



Northwest High School Hall of Fame Announces 2023-24 Class

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The Northwest High School Athletic Hall of Fame is pleased to announce its fourth class for the 2023-24 school year. The Northwest Hall of Fame committee was formed in the summer of 2020 with the goal of developing a permanent hall of fame to recognize past Northwest teams, students and coaches who displayed excellence during their time at Northwest. Additionally, the committee will recognize community members who had a lasting impact on Northwest athletics.

“It’s a great honor for our committee to induct this class that has had a lasting impact on Northwest High School,” committee member and Northwest principal PJ Smith said. “We are excited to welcome them home and to our hall of fame.”

The new class includes four athletes, one coach, two state championship teams, as well as a special contributor to Northwest. Inductees will be recognized at three Northwest athletic events during the spring semester. Next weekend, January 12th and 13th the first set of inductees will be recognized. They include former Viking three-sport standouts Hadley and Aaron Cooksley, long-time coach Al Sheffield and the 1982 state championship girls’ basketball team. Sheffield and the 1982 team will be recognized between home basketball games against Adams Central and the Cooksley brothers will be honored during the Northwest Invitational wrestling meet on Saturday.

Other new inductees that will be recognized at the April 18th Dave Gee Invitational Track Meet include: athletes Sam Ogden and Megan Billington, the 2010 state championship girls track team and coach and contributor Mike Witt.

Aaron Cooksley (2005): A three-sport standout for the Vikings, Aaron Cooksley made lasting marks as a wrestler and on the football field. As a senior in 2005, he became Northwest’s first state wrestling finalist since 1985 when he upended two-time state champion Dylan Wheaton of Omaha Skutt in the semifinals before losing in the championship match and finishing 23-1. He also had a fourth-place finish as a junior. A jack-of-all-trades on the football field, Cooksley was named to the All-Heartland Super Squad by *The Grand Island Independent* after both his junior and senior campaigns. He ran for over 2,300 yards during those two seasons and was a standout defensive back on consecutive Northwest playoff teams in 2003 and 2004 while punting for a nearly 45-yard average. Cooksley was also a two-time medalist at the state track meet as a member of the Northwest 400-meter relay team. After participating in the 2005 Shrine Bowl, he played football collegiately for Chadron State.

Hadley Cooksley (2008): A 2008 Northwest graduate, Hadley Cooksley was a dominant three-sport athlete for the Vikings before signing with the University of Nebraska to wrestle after his senior season. After his senior year, he was named *The Grand Island Independent* boys athlete-of-the-year when he was selected to the All-Heartland Super Squad in football, was a state runner-up at the state wrestling meet in Omaha and the Class B state champion in the shot put. A four-time state wrestling qualifier, he finished 5th as a sophomore and 3rd as a junior and ended his career with a record of 113-17 with 85 wins coming by pin. Cooksley was also selected to compete in the 2008 Shrine Bowl.

Sam Ogden (2005): A 2005 graduate, Sam Ogden made his mark as one of the top pole vaulters in the state during his junior and senior seasons for the Vikings. As a junior, Ogden’s mark of 15-6 at the state meet earned him the Class B and all-class gold medals. He went one better as a senior, becoming just the second vaulter in state history to clear 16-feet at the state meet while also winning all-class and Class B golds. Ogden’s gold in 2005 helped the Vikings to the Class B state team championship as well. He turned down an offer from national champion Louisiana State as a senior and signed with Nebraska where he set a career best of 16-10 3/4.

Megan (Billington) Roach (2015): There is little argument that Megan (Billington) Roach is the top female distance runner in school history at Northwest. A 2015 graduate, Roach was a four-time qualifier for the state cross country meet as well as the state track meet. In cross country, she holds the Kearney Country Club school record and was a three-time medalist at the state meet earning

third place as a senior and being named to the Nebraska Coaches Association all-class super-state team. On the track, she was an eight-time state medalist and a member of the 2014 state championship team. She holds school records in both the 1,600- and 3,200-meter run. Roach continued her running career at South Dakota where she was on four Summit League cross country championship teams and won the 10,000 meters at the prestigious Drake Relays her senior year. Megan is currently the head cross country coach and distance coach at Grand Island Senior High School.

Al Sheffield (coach): Al Sheffield came to Northwest as the head basketball coach and an assistant football coach in 1978. An assistant football coach for both the 1981 and 1985 state championship teams, Sheffield took the basketball program to new heights during his first stint as head coach from 1978-1987 when he led the Vikings to their first ever appearance in the state tournament in 1982 and, again, in 1983. The 1982 team finished 23-2 after being upended in the state semifinals by Gretna. After stepping away as head coach, he continued to lead the Viking freshman teams and he returned to the head coaching position for the 2003-04 season until his retirement in 2008. During his second tour, he led the Vikings to a state tournament appearance in 2007 where they took eventual state champion Omaha Skutt to overtime in the first round. Sheffield was a four-year letterman in football and baseball at Kearney State College where he was an honorable mention All-American football player and all-conference in baseball. He is also a member of the Loper Athletic Hall of Fame.

Mike Witt (coach, special contributor): In his classroom, on the softball diamond, cross country courses and on the track, Mike Witt left a positive impact on many Northwest student athletes. A 1988 Northwest graduate and a member of the 1987 state cross country team, Witt was also a track athlete after college at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, SD. He returned to Northwest in 2000 as an assistant softball coach and took over the program in 2001. He coached the team to a then-school record for wins in 2011 and was named a head coach for the Nebraska Coaches Association All-Star Game in 2008. During his tenure at Northwest, he was also an assistant track coach working mostly with high jumpers and the Vikings won a boys (2005) and two girls state titles (2010, 2014). Witt also led the junior high track and cross country programs for Northwest as well as being a high school assistant cross country coach.

TEAM – 1982 Girls Basketball: In 1981, the Northwest girls went to the state tournament as undefeated favorites to win a state championship. They came home after a semifinal loss to Crete. During the 1981-82 season the Lady Vikings started 3-3 before things heated up. Spearheaded by a suffocating 1-3-1 zone defense, the Vikings rarely gave up more than 35 points a game. In winning 19 of their last 20 contests, they advanced to state with a 30-23 win over Aurora and then in Lincoln gave up 31 points in each of their three tournament games. The Vikings defeated Minden, North Bend Central and top-ranked Sidney for a state championship 32-31 when Mindy Roby scored on a rebound and basket with 1:29 left. It was the first team state championship in a girl's sport in Northwest school history.

TEAM – 2010 Girls Track: Long-time Northwest track coach Dave Gee chuckles at calling the 2010 Northwest girls a track and field team. "We were a field team," he would joke. Indeed, the Vikings captured their first state championship in school history without scoring a single point on the track at the 2010 state meet. Led by state titles from Taylor Johnson (discus) and Tess Merrill (pole vault), Northwest scored 47.5 points to edge conference mate Seward by 4.5 points for the team title. Johnson added second place finishes in the shot put and triple jump for Northwest and Christina Anderson was second in the pole vault.

The Northwest Hall of Fame has been made possible by 11 members that have committed to the ongoing success of the project. Those businesses and families include Equitable Bank, Family Eyecare Center, Five Points Bank, Grand Island Physical Therapy, Grand Island Surgery Center, Holiday Bus, Home Federal Bank, Mike and Melissa Jakubowski, Pinnacle Bank, Mike and Michelle Schuster and Tom Dinsdale Chevrolet Cadillac GMC.

