

Heart of a Tiger: My evening with Tiger Hall of Famers

The Tiger Sports Hall of Fame induction ceremony is one of my favorite campus events. This annual event was established in 1986 to honor former Fort Hays State University athletes, coaches, administrators, and community members who have made extraordinary contributions to Tiger athletics.

The ceremony never disappoints. In story after story, I couldn't help but marvel at our hall of famers' perseverance, grit, and remarkable triumphs over adversity. The room is filled with fellowship and shared admiration, and the stories bring laughter, smiles, and tears. In fact, there is always a box of tissues at the podium.

Another aspect of the program I love is that the inductee chooses who will present them to the attendees. Often the presenters are former coaches and teammates. Just as frequently, they are sons, daughters, and, this year, a mom. I loved that!

2022 Hall of Fame inductee Jon Nelson, track and field/cross country (1970-74), was introduced by his daughter. They shared stories of Coach Alex Francis who was known for his one-liners, including "beat someone."

Fred Campbell, men's basketball (1984-1986), was unable to join us due to an injury. He sent a beautiful letter about how much he was looking forward to returning to Fort Hays State University and what his time here meant to him. Fred promised to return in the near future. He remains in my thoughts and prayers as he goes through his surgery and healing journey.

Steve Broxterman, track and field (1986-88), was introduced by his son, who told several heartfelt stories detailing how his dad overcame adversity several times – two of those stories had to do with earning his way to the national championships in the high jump. The first time he earned a spot in a national championship, he was a student at Highland Community College in northeast Kansas. The championships that year were in Dodge City. A bus breakdown led to him arriving too late to compete in his event.

Steve went on to continue his career at FHSU, qualifying for the NAIA National Championships in both his junior and senior years. Just prior to the competition in his senior year, Steve blew a hole in his shoe during practice. He did not have a spare pair. So, Steve looked around for somebody who he thought might be the kindest of his competitors and spotted an Emporia State athlete. He asked that competitor if he could wear his shoes. The ESU athlete agreed to share his shoes. Round after round, the two athletes shared one pair of shoes. This amazing demonstration of the spirit of sportsmanship in action is a great example of what it means to have the heart of a champion.

What I remember most about Greg Yost's introduction (football 1987-90) was his aggressive, detailed, and dedicated approach to the game. A teammate described the ferocity of his tackles, saying when Greg walked off of the field, his helmet often carried paint streaks from his opponents' helmets. Greg was also known to spend a lot of time watching the film on his opponents so he could recognize plays and player tendencies ahead of time. That way, he always knew he could stay one step ahead of his opponents.

Damian Evans, men's basketball (1990-92), was raised by a single parent in Chicago. His mom, a tough and loving woman, guided by faith, poured all she had into raising her children. She

prepared them to lift themselves up and pay it forward. You can see how her determination fueled the excellence that drove Damian to succeed. He is an excellent example of the work ethic we often talk about as core to the Tiger Nation.

Derek Pomeroy, baseball (1992-93), was introduced by athletic director Curtis Hammeke. Hammeke recruited and coached Derek at FHSU, who would become a key contributor to the winning baseball program Curtis was building. Derek talked a lot about the importance of establishing a winning culture with the right people on the team – reminding me of the well-known saying that you have to get the right people on the bus.

The event concluded with the celebration of Shelby White, women's golf (2004-07). Shelby was unable to attend. Her sister accepted the award on her behalf.

I left the event filled with so much joy. The authentic stories I heard reinforced for me why the student-athlete experience is so valuable. They are champions of this university, and decade after decade, we always look to our student-athletes to tell our university story through how they practice and play, their character on and off the field, and their success in the classroom and in their professional lives after college. These pages of our "family album" are anchored in our culture and values – it is what makes us Fort Hays State University.