connection for young girls in Black River Falls, they each set the groundwork for an athletic experience.

Another one of these moments was when Kitti was asked if she believed that Title IX had an impact on her life. Her response: if it wasn't for women's athletics, I truly believe that I would not have gone to college. She continues to elaborate that sports built a foundation for growth in her life both socially and academically. This points out the depth of experience athletics was able to provide her as both an athlete and a coach. It was not just one moment, but it was a foundation for her life.



Although these moments stand out, there are countless oral histories throughout this project that hold significance: state championships, makeshift teams, inspiration offered through other women, etc. However, what has really struck me in every single interview regardless of the topic, is the emotional weight these moments carried. It was enough to inspire tears. These are not distant memories; they are still powerful, defining moments in the experiences of each of these women. Each interview changed the way I saw my own opportunity. Every single one of these women deserved the **entire experience** of hope, fear, joy, grief, optimism, defeat, victory, and community that athletics offers. The denial of these opportunities leaves a subtle feeling of absence. However, the inspiration and encouragement these women gave to young girls, leaves me with a final feeling of incredible pride in the legacy I was given, one I did not even know existed. A legacy I received from Mary Mack, Kitti Young, Mary Rykken, Carol Anderson, Holly Smith, Linda Krenz, Debra Sanberg, Katie Kline, Carla Nielson, Kari Nelson, Ann Homstad, LuAnn Marg, Mim Rykken, Kirstie Danielson, and any girl who felt unseen and unheard and refused to be hidden in the shadows. The women of Black River Falls stepped forward with incredible tenacity, because they were meant to live out their lives with the entire experience there was to be offered. As a result, others -- including myself -- have the chance to do the same.

Thank you,  
Lily Sullivan, Falls History Project Intern