



## Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

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### One Of The Best: Mistretta To Be Recognized For Softball Prowess

By Scott Kindberg, *The Post-Journal*, July 18, 2019

For many years during the 1980s and 1990s, Ames Insurance of Falconer sponsored a softball team in the Randolph modified league.

There was one problem.



From week to week, the squad would usually be short a player or two, prompting Tom Ames to have to scramble to fill out a roster. His first call for help was usually to Joe Mistretta, another Falconer native who just happens to be on the Mount Rushmore of all-time softball greats in this area, or any area for that matter.

*“Our opponents were never happy to see Joe and would not be shy about their feelings,” Ames said. “I would simply tell them that I can’t help it that my friend is one of the best softball players to don a uniform in Western New York.”*

One year, Mistretta joined the Ames Insurance team for a tournament on the Fourth of July. In its third game, Mistretta was preparing to lead off an inning when Ames decided to needle his longtime friend.

Following is the conversation as Joe strolled to the plate.

AMES (in a kidding voice): *“You haven’t hit all that well today.”*

MISTRETTA: *“What is it you’d like me to do?”*

AMES: *“Hit a home run.”*

MISTRETTA: *“On what pitch?”*

AMES: *“The first pitch.”*

Well, guess what?

*“Joe promptly deposited the first pitch of that at-bat 50 feet over the center-field fence,” Ames said. “As Joe began his trot, he glanced into the dugout and gave me that wry stare. Those of us who were lucky enough to have played any sport with Joe are all too familiar with the ‘stare.’”*

That’s kind of ironic, because when Mistretta was on the field — any field — it was hard to take your eyes off of him.

The Western New York Softball Hall of Fame has taken notice, and now Mistretta will be one of its newest inductees.

Mistretta was a three-sport star at Falconer Central School during the mid-1970s, a guy who made a habit of turning in highlight-reel performances on a regular basis.

*“My dad was quite a competitor, and I learned that from him,” Mistretta said earlier this week. “There wasn’t anything that I did that I didn’t want to be the best. It was just in my nature. Some people called it that I was a little too cocky or whatever, but if you’re going to play, you might as well play to be the best, to win. That’s the only way I knew how to play.”*



The guys on the Jock Shop, Fudge’s Sub Shop and Betts Industries modified teams of the 1980s were certainly happy to have Mistretta (seated, middle in Jock Shop team photo) on their side. All three squads played in national tournaments in that era, highlighted by the Jock Shop posting a 323-33 record during a five-year stretch and winning back-to-back national titles in 1983 and 1984, and Fudge’s Sub Shop claiming a national crown in 1989.

For his part, Mistretta, was a seven-time first-team All-American; a two-time Most Valuable Player — once with the Jock Shop in 1983 and once with Fudge’s Sub Shop in 1989 — and posted the best-ever tournament average (.818) at the nationals in 1988.

*“I started out (playing softball) with my friends from Falconer, and they were all competitors, and we just had fun playing and had a good time, but I just needed a little more than that,” Mistretta said. “That’s when I approached the Jock Shop, and talk about being at the right place at the right time.*

*“They needed a second baseman.”*

A star was born.

*“We just hit it off,”* said **Mistretta, who was inducted into the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame in 2009.** *“I was in the right place at the right time, with a bunch of great athletes, great players, and we just all gelled together so well. That’s when softball took off for me.”*

John Woodfield’s favorite on-field Mistretta memory came in 1982 during the Jock Shop’s first trip to nationals in Meadville, Pennsylvania. Nearly 40 years later, the former third baseman still can’t believe what he saw.



*“There was a groundball and (first baseman Bob Schmitt) dives for it,”* Woodfield said. *“Joey starts yelling to (Schmitt) to get back to the bag. Joey catches this thing on the ground in shallow right field, does a somersault as Schmitt is hustling back to the bag. By the time Joey got to his feet and threw the (runner) out, he was in foul territory. If you didn’t see that thing, you wouldn’t believe it. It was the most phenomenal play I’ve ever seen. To this day, I’ll never forget it.”*

Mistretta has worked at Inscape in Falconer for the last 37 years; has had a long tenure as the Cassadaga Valley Central School varsity baseball coach; and is a big supporter of his nephew, Tommy Tantillo, who is the junior varsity baseball coach at Jamestown High School.

It was while Mistretta was watching Tantillo’s team play a game against the Frontier High School jayvees at the Martin Road Athletic Complex this spring that the idea of induction into the WNY Softball of Hall of Fame first gained some traction.

Sitting down the left-field line on a picnic table to watch the game, Mistretta was joined by a parent of a Frontier player, who said that he had visited Jamestown years before when he participated in slo-pitch softball tournaments in the city. The man then asked Mistretta if he had ever heard of a team called the Jock Shop.

*“I said that I played second base for them,”* Mistretta recalled.

As his new softball friend kept egging him on, Mistretta somewhat reluctantly detailed some of his accomplishments mentioned earlier in this article.

*“Then he told me he was on the board of directors (of the WNY Softball Hall of Fame),”* Mistretta said, *“and he was going back (home) and nominating me for the Hall of Fame.”*

A day or two later, Mistretta received a phone call. The vote was unanimous. He would be adding another Hall of Fame to his athletic resume.

*“I made it to the top of the mountain,”* Mistretta said. *“I think (the induction) put a cap on the whole thing. I gave it the best I could in college (baseball) to be a professional player and didn’t quite make it, but I had a second chance to get with a great group of people that treated me awesome, and I made the best of it.”*



How much did Mistretta (**fist clenched in photo**) love the game? Schmitt (**holding trophy in photo**) saw that first hand during one of the team’s trips to nationals.

*“I was rooming with Joe and, of course, Joe didn’t drink,”* Schmitt recalled. *“We had been out drinking and Joe was back in the room. I got back, I opened up the door and walked in the room. Joe was asleep. All of a sudden, he sat up and he still had his eyes closed. He reached under the covers, grabbed his bat, took a swing, laid right back down and went to sleep.”*

*“He always wanted to be nice to his bat and the bat would be nice to him.”*

When Mistretta played in the national modified tournaments in Meadville, he always felt right at home. Guy Demaio, the tournament director at the time, was one of the people who made Mistretta feel that way.

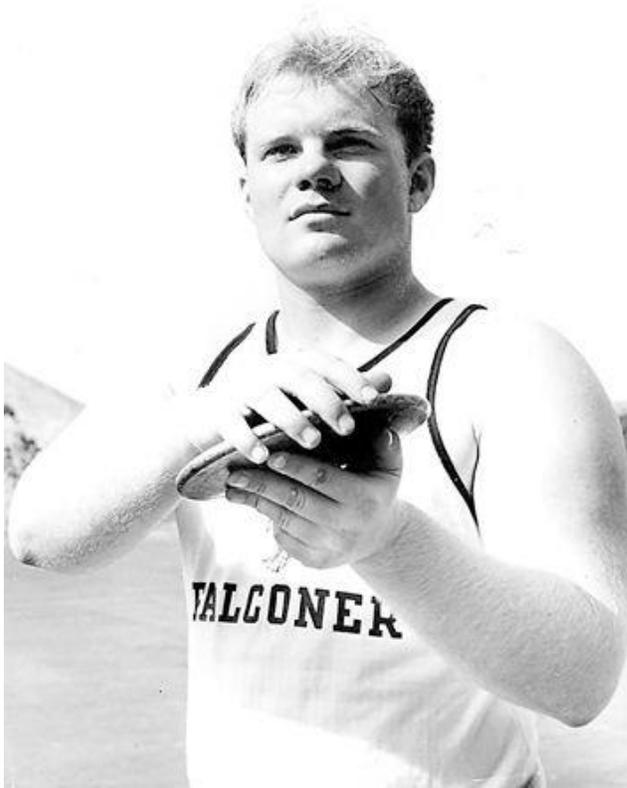
*“This guy was a strong Italian, and he kind of adopted me,”* Mistretta said. *“... He called me ‘Pisan,’ and he’d say, ‘When you go to heaven, you’re going to be the starting second baseman on that team up there. There’s nobody better.’”*

In light of his most recent honor, Mistretta believes other area players should, and will, eventually follow.

*“Hopefully this is a stepping stone for all the other greats,”* he said. *“There are so many deserving people beside me. ... I was at the right place at the right time.”*

## Coaches Association To Honor Falconer Native Dan Stimson

Legendary William & Mary track and field coach Dan Stimson will be inducted into the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association Hall of Fame this December as part of the USTFCCA's annual convention in Orlando, Florida.



A native of Falconer, Stimson graduated with honors from Ohio University in 1971 and earned a master's degree from Miami (Ohio). As an undergraduate, he was the All-Ohio and Central Collegiate shot put champion, as well as a two-time MAC shot put champion. He concluded his athletic career by competing in both the NCAA and AAU national championships in the shot put.

Stimson passed away in the fall of 2017, and is survived by his wife of 46 years, Rosemary, an art educator; two children, son Clare and daughter Krista; and three grandchildren, Samuel, Kara and Luciana.

Stimson's coaching career began at the University of Tennessee in 1971-72 where he was the throwing coach. The next nine years came at Miami

(Ohio). After most of a decade with the Redhawks, Stimson went back to Tennessee, this time as the head assistant coach.

Stimson spent 25 years as William & Mary's first director of track & field and cross country, overseeing both the men and women from 1986-2011. During his tenure leading the Tribe, Stimson's teams combined for 49 Colonial Athletic Association Championships, a total that ranked his program third among all league universities over that time, behind only the rest of William & Mary's teams (53) and James Madison's entire athletics department (64).

His athletes also achieved remarkable individual success, with 64 All-American performances and one Olympic appearance. The Tribe also totaled 90 CAA athlete awards (MVPs, Athletes of the Year and Rookies of the Year) during his directorship. In 2003-04, W&M became the first (and to date only) school in CAA history to win all four conference titles in a single school year, a feat it would repeat in 2012-13. After stepping down as director in 2011, Stimson continued to contribute to the Tribe's success, first as an assistant coach in charge of throws for three years, then for three more years as a volunteer assistant.

Academic success was not neglected either, with William & Mary student-athletes putting together an enviable resume for any athletics team at any school. The Tribe won a total of 47 team academic awards from the national coaches' associations, and in the first 10 years of the CAA Scholar-Athlete of the Year program, Stimson's athletes won 22 of 40 sport awards and two Male Scholar-Athlete of the Year awards (chosen from across all sports).



Another hallmark of the national recognition that Stimson brought to W&M was as a developer of great coaches. While he was recognized himself on several occasions, including CAA Coach of the Year honors in both men's cross country (1996) and track and field (1992), Stimson would often remove himself from consideration for awards, insisting that his event coaches be recognized instead. They were at that, winning 42 CAA Coach of the Year awards as well as three W&M Alumni Association Coach of the Year honors. Stimson was also recognized as the Alumni Association Coach of the Year in 2002-03, after leading the Tribe to three of the four CAA titles available between cross-country and track and field in that athletics year.

In recognition of his coaching achievements, following his retirement after the 2014 season, Stimson was inducted into a number of Halls of Fame, including the William & Mary Athletics Hall of Fame in 2014. **In 2015, he was inducted into his hometown Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame**, and that winter he was also named to the Miami University Cradle of Coaches Hall of Fame. In 2011, Stimson was named an Honorary Alumnus of William & Mary, and in 2007, friends of the track program named the Tribe's newly constructed throwing facility in his honor, as the Stimson Throwing Events Area.

## **Bill Bergey and Cheryl Bailey to be Honored by NYSPHSAA Section 6**

Two Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame inductees will be inducted into the New York State Public High School Athletic Association Section VI Hall of Fame later this year.

Football player Bill Bergey and administrator Cheryl Bailey are among 14 people who comprise the Class of 2019. The induction ceremony will be held December 6 at The Commons Banquets in Elma.

The Section VI Hall of Fame was established to honor and recognize those, within its organization, who excelled in their roles as athletes, administrators, coaches, officials or contributors for their meritorious service.

Bailey and Bergey will join two other CSHOF inductees in the Section 6 Hall of Fame. Former Clymer Central School, Michigan State and NFL running back, **Jehuu Caulcrick**, and former Jamestown High School football coach **Wally Huckno** were both enshrined in 2016.

Bergey, a Pine Valley Central School graduate, was an All-American at Arkansas State University; and played professionally with the Cincinnati Bengals and the Philadelphia Eagles where he was a five-time Pro Bowl linebacker and earned a place in both the Eagles and Philadelphia halls of fame.





Bailey, who is a Southwestern Central School graduate, is the former executive director of the National Women's Soccer League; was the former general manager of the United States women's national soccer team; and served as athletic director at Denison University; served in athletic administration at the University of Wisconsin; served as the chairman of the NCAA Division 1 Basketball Committee from 2001-04; and also served on the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics Executive Committee.

The induction banquet will begin at 5:30 p.m. Dec. 6 with a cash bar and dinner, followed by the induction ceremony. Dinner reservations are \$30 per person. Reservations must be made by Nov. 19 to [pturski@e1b.org](mailto:pturski@e1b.org) or to Pauline Turski at 716-821-7581.

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For additional information about **Joe Mistretta, Dan Stimson, Cheryl Bailey** or **Bill Bergey**, use the links below:

<https://www.chautauquasportshalloffame.org/joemistretta.php>

<https://www.chautauquasportshalloffame.org/danstimson.php>

<https://www.chautauquasportshalloffame.org/cherylbailey.php>

<https://www.chautauquasportshalloffame.org/billbergey.php>