

GRAND MARSHALS

2016 State Finals



Four Grand Marshals, who have combined to contribute more than 140 years to the sport of wrestling, will lead the annual Grand March of Finalists Saturday night before the championship bouts of the 79th IHSA Individual Wrestling State Final Tournament.

First held in 1975, the annual March of Finalists is conducted at the State Tournament by the IHSA in conjunction with the Illinois Wrestling Coaches and Officials Association (IWCOA) and the State Farm Center. Each year the Grand Marshals are honored for their contributions to the sport and to the young men and women who participate in it.

The Marshals play an important role in the color and pageantry of the event. They lead the 84 individual finalists and their coaches in a breathtaking Grand March around the Assembly Hall arena floor just prior to the championship bouts. The annual crowd in excess of 10,000 is witness to a spectacle of high school athletics seen nowhere else in America.

Here is a closer look at the 2016 Grand Marshals:

A legendary high school wrestling coach in Illinois, **Howard Becker** built one of the most respected small school wrestling programs in the state.

A native of Princeton, Illinois, Howard was a three-sport athlete (football, basketball, track & field) during his high school career at Mendota High School. After graduating in 1957, he moved on to Northern Iowa University, where he continued his football career. After graduating with an education degree from NIU in 1962, Howard started his teaching and coaching career at South Wilmington High School in Gardner, where he was tabbed to guide the varsity wrestling program.

After two years at South Wilmington, he moved on to Wilmington High School as the head football and wrestling coach, starting a three-decade span leading the Wildcat wrestlers. Becker oversaw Wilmington wrestling from 1964 until 1994, producing 332 dual team victories, six conference titles, six IHSA district championships, 34 state final qualifiers, 15 state medalists and four IHSA individual state champions.

For his accomplishments as a coach, Howard was inducted into the IWCOA Hall of Fame in 1994, and also received enshrinement in the Illinois High School Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame after tallying 127 wins on the gridiron.

Howard, who added the high school Athletic Director duties to his plate for his final ten years at Wilmington, retired from teaching and coaching in 1994. He and his wife Barbara spent 12 years exploring the country in their motorhome, and now split time between Florida and Illinois.

Howard and Barbara have three children, daughters Kristi and Kathi, and son Todd, who is the Athletic Director at Fenton High School.

Howard calls being named a Grand Marshal a "great honor and privilege."

A true ambassador to the sport, wrestling has not only taken **Ron Bessemer** all over the country, but all over the world.

A native of Palatine, Ron attended Palatine High School, where he was a part of the varsity wrestling team for three years, serving as a captain as a junior and senior.

Ron spent a year in college at Illinois State University, before deciding to enlist in the United States Army. In the armed forces, he coached and wrestled for the All-Army European Wrestling Team from 1957 to 1959, as well as for the German Sport Club in Hanau, Germany.



Howard Becker



Ron Bessemer



Randy Conrad



Joe Summerville

After his tour of duty, Ron spent time in Oregon wrestling, where he placed third in National Freestyle before returning to Illinois to help coach at his high school alma mater. He then returned to ISU to complete his degree, and as a graduate student helped coach the Redbird wrestling squad to a fourth-place finish in the NCAA College Division National Tournament.

Ron would then lead an Oregon high school program to a state runner-up finish, before starting the wrestling program at Harper Community College in Palatine, immediately establishing them as a power, as they rose to a Top 5 national ranking and Ron received Region IV Coach of the Year honors twice.

Ron later returned west, taking the Athletic Director position in the Everett Washington School District. During his time there, he continued his advocacy for the sport by starting the U.S.A. Everett Washington Club. During his time there, he also served as a coach for the Washington State Freestyle team, Washington State National Cadet team, and World University Games Greco-Roman team.

Married to Arlas, Ron has four children (Matt, Laura, Steve, Brad), two step-children (Matt, Boyd), and eight grandchildren (Gabe, Maddie, Lizzy, Haley, Hayden, Genna, Calandra, Trinity).

An IHSA Wrestling State Champion and NCAA All-American, **Randy Conrad** remains as committed and connected to the sport today as he did as a high school wrestler in the late 1970's.

After learning the sport in Chicago's Fighting Fraziers program as a kid, Randy Conrad showed immediate promise in his career at East Leyden High School under head coach Chuck Farina, as the three-time state final qualifier placed third at 112 pounds as a sophomore in 1976. Two years later, he completed a perfect season, becoming an undefeated state champion at 126 pounds, while not allowing a single point to be scored against him during his 1978 state tournament run. He was also the catalyst for the Eagles team state championship that season, which came via the highest team point total in state history under that format.

Randy wrestled collegiately at Iowa State University under Harold Nichols where he recorded a pair of Top 6 finishes in the renowned Midlands tournament, and also won the 1982 Midwest Championships. He went on to place third and second, respectively, in the Big 8 Conference, before his career culminated with NCAA All-American honors in both 1981 (6th) and 1982 (5th).

Randy started coaching wrestling at Elmwood Park High School in 1985, and rose to the head coach position in 1988, where he helped end the school's 20-year state qualifying drought. He then moved on to an assistant coach position at Conant, where he was named the IWCOA Assistant Coach of the Year in 1994 and helped the Cougars to a second-place finish at the 1996 IHSA Dual Team State Meet.

Randy is now the Athletic Director at Leyden, which he remains active in hosting wrestling events, where he earned him the IWCOA Administrator of the Year award in 2009. He has also volunteered his time as the Head Table Supervisor at the IHSA Individual State Finals for the past 15 years.

A resident of Hoffman Estates, Randy and his wife Robin have four children: Beau, Paige, Kevin, and Matt.

With a background in football, **Joe Summerville** never set out to be a wrestling coach. However, he took on the unexpected challenge and put together a celebrated 30-year coaching career.

After a standout career on the gridiron at Champaign High School, Joe went on to play college football at Eastern Illinois University. After graduating, he took a job as a teacher and coach at Unity High School in Tolono, where he served as an assistant football coach.

In 1966, a Unity Board member sought to have his son wrestle and Joe was given \$5,000 and the challenge of not only starting, but building a program. The program grew and thrived under his leadership, as the team completed the 1972-73 season with a perfect 18-0 record, and three years later the program captured the first Regional crown for the high school in any sport.

When Joe completed his 21-year coaching career in 1987, his resume included 19 state qualifiers, one state champion (1986-A-105, Bill Brandon), nine state medalists, and 220 dual meet victories. He was equally proud to see two of his assistant coaches, Ray Cummings and Gene Everett, go on to become successful head coaches who would earn enshrinement in the IWCOA Hall of Fame.

Joe is a member of the IWCOA, Illinois High School Football Coaches Association, and Unity High School Athletic Association Halls of Fame. All told, his wrestling, football and track & field teams at Unity combined for six conference crowns and seven Champaign County championships.

Joe has been associated with high school wrestling for over 50 years, as he has continued to work as a bench official at the state tournament in his retirement.

Joe and his wife Sue continue to reside in Tolono, and have two children (Cathy, Geoff and wife Amy) and two grandchildren (Kim and Tim).

National Anthem Soloists



Tayloran Miller
Benton



Avery Miller
Benton