

2012 Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame



Dr. Sharon P. Misasi

To most, involvement in sports is mainly for recreation, to escape and nourish both body and soul in ways that divert us from everyday life. Few are able to take their interest in sports to the utmost highest level and anyone who has ever played a sport has dreamed, at one time or another, of what it would be like to be so good at something they loved doing and being able to do it professionally. Sports teach us many life lessons that we are able to apply in business or careers, enriching one's professional skills as a result of having been part of a team experience and often, that same drive brought off the court or ball field, is applied when striving to excel in the board room or class room. In Sharon Misasi, we find someone who has taken her love and passion for sports and molded that into a thriving and exciting career in the sports field – not as a performer, but rather, following a path that led her to become a world renowned athletic trainer, all of which began on the ball fields of Saugerties.

Sharon Misasi was born 12/9/61, the youngest daughter of Rita and Sal Misasi Sr. With older brother Sal Jr. and sister Linda coming before her and as the daughter of one of Saugerties' most recognized past amateur athletes in 1985 Hall of Famer Sal Sr., it came as no surprise to see Sharon immerse herself into sports with a strong interest and a lot of success. Growing up on the fringe of the hamlet of Glasco on Barclay Lane, Sharon follows 2011 Hall of Fame Inductee Tim Cole as back to back recipients from this tiny cul-de-sac street to achieve Saugerties most coveted sports recognition leaving one to wonder and surmise as to what special qualities were present in the well water of that neighborhood.

Sharon got her start in the newly formed Saugerties Little League girls program in 1974, playing the infield (mainly shortstop and 3rd base) on the Saugerties Fire Department's 'Auxiliary Sparks', with Anita Yates and Barbara Griffis as coaches. "I remember that they started the league and I just wanted to play, I didn't care if it was baseball or softball, I just loved playing. I always played sports, whatever sport was in season, with the other kids on my street growing up." As an All Star, Sharon and the Saugerties girls team did Saugerties proud by winning the District 15 championship in '74. In 1975, Sharon played in the inaugural season of the SAA Colleen Softball League, on the Bowlers Club Blasters, who went on to win the first league championship, coached by Bob Kraft. The following year Sharon moved up the Girls Senior Little League softball program, as a member of the 1976 championship team that advanced to the NY State Championship game, played at Gil Hodges Stadium in Brooklyn. This was to be Sharon's first exposure to the larger stage, as the team bussed to NY City for what was to become one of Sharon's initial highlights of a long and fascinating career. "We played in what to us seemed like a big stadium and it was under the lights. Just being there with our team and coaches – we were very excited. We didn't win, but we knew it was special", recalls Sharon.



Sharon, 3rd row second from left, and 1976 Saugerties Little League Senior Girls All Stars.

One important aspect at this time was the growth of female interscholastic teams. In 1972, the landmark "Title IX" educational amendment was passed, that 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..." Aimed primarily at collegiate programs, this had a local impact as well. Prior to 1972, Saugerties High School's female athletic programs consisted of cheerleading and intramurals only. Saugerties High first offered a girls volleyball team in 1972, under coach Andrea Ungvarsky, and by 1974 the varsity team became Dutchess County Scholastic League

champions (the '74 JV team was also 11-2, finishing 2nd in the DCSL). Saugerties High School girls softball, basketball, and track were soon to follow and by 1976 Saugerties High had a full blown girls athletic program giving Saugerties female athletes the opportunity they had long awaited.

Given an opportunity to participate in more girls team sports, Sharon continued to excel, demonstrating an interest in many sports in high school. "I just wanted to play sports and at that time all Saugerties HS offered in the fall for girls was volleyball and in the winter it was basketball...so I thought it would be great to play all year round. I think I also thought that as an athlete, I could try any sport." Sharon first lettered as a member of the Saugerties Junior High track team and then in her freshman year of 1977 she was on the SHS varsity volleyball, basketball, and softball teams. In volleyball's fall 1977 season the team finished with an undefeated 18-0 regular season record, then defeated Arlington in the DSCL playoffs, and then besting Scarsdale in the sectional class AA finals (15-1, 15-3), and Yorktown (16-14, 15-9) in the Sectional Finals. The 1978 team eclipsed that by going 20-0 in another DCSL championship campaign, to finish 2nd overall in the Section 1 Class AA tournament, as Sharon earned an honorable mention on the 1978 "All DCSL" team. Those teams and the coaching of "Miss U" were a big inspiration to Sharon and the team: "I think A.J. (Andrea) was an inspiration to a lot of us. Again,

we were not always the tallest team or the fastest team or even the most talented team, but she could motivate us and get us to believe in ourselves that no matter who we faced in any competition we could beat them. She prepared us both physically and psychologically.”

On the basketball court as a member of the 1977-1979 girls teams, the success continued, with outstanding records of 11-3 in her '77/78 sophomore year, and an 11-4 record in 1978/79, although a hand injury cut her basketball season short. However following in the family tradition, it was on the softball diamond that Sharon's excellence stands out. Initially joining the team as a freshman, Sharon compiled a career batting average at SHS of .459 in her 3 varsity seasons. With fellow 2012 Hall of Fame inductee Shelly Pfeil as a teammate for volleyball, basketball and softball, the duo anchored the left side of the Lady Sawyer infield. Sharon recalls “In high school I played third and Shelly was at short. I think having us both on that side of the field was awesome. We played really well together.”

The 1977 team garnered Section I Class A, and Section I-AA open title championships, with Sharon leading the league in batting .544, with 15 runs batted in, and tied for 1st in the league with 17 stolen bases, to go with a .926 field percentage – all of which added up to Sharon's DCSL first team selection as the only freshman so chosen. The 1978 sophomore season was more of the same, as the team compiled a 16-3 overall record, to grab DCSL tri-championship honors, before bowing to Lakeland in the Section I-AA championship game. With a .397 average, 31 RBIS, 13 stolen bases, and a .938 fielding average, again Sharon was selected to the All DCSL first team. The 1979 softball season again saw Lady Sawyer dominance – the team finished 17-5 overall, capturing the Section I-AA and Section I-AA-AAA Open Championships. And once again, for the 3rd straight year Sharon was chosen to the All-DCSL First Team, after posting a .448 average, 22 RBIs, 15 stolen bases, and .855 for a fielding average – a remarkable balance of all-around excellence. “I think our teams were again well coached and we believed in our abilities. We played in many sectional games in both volleyball and softball. I think the games that stand out were the games against Kingston - big rivals at that time.”



1979; Sharon in action at Saugerties High School, puts a sweet swing on a pitch.

When asked to reflect back on her experiences in what was then a pioneering experience in female athletics, Sharon remarks “I think that all of us who played sports early after Title IX are happy with how things have gone but we still need to move forward. I am happy that we could set the trend for teams to come and especially for girls playing sports in Saugerties. I always think that someone has to lay the ground work, but for me there were those women in Saugerties who did the same for us. So in a way we are paying it forward.”

While standing out as she did in athletics, Sharon's work in the classroom was also overachieving, as she graduated SHS a year early as a junior in 1979, enrolling at Ithaca College, before eventually moving on to Southern Connecticut State University. “I was a good student and I graduated early because I could, as well as there was a possibility of not having sports due to a budget cut in the Saugerties Central School District. I was able to move on and then go to college. I don't regret graduating early; in fact it was the best decision for me. I did go to Ithaca for a semester and was on an academic scholarship. I decided to leave Ithaca since Southern Connecticut would let me do more with Athletic Training earlier in my college career.” From 1980 through 1983, Sharon played the infield for the SCSU women's softball team, as a 2nd and 3rd baseman, with a .887 fielding average. In her college



1983; Sharon in ready set position at Southern Connecticut State University.

senior 1983 season, Sharon posted a .333 batting average (27th in New England Division II league), while also serving as the team's captain. Recreationally, Sharon continued to play softball outside of school and as an adult in the New Haven, CT women's slow pitch softball league, and in the Littleton, Colorado co-ed softball leagues.

Academically Sharon built on her stellar intercollegiate sports successes, graduating from Southern Connecticut in 1983 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Physical Education, with a concentration in Athletic Training. She then earned her Master's degree in 1984 from Indiana State University's National Athletic Training Association-approved program. In 1998, Sharon was awarded her Doctorate of Philosophy from the University of Connecticut, in Educational Psychology. Her doctoral dissertation was on Academic Preparation for Counseling in Athletic Training.

In turn, this prepared Sharon for a career which spanned over 20 years, working with world class athletes and at international sporting events as an athletic trainer and on the medical staffs for such events as the 1993 World University Winter Games in Zakopane, Poland, the 1994 US National Skating Championships, 1994 XVII Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, 1997 World Team Short Track Speed Skating Championships in Seoul, Korea, 1999 World Individual Short Track Speed Skating Championships in Sofia, Bulgaria, 2002 Blue Swords Junior Grand Prix Figure Skating Competition in Chemnitz, Germany, and the 2011 International Skating Union Junior World Championships, Gangneung, Korea.



U.S. Olympic Speed Skater Bonnie Blair (left) celebrates medal victories with Sharon in Lillehammer.

Most memorable from this list of events is the 1994 US women's figure skating duo of Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding. Sharon was front and center in both the US Nationals held in January 1994 in Detroit, where Kerrigan was injured in a bizarre chain of events involving Harding's ex-husband, and prior to the Winter Olympic Games in February. "I arrived in Detroit right after the incident. The Olympic team was being decided there at Nationals. I didn't see Nancy until we got to Norway...as she was being treated in Massachusetts by her doctors. When she got to Norway she was much better. On the other hand, Tonya had sprained her ankle prior to coming to Norway and we did work on her as a sports medicine team... I had one experience where I was asked to go with Tonya to another

place where her coaches were staying. As we were leaving the rink we were mobbed with reporters etc.. The security folks put Tonya and me in one car and we had another car behind us. At one point the driver said 'Hold on' as we were being followed. I can tell you it was a ride I won't forget. It was fast and they don't plow roads like they do here. Once we were safe I made sure to tell the other staff members I wouldn't do that again."

With the 1993 World University Winter Games, Sharon recalls: “We were in Zakopane, Poland. We wanted to go up the mountain on the gondola. So we get to the top and it's snowing really hard. We start to walk and walk, and all of a sudden this military guy comes out of the blizzard. He was carrying this automatic rifle.

He told us to stop. We weren't sure what was going on, but we asked if we could take a picture with him. He was young and said yes. We started to take some pictures, and all of a sudden another guy appears and begins to speak loudly and in another language...it wasn't Polish. What we didn't realize was that we had crossed the

border into the Czech Republic. The older guy told us to leave. We said we would but we weren't too sure which way to go as it was snowing hard. They pointed us in the direction and we were happy that they let us leave. On another trip in Poland, we were able to take the Figure Skating team to Auschwitz and Birkenau Camps. It was very somber and educational. So even though the trips were sport-related, we always tried to experience the area in an educational and cultural way. For me, I truly enjoyed these aspects of the trips!”



U.S. figure skater Brian Boitano and Sharon.

“ I feel fortunate to have worked with so many great athletes, not just at the Olympics but at World Games and competitions. (US short track speed skater) Apolo Ohno was just 14 or 15 when I met him for the first time, and I worked with him through several competitions. He was (and still is) an unbelievable athlete at a young age and to see how he has grown both as a person and athlete is just wonderful. All athletes, no matter what level, I have worked with them at just want one thing...to play to the best of their ability and to be healthy.”

“As far as the Olympics - It was a dream come true! I always wanted to go. Living in the village we had a house - our team doctor and another athletic trainer. All the athletes would hang out with us because we had a live feed of TV and could see the other events as they happened. So besides treating them we were able to just help them relax and have fun.”

Sharon Misasi's career has not been without its professional recognitions as well...to name a few, Sharon received the 1999 Southern Connecticut State University Alumni Citation Award, in addition to the American Red Cross 10 year volunteer award, as well as a 25 year pin from the National Athletic Trainers Association. Sharon has lectured about sports medicine often throughout her career, and has had numerous publications on her athletic training experiences, presenting professionally on these topics across the United States. In addition, Sharon has participated in the authoring of grant proposals for faculty and educational improvement areas in the same subject areas for SCSU.

In looking back at her career and experiences, Sharon reflects on her inspirations: “My parents: they inspired me to be the best I could be; if you are going to do something – do it 100%. They never missed my games in Little League, High School or College. To this day, they follow my career with enthusiasm and support.” Also high school coach Andrea Ungvarsky, who “taught me to be mentally as well as physically tough and inspired me to work hard.” Sharon currently resides in Wallingford, CT, with Sandy DeCicco “Sandy has been by my side for the last 20-plus years. She has been proud of all of my accomplishments and has made my life easy when I travel with all the teams. We have a great life together.”



l-r; Hall of Famer Sal Misasi Sr. and family; Sandy DeCicco, Sharon, wife Rita, daughter Linda, and Kathy Hall.

Sharon is currently a Professor in the Exercise Science Department, and Assistant to the Dean of Arts and Sciences, at Southern Connecticut State University, and has been there since 1988. “My love of sport and medicine became my life’s ambition. As a female during that time period there were not many options, it was either coaching or teaching. I enjoyed

medicine and was able to combine the two. I was the 497th person certified in the athletic training profession and at that time there were not many females. Today, there is still somewhat of a ceiling in professional sports for female Athletic Trainers, although the Dodgers recently hired a female as the Head Athletic Trainer and there was one female assistant with the Pittsburgh Steelers who is now a Head Athletic Trainer at a Division I University. I have been fortunate to work at all levels. I enjoy watching all sports, but go every year to the US Open Tennis Tournament in NYC as well as go to the NCAA Women’s Final Four Basketball Tournament. Personally, I have enjoyed all sports as well, but now cycle, hike, kayak, snowshoe, cross country ski, golf...actually sports that have little risk of injury now.”

When asked about what athletes (amateur or professional) she admires, Sharon responds: “ I don’t know if I really follow one athlete, what I preach in my Sport Psychology class is ‘I enjoy and admire an athlete who gives it their all psychologically and physically’. I think most athletes focus on their body and not their mind. There is an athlete - Lewis Gordon Pugh – a British environmental campaigner, maritime lawyer and endurance swimmer...Pugh was the first person to complete a long-distance swim in every ocean. He is able to use his mind to adjust (increase) his body temp before swimming in the North Pole and other cold places. I try to stress the importance of the mind. I have my students keep track for 24 hours the number of positive things as well as the number of negative things they say. Its surprising how many negative things we say to ourselves on a daily basis so I work with them to change this...if you believe it in your mind you will do it and be successful!! My experiences have ranged from Little League all the way through to the Olympics with world class athletes and at every level the same holds true...sports are very important not only in developing one as an athlete, but also as a person.”



Sharon (r), Sandy (l) and big brother Sal Misasi Jr.

As we congratulate Sharon Misasi on her 2012 induction into the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame we hold with great pride and high esteem Sharon's high school, college, and career achievements which have put her in a class that few have attained. Her dedication to sports as well as her "world class" accomplishments, have once again put Saugerties on the map of international acclaim. Sharon, your family, your friends, and the Saugerties community are proud of you!