

Heart of a Tiger: Reflections on the 2023 Tiger Athletics Hall of Fame Celebration, Part 2

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By Tisa Mason

HAYS, Kan. – In [my last column](#), I shared how much I appreciate our annual Tiger Athletics Hall of Fame induction ceremony. It is an authentic celebration of humble, extraordinary people who share stories of grit, humor, and, most of all, love – love of their sport, teammates, and coaches. It is a day when our honorees gather with family, teammates, and friends to smile, laugh, and, I guarantee, shed a tear. It is a day for gratitude, heart, and thanksgiving.

The Tiger Sports Hall of Fame was established in 1986 to honor former Fort Hays State University athletes, coaches, administrators, and community members who have made an extraordinary contribution to Tiger athletics.

Part 2 of this two-part column includes the last four stories that filled me with emotion and appreciation for the 2023 Hall of Fame inductees.

Two things stood out about the induction of Shawn Behr – his daughter and his teammates.

Shawn Behr was an exceptional athlete, particularly in football and baseball. In 1995, Shawn had an incredible season as a quarterback at Fort Hays State University. He broke records for passing yards and touchdowns, and his achievements remained untouched for many years. Shawn's success led him to play professionally for the Helsinki Roosters, an American football team based in Helsinki, Finland.

I thoroughly enjoyed listening to Shawn's teenage daughter, Kya, who had the honor of introducing her dad. I enjoyed her humor as she shared, "I can just hear it now; Kya, would you go get your Hall of Fame dad a bottle of water from the fridge."

She also said that when her dad found out about his nomination, he was humble and quiet. With quick wit, she speculated that her dad probably didn't want many people to know about his selection, just in case something fell through for some odd reason.

One aspect of Shawn's life that stood out was his dedication to coaching his daughter's softball team for six years. Seeing the front table filled with softball players made me smile. Kya highlighted how her dad translated coaching lessons into life lessons, emphasizing the importance of being a good teammate, giving 100% effort, being coachable, doing things correctly, and, most importantly, having fun. Great advice!

Shawn, like fellow inductee and Tiger Basketball great Tyrone Shepard, who I profiled in [Part 1 of this column](#), recognized that his success wasn't solely his own. He believed in acknowledging the 95% of people who contributed behind the scenes, representing the teammates, support staff, and administration members who played an essential role in his accomplishments. Using the metaphor of an iceberg, Shawn eloquently conveyed that while he stood in the spotlight as the visible 5%, those behind the scenes carried the weight and allowed him to shine.

His appreciation extended to the unsung heroes, the 95% behind the scenes, the support staff, administrators, and all those who worked tirelessly to ensure the smooth functioning of the team. They were the unsung heroes who carried the weight, allowing the 5% to showcase their talents on game days.

In the end, Shawn stood there as the embodiment of gratitude, knowing that his induction into the Hall of Fame was a testament to the unwavering support of the 95%, who had pushed him to new heights. His success was a reminder that recognizing and appreciating the efforts of others was just as important as celebrating personal accomplishments.

I loved how Shawn and Kya's stories captured the emotions of a young athlete rising to greatness, the gratitude of a daughter proud of her father's achievements, and the recognition of the team behind the individual success. It was a story that highlighted dedication, humility, and the transformative power of sports in shaping character and building a legacy.

Jamie Heiman Dreher, a standout in women's basketball at Fort Hays State from 1999-2003, had an impressive career. What I loved most about her story was how her dry sense of humor has always been a comforting presence, supporting the team in challenging situations.

One game that stands out is their memorable three-overtime match against Colorado School of Mines. Despite exhaustion, Jamie refused to take a break and played almost the entire game, only coming out for one minute. That is resilience. Her selfless dedication to the team's victory was truly inspiring.

Jamie's impact extended beyond the court, as she took immense pride in both the team's GPA and her own academic achievements.

Reflecting on her playing days, Jamie emphasizes the importance of hard work and making the right decisions, even if they aren't popular or enjoyable. She advises her children to prioritize dedication, surround themselves with supportive individuals, and keep God at the top of their priority list.

Expressing her gratitude, Jamie acknowledged all her coaches and teammates throughout her basketball career, highlighting the camaraderie and joy of competing as a team. She credits her parents for their unwavering support, prayers, and countless hours spent driving her to games and camps.

Unfortunately, Steve Boehmer was unable to attend the ceremony. A native of Bern, Kansas, Steve was the indoor 1,000-yard run national champion in 1971, running the distance in a time of 2:14, which gained him NAIA All-America honors. He was a member of the 1969 FHSU National Championship Cross Country team and contributed to a second-place team finish at nationals in 1970. Boehmer was the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference champion in the 880-yard run in 1969. He was a member of the 2-mile relay team that finished second at the NAIA Indoor Championships in 1968. He was a member of a distance medley relay team that went undefeated at the Texas, Kansas, and Drake Relays.

Finally, I want to mention Dale Vatapa, who was honored posthumously. Dale had an impressive wrestling career and left a lasting impact on the sport. He was a two-time NCAA All-American and the first All-America performer in the program's history. He finished third nationally in 1959 and was a national runner-up in 1960. Before attending Fort Hay State, Dale served in the Navy and was part of the all-Navy wrestling team. He even placed fifth in the 1956

US Olympic trials. Dale was rightfully elected to the Kansas Wrestling Coaches Hall of Fame in 1984. Unfortunately, he is no longer with us, but his contributions to the sport of wrestling, both as a competitor and as an official, will not be forgotten.

After attending the event, my heart was overflowing with immense joy. The genuine stories I had the privilege of hearing reaffirmed the profound value of the student-athlete experience. These individuals truly embody the spirit of our university, acting as beacons of inspiration and exemplifying what it means to be champions.

Throughout the years, our student-athletes have continually shaped the narrative of our university – their unwavering dedication, both on and off the field, exceptional character, and remarkable achievements in the classroom and beyond. Undoubtedly, these moments captured in the pages of our university's "family album" serve as a testament to our deeply ingrained culture and cherished values, the very essence that defines Fort Hays State University.

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