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BBE

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BELGRADE - BROOTEN - ELROSA
 Hall of Fame

Saturday, September 28, 2024

Wesley Von Eschen	Kevin Weller
Douglas Halvorson	Joyce (Spanier) Borash
Jerry Olson	Kristopher Prestler
Vernal Anderson	Brian Goodwin

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE INDUCTEES

Congratulations to the eight distinguished individuals selected for the 2024 Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa Hall of Fame. Being inducted is a testament to your hard work, dedication, and exceptional contributions. You exemplify the best of our communities and the pride of the BBE spirit. We are honored to host you at this event.

Formed in 2015, the BBE Hall of Fame Committee is a nonprofit, independent organization dedicated to honoring past Belgrade Redmen, Brooten Buccaneers and BBE Jaguars for their achievements during and after high school. This recognition, held triennially, celebrates not only outstanding athletes, but also coaches, teachers, and community members who have made significant impacts.

We recognize the valuable lessons learned through participation in school programs, whether as participants, coaches, educators, or community members. These experiences foster important qualities such as teamwork, sportsmanship, and leadership. These roles contribute not only to personal growth, but also to community development, nurturing leadership skills and self-confidence that resonate throughout our lives and benefits the entire community. The BBE Hall of Fame is made possible by the generous support of our community businesses and individuals, who donate time and resources to make this event successful. As a nonprofit community organization, we warmly welcome any support for future Hall of Fame events, whether through monetary donations or nominations you deem worthy of this prestigious award.

For donations or to consider nominations, please contact one of our committee volunteers listed below.

Again, congratulations to all inductees! This is your night! You have truly earned it—enjoy!

Sincerely,

The BBE Hall of Fame Committee

Chris Anderson, Ruth Von Eschen, Paul Weller, Jerry Lindstrom, Doug Mohs, Wayne Huffman, Janelle Field, Annette Fischer, and Greg Sagedahl.



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BRIAN GOODWIN

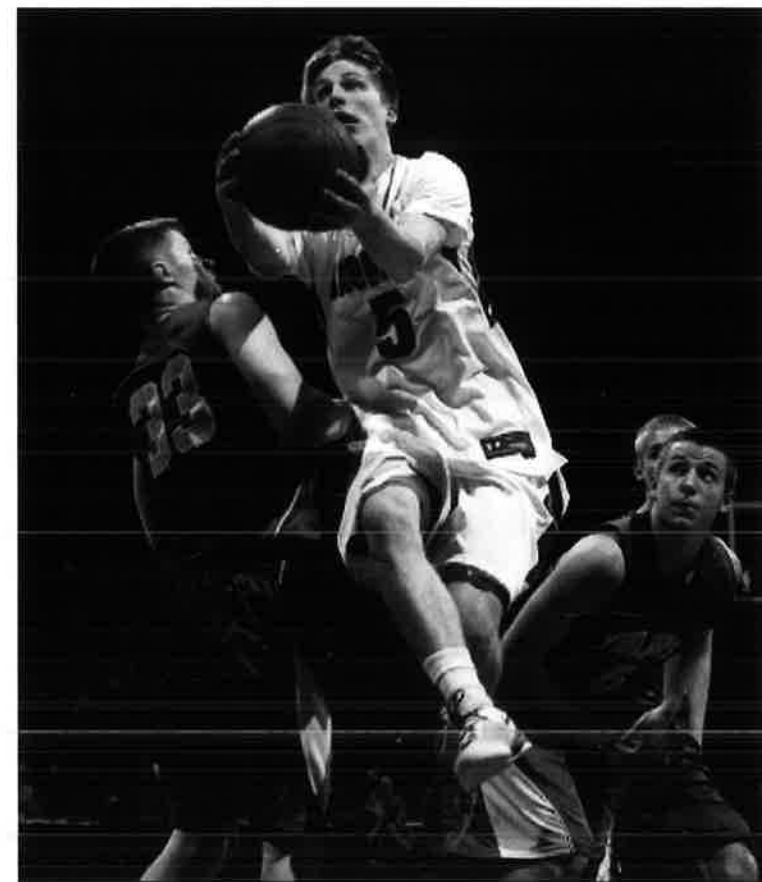
BELGRADE-BROOTEN-ELROSA JAGUARS, CLASS OF 2014

Brian Goodwin led a remarkable group of B-B-E athletes who set their sights on a return to the state tournament. At the forefront of this mission was 6'4" guard Brian Goodwin, a fourth-year starter who had already cemented his legacy as a key player on B-B-E's 2012 state championship team, the school's first-ever to win it all.

Brian's high school journey began as a freshman when he helped lead the Jaguars to their first state tournament appearance in 2011, after defeating Norman County East to win the Section 6A title. Goodwin also starred in football, where he started as quarterback for 32 games over three seasons, guiding B-B-E to back-to-back Section 4A runner-up finishes in 2012 and 2013. On the baseball field, Goodwin was a three-year varsity player, earning All-Conference honors in 2014.

Brian quickly made an impact on B-B-E sports, beginning with basketball, where he took over as point guard in his sophomore season. That year, the Jaguars enjoyed their first-ever undefeated regular season and stormed through the Section 6A playoffs.

In his junior season, Goodwin reached 1,000 career points early in 2013, but the Jaguars suffered a heartbreaking playoff loss that kept them from returning to state. Goodwin set a school record by scoring



Brian Goodwin drives for a basket in the 2014 State Championship versus Rushford-Peterson at the Target Center

46 points. By the end of the regular season, B-B-E had completed a fourth consecutive undefeated run through the Central Minnesota Conference. On March 7, 2014, Goodwin reached another milestone, scoring his 2,000th career points. Goodwin finished his senior year averaging 24.3 points and 5.7 assists per game, earning recognition as a Mr. Basketball finalist and a three-time Class 1A All-State First Team selection. Brian spent his freshman year at North Dakota State College of Science. In April 2015, he signed with Wayne State College in Nebraska, fulfilling his goal of playing Division II basketball. Goodwin made an immediate impact. He went on to play three more seasons at Wayne State.

In his senior year, Goodwin earned the NSIC Myles Brand All-Academic with Distinction Award for his academic achievements. He graduated in May 2018 with a Business Finance degree.

He has spent more than six years with Pinnacle Bank in Omaha, Nebraska, where he currently serves as a commercial loan officer. Reflecting on his transition from athlete to banker, Goodwin says, "Pinnacle liked my background as an athlete, and the team culture here is really family-oriented."

Goodwin, the youngest of four children to Brad and Amy Goodwin, both retired teachers from Brooten, followed in the athletic footsteps of his older siblings.

Goodwin also treasures the camaraderie he built with his teammates across all sports. "I had great teammates throughout the years, starting in elementary school. Whether it was football, basketball, or baseball, we were all competitive, and that was a huge advantage."

Brian Goodwin's legacy at B-B-E is one of perseverance, leadership, and excellence. His contributions to Jaguar athletics continue to inspire the next generation of athletes, proving that hard work, determination, and a love for the game can take you to great heights.

Written by Randy Olson, Bonanza Valley Voice



Brian Goodwin was quarterback for the Jaguars for three seasons

KRISTOPHER PRESLER

BROOTEN BUCCANEER, CLASS OF 1987

Kris Presler's journey in wrestling began early, growing up on a dairy farm in the Padua area as the youngest of six children. Born to Keith and the late Esther Presler, Kris followed in the footsteps of his older brothers—Kevin, Kent, Kraig, and Kyle—who were already making their mark as wrestlers for Brooten High School. Kris quickly joined their ranks, becoming a standout athlete and ultimately graduating as Brooten's all-time wrestling career win leader with 146 victories. Kris was inspired by watching his older siblings compete.

Kris's wrestling career was marked by numerous accolades. In 1987, he finished as the state runner-up at 126 pounds and went on to wrestle at Willmar Community College, where he became an All-American. His success didn't stop there; at the University of North Dakota (UND), Kris continued to excel, finishing his collegiate career with a record of 89-34-3. By the time he graduated, Kris was seventh on UND's career win record board and shared the record for the school's fastest fall at 17 seconds. His senior year saw him finish 34-9-1 and qualify for Nationals, where he placed eighth despite a knee injury.

Academically, Kris was equally impressive. He earned an A in every college course, graduating Summa Cum Laude with a B.A. in Applied Math from UND in 1990. He later earned his M.A. in Math in 1992. His academic achievements were recognized with numerous accolades, including Academic All-American honors

and the NCC Stan Marshall Award for the conference's outstanding student-athlete across all sports.

Kris recalls fond memories of Brooten wrestling, including watching his brothers compete, practicing with friends like Greg Schmitz and Brendan Bogart, and the guidance he received from coaches like Roy Minter and Bud Heidgerken.



1985 Minnesota State Wrestling Tournament, Class A, Weight 112, Kris Presler pictured bottom row, four from the right

In addition to wrestling, Kris was a standout in other sports. He played football and baseball for Brooten High School, with the Buccaneers co-championing the Prairie Conference in his senior year. The wrestling team also won the District 20 title in 1985, with a memorable 24-22 dual win against Paynesville. Kris's versatility and athleticism were evident throughout his high school career, where he not only excelled on the mat but also contributed significantly on the football field and baseball diamond.

Today, Kris is a professor and chair of the Actuarial Science department at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He lives with his wife, Sheila, and their four daughters: Sydney, Madison, Morgan, and Taylor. As he reflects on his journey, Kris remains deeply grateful for the love and support of his family, particularly his parents. He aspires to offer his daughters the same level of encouragement and presence that his parents provided him throughout his wrestling career.

Kris Presler's story is one of dedication, perseverance, and the powerful impact of family and community.

His achievements on the wrestling mat are a testament to his hard work, but it is the support he received along the way that truly shaped his success. As he looks back, Kris values the relationships and memories formed through wrestling above all, recognizing that it was the people—family, coaches, teammates—who made his journey so rewarding.

Written by Randy Olson,
Bonanza Valley Voice

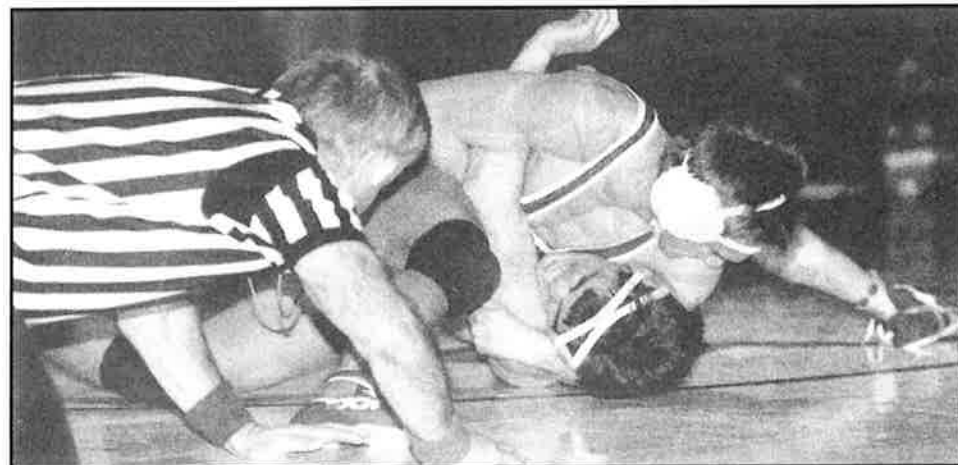


Photo from 1990-91 University of North Dakota Wrestling,
1990 NCAA II runnerup at 142, Kris Presler

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

BBE HIGH SCHOOL, BELGRADE

- 5:00 PM..... Meet and Greet
 6:00 PM..... Welcome by Chris Anderson, BBE Activities Director and Dean of Students
 6:00 PM..... Meal (BBE HS Cafeteria)
 7:00 PM..... Introduction of the 2024 Inductees by 1972 Belgrade Graduate Bill Gysberg (Olson Auditorium)

Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa Schools would like to congratulate the 2024 inductees of the BBE Hall of Fame. The development of this organization and the elite membership that it will represent was a vision of many past BBE graduates as well as past and present BBE Staff. The monetary donations and volunteer hours that were given on behalf of this vision are remarkable and can never be repaid. Special thanks to Randy Olson from the Bonanza Valley Voice for his part in writing the stories about our inductees.

THE 2024 INDUCTEES ARE...

Wesley Von Eschen

Brooten, Class of 1964

Kevin Weller

BBE Volleyball Coach, 2007-2018

Douglas Halvorson

Belgrade, Class of 1967

Joyce (Spanier) Borash

Belgrade, Class of 1987

Jerry Olson

Brooten, Class of 1969

Kristopher Presler

Brooten, Class of 1987

Vernal Anderson

Belgrade, Class of 1971

Brian Goodwin

Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa, Class of 2014

BBE will host a Hall of Fame banquet with new inductees every three years. Looking ahead to 2027, we will need donations in order to make it a reality. Donations for the 2027 banquet can be sent to: BBE High School, C/O Hall of Fame, 710 Washburn Avenue, PO Box 339, Belgrade, MN 56312. There is also a basket for a free will donation by the exit after tonight's banquet. Thank you for your support!

WESLEY VON ESCHEN

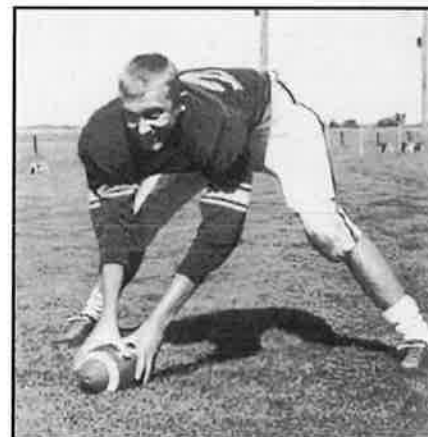
BROOTEN BUCCANEER, CLASS OF 1964

Wes Von Eschen's story is one of dedication, community, and a lifelong passion for basketball, all rooted in the small town of Brooten, Minnesota. A 1964 graduate of Brooten High School, Wes was a four-sport athlete who left a lasting legacy in both sports and his community. From his earliest days, Wes was immersed in the world of basketball.

In high school, Wes quickly became a standout athlete. During his junior year, the Buccaneers were coming off a West Lake Conference title. As a senior, Wes was co-captain of both the football and basketball teams, earning All-Conference honors in football and leading the basketball team to another conference title.

On the basketball court, Wes was a dominant presence as a 6'3" center. He averaged 15.4 points per game during his senior year, a remarkable feat considering it was over 20 years before the advent of the three-point line. Wes also averaged a double-double that season, grabbing 218 rebounds. His leadership and talent were recognized when he was named to the WCCO Radio All-State Team of the Week. The highlight of that season came in the final game against arch-rival Belgrade, where Wes and his teammates secured the West Lake Conference title with a 51-49 victory.

Wes's athleticism extended beyond basketball. In the spring, he was a two-sport athlete, competing in both baseball and track. He excelled in events like the 180 low hurdles, 110 high hurdles, long jump, and the 880 relay, showcasing his versatility as an athlete. In baseball, Wes played primarily at first base and occasionally pitched. Despite his demanding schedule, he also found time to work. His work ethic and dedication were evident in every aspect of his life.



Von Eschen as co-captain of Brooten Buccaneers football team

After high school, Wes attended St. Cloud State University, where he played Division II basketball for the Huskies for one season. Wes was drafted on December 2, 1965 and served in the U.S. Army, first stationed at Fort Carson, Colorado, and later in Saigon, Vietnam as a Mili-

tary Policeman. After his discharge in November 1967, he earned an A.A. degree from Willmar Community College before attending Moorhead State University.

Wes married Ruth Damhof on March 13, 1971, and settled in Brooten, where they raised three children: Todd, Wendy, and Wade and are blessed with nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

In 1971, Wes took over the Mobil Oil business in Brooten, a venture he successfully ran until 2003. After selling the business, Wes continued to serve his community in various roles, including as a school bus driver for 44 years, a member of the Brooten city council, and a custodian at B-B-E elementary.

Wes's contributions to his community didn't stop with his professional life. He was also a dedicated member of the Brooten Fire Department for 36 years, a council member at Trinity Lutheran Church, and a charter member of the Prairie View Community Golf Course. His involvement in the Brooten American Legion and the B-B-E Jaguar fan community further solidified his role as a pillar of the community.

His lifelong friend and teammate, Julius Evenson, sums up Wes's legacy best: "Wes wasn't only a great player but also a great leader. He was always trying to make other players better and giving others encouragement. His peers all respected what he was doing for us."

Wes Von Eschen's life is a testament to the power of hard work, community, and dedication. From the basketball courts of Brooten to the battlefields of Vietnam, Wes has always represented his hometown with pride and integrity. His story is not just one of athletic success but of a deep commitment to his family, his community, and the values that have guided him throughout his life.

Written by Randy Olson,
Bonanza Valley Voice



Wesley Von Eschen (pictured on the right) in Vietnam War in 1967

JOYCE (SPANIER) BORASH

BELGRADE REDMEN, CLASS OF 1987

Joyce grew up on a dairy farm east of Belgrade, where her parents, John and Armella Spanier, raised six children.

Joyce graduated in 1987 as Belgrade-Elrosa's all-time leading scorer and had a stellar volleyball career as a three-year starter. She was part of a group of athletes that upheld a tradition of excellence in volleyball and basketball, beginning when the high school league sponsored girls' athletics in 1973. She continued to excel in college and earned numerous Division III-level awards with the College of Saint Benedict Blazers.

Former Belgrade-Elrosa basketball head coach Robert Cassidy recalls Joyce's incredible work ethic. "Regardless of the score, Joyce was always 100 percent. She never took a practice or a game off, always working as hard as she could no matter the situation." Cassidy appreciated Joyce's positive attitude and dedication to improvement.

A Volleyball Standout

Joyce's volleyball career began when she was a sophomore starter on Belgrade's state tournament team in 1984. The Redmen placed third in Class 1A at the state tournament, and Joyce earned co-MVP and co-Most Improved Player awards on the senior-dominated team. The next season, Belgrade went 15-4, and Joyce earned multiple honors, including All-State Honorable Mention and All-Prairie Conference recognition. In 1986, Belgrade claimed the District 20A volleyball championship, with Joyce earning All-Area honors for the St. Cloud Times and Willmar newspapers.

Success on the Basketball Court

On the basketball court, Joyce was a key player during her sophomore season, as the Redmen finished second in the Prairie Conference with a 12-1 record. Her junior year saw the team climb to No. 5 in the state rankings, and Joyce became the first in program history to earn



Joyce Borash playing basketball for Belgrade Redmen

Honorable Mention with the Coaches Association All-State team. During her senior season, Joyce hit a milestone by scoring her 1,000th career point. She earned her third All-Conference award and was named to the District 20 Coaches All-Star team. She finished her career as the program's leading scorer with 1,262 points.

In addition to athletics, Joyce was active in band and choir. She also participated in the Knowledge Bowl, student council, and the National Honor Society.

Collegiate Success at St. Ben's

Over Joyce's four years, the Blazers had an 84-25 overall record, won the MIAC championship, and made three NCAA Tournament appearances. Individually, Joyce was named CSB's first Kodak All-American following the 1990-91 season and graduated as the program's all-time leading scorer with 1,661 points. She also held records for most points in a season, most three-pointers in a season, and the most three-pointers in a game.

Joyce's collegiate success extended beyond the basketball court. She graduated from CSB in 1991 with a Bachelor of Arts in liberal studies. Her athletic achievements earned her a place in the CSB Hall of Fame in 2000.

Faith, Family, and Farming

Joyce's journey to the next chapter of her life began when she met Wayne Borash. The two married in August 1991.

Today, Joyce and her husband, Wayne, are dairy farmers near Sobieski, Minnesota, where they raised their four children while playing active roles in their local Catholic church and private school in Little Falls.

Reflecting on her journey, Joyce takes pride in the strong sense of community, faith, and perseverance that have defined her life.

Written by Randy Olson, *Bonanza Valley Voice*



Joyce Borash defending for Belgrade Redmen versus New London-Spicer in a basketball game in December 1986.

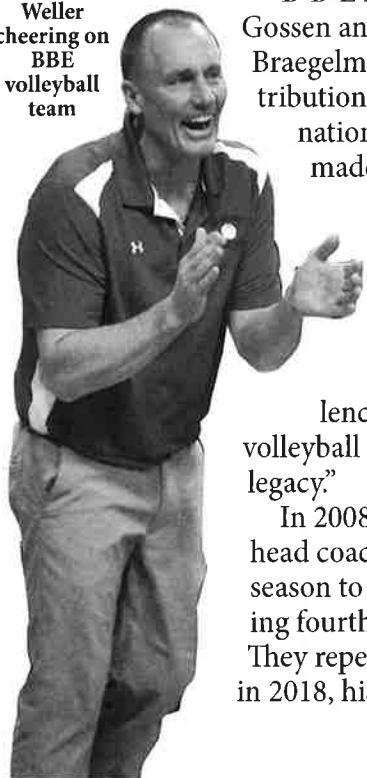
KEVIN WELLER

BELGRADE - BROOTEN - ELROSA JAGUARS, 2007 - 2018

Kevin Weller played a pivotal role in elevating Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa (B-B-E) volleyball to new heights. With his wife Micki, Kevin founded the B-B-E Blaze Junior Olympics program in 1996-97, which helped build a foundation for the varsity Jaguars to become a powerhouse in the 2000s. Under his guidance, B-B-E volleyball secured 16 Central Minnesota Conference (CMC) titles between 2000 and the 2022 season.

Kevin served as head coach for eight of those CMC title-winning teams between 2007 and 2018. His teams amassed an impressive record of 284-97 during his 12 seasons. Under his leadership, B-B-E volleyball competed in nine Section 5A championship matches and won nine Sub-Section 5A-South championships. The Jaguars also made four state tournament appearances, finishing as high as fourth place twice. Weller's impact on the B-B-E volleyball program and the community as a whole is significant.

Kevin Weller cheering on BBE volleyball team



B-B-E Activities Director Rick Gossen and former player Hailey Braegelman, highlighted Kevin's contribution in their Hall of Fame nomination letter. They wrote, "Kevin made significant contributions to the B-B-E community, not just as an outstanding athlete but as a mentor and leader. His coaching, commitment, and ability to inspire excellence shaped the success of the volleyball program and left a lasting legacy."

In 2008, Weller's second year as head coach, the Jaguars had their best season to date, going 31-3 and finishing fourth at the state tournament. They repeated this fourth-place finish in 2018, his final season as head coach.

Weller also served as a volunteer varsity football coach in 2004 and 2005.

His dedication to the community extended into business, as he owned Feed Co. in Belgrade and Paynesville for 41 years. Weller was an active member of the Belgrade Economic Development Authority, Belgrade Lions, "Let's Go Fishing" and a Prairie View Community Golf Course board member.

Weller's former volleyball players, including current B-B-E head coach Brittany (Roelike) Borgerding, recall his profound influence. "Kevin's dedication to B-B-E volleyball and his commitment to the personal growth of his athletes make him exceptional. He instilled values of teamwork, perseverance, and sports-

manship, extending his leadership far beyond the court. Kevin took the time to mentor us, helping us reach our full potential on and off the court. His emphasis on academics, time management, and leadership skills shaped us into well-rounded individuals. He left a lasting legacy that continues to inspire us."

Born to Casimir and Caroline Weller and later raised by his father and stepmother Dorothy on a Belgrade-area dairy farm, Kevin was one of 14 children. He graduated from Belgrade High School in 1981 as a standout football player and wrestler. He continued his athletic career at Willmar Community College, where he played football and wrestled for the Warriors.

Kevin and Micki have lived in the Belgrade community their entire lives, where they raised two children, Michelle and Jordan. In recent years, they have enjoyed semi-retirement, spending much of their time with their three grandchildren.

Through his dedication to coaching, business, and community service, Kevin Weller has made an indelible impact on B-B-E. His leadership on and off the court helped shape the culture of the volleyball program, establishing a legacy of success that continues to inspire athletes and community members alike.

Written by Randy Olson, Bonanza Valley Voice



Weller talking strategy with BBE volleyball team to secure a win in the 2016 season.

DOUGLAS HALVORSON

BELGRADE REDMEN, CLASS OF 1967

Doug Halvorson's journey from the humble farmlands of Burbank Township to the gridirons and basketball courts of Belgrade High School, and eventually to a successful career in the insurance industry, is a testament to the values of hard work, perseverance, and leadership. As one of nine children born to dairy farmers Gordon and Anna Halvorson, Doug grew up knowing the importance of dedication.

At Belgrade High School, Doug became a standout athlete and leader, excelling in football and basketball. In football, he was a three-year letterman and co-captain of the Redmen squad during his senior year in 1966. Playing as a guard on the offensive line and a linebacker on defense, Doug was known for his toughness and football IQ, which earned him a place on the All-West Lake Conference team in both his junior and senior years.



Halvorson shooting as a forward for the Belgrade Redmen basketball team

through senior years, and I cannot tell you how much of a pleasure that was. He has always been a young man of integrity and hard work."



Halvorson (pictured on left) as tri-captains of Belgrade Redmen football team with Craig Bahe and Jim Anderson

Doug's success on the football field was matched by his achievements on the basketball court. As a three-year letterman and co-captain of the basketball team during his senior year, he played a crucial role in leading the Redmen to a 17-5 overall record and the West Lake Conference title in the 1966-67 season. Averaging 10 points per game, Doug's leadership and skills were integral to the team's success.

After graduating from Belgrade High School in 1967, Doug continued his education at Concordia Col-

lege in Moorhead, where he earned a B.A. in psychology with a minor in political science. At Concordia, Doug continued to shine on the football field as a left guard on the offensive line. He lettered in his final three seasons and was part of the Cobbers' back-to-back Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) championship teams in 1969 and 1970. His junior year saw the Cobbers advance to the NAIA national playoffs, where they finished 10-1.

After college, Doug worked in the insurance industry. Doug's dedication to his community and his profession is further exemplified by his involvement in various civic and charitable organizations. He has worked with Habitat for Humanity, held leadership positions in his church, and served on the Mille Lacs Health System Foundation Board. A long-time member of the Lions Club, Doug was awarded the prestigious Melvin Jones Fellowship Award in 2021 for his service, during his tenure as Vice President and President of the Isle Lions Club.

In 2006, Doug and Judy moved to the shores of Mille Lacs Lake, where they embraced small-town living in Isle, Minnesota. From the farmlands of Belgrade to the football fields of Concordia College, Doug Halvorson's journey reflects the qualities of a true leader. His contributions to his community and his profession, coupled with his athletic achievements, make him a deserving inductee into the Hall of Fame.

Written by Randy Olson, Bonanza Valley Voice

JERRY OLSON

BROOTEN BUCCANEER, CLASS OF 1969

Jerry Olson's journey to becoming a local legend in Brooten, Minnesota, began in a humble setting. As a child, when he wanted to shoot baskets at home, his father, George, crafted a basketball hoop from a round piece of rod, welding it together to create a hoop that was barely larger than a basketball.

Olson's talent was so remarkable that by the seventh grade, he was invited by Coach Clifton Jacobson to dress for the varsity basketball team. During that season, the 1963-64 Brooten Buccaneers won the West Lake Conference title in one of the school's best seasons. Olson fondly recalls a particular varsity game against Atwater in Brooten, where he was given the opportunity to contribute to the team's score, making the free throw that brought them to 101 points. This moment, among others, left a lasting impression on Olson, instilling in him a deep appreciation for the opportunities his coaches provided.

As a sophomore, Olson began to make a name for himself on the court, scoring an average of 8.2 points per game. By his junior year, his scoring average had climbed to 18.2 points per game, and by his senior year, he was averaging 19.8 points per game. Olson's high school basketball career was marked by consistency and excellence, as he scored at least 900 points during his time, all without the benefit of a three-point line. In addition to being a proven scorer, Olson was also a formidable rebounder, playing as a versatile forward. His senior year saw him score 45 points in a single game, earning him a spot on WCCO's Prep Parade Team of the Week in January 1969. For his exceptional talents, Olson was named to the All-

West Lake Conference team in both his junior and senior years.

But Olson's athletic prowess wasn't confined to the basketball court. In football, he played multiple roles, including kicker, fullback, and defensive end, showcasing his versatility and dedication to the team. On the baseball field, he mostly played first base but also contributed as a pitcher and infielder, proving his adaptability. Track and field was another

arena where Olson excelled, setting school records in pole vault with a height of 11'6" and in high jump with a six-foot clearance. He also competed in shot put, discus, and the 880 relay, further demonstrating his athletic versatility.

Beyond sports, Olson was deeply involved in Brooten High School's theater program, where he lettered in Dramatics during his sophomore, junior, and senior years. His dedication to both athletics and the arts earned him a rare place in the B-Club during all four years of his high school career.

After high school, Olson's passion for hard work and his love of horses led him to a fulfilling career and a rich personal life. It was through this passion for horses that Olson met his future wife, Kay Ogdahl, of Sunburg. In their second year of marriage, they founded J and K Meat Processing. Together, Jerry and Kay successfully operated the business for nearly 40 years, with Olson's work ethic and dedication ensuring its success until their retirement in 2012.

The Olsons were blessed with two children, Kelly and Ross, both of whom stayed in Brooten with their own families. Their grandchildren, Nevada, Evan, and Isabella, have brought Jerry and Kay much joy and pride. Despite slowing down in his golden years, Olson remains as busy as he can be, still driven by the work ethic that has defined his life. "I've always liked to work. Hard work has never bothered me," Olson reflects. "I like to sit down at the end of the day and say, 'What did we get done?'"

Written by Randy Olson, Bonanza Valley Voice



Olson shooting as a forward for the Brooten Buccaneers basketball team



Jerry Olson playing as the roll of kicker for the Brooten Buccaneers

VERNAL ANDERSON

BELGRADE REDMEN, CLASS OF 1971

Vernal Anderson's life story is a testament to the powerful influence of sports, community, and family. Growing up on a 17-cow dairy farm in Lake George Township during the 1950s and 1960s, Anderson was no stranger to hard work. The daily demands of farm life shaped his character, but it was his involvement in sports that provided a vital outlet and set the stage for a lifetime of achievements.

From a young age, Anderson found solace and joy in sports. He joined the Big Grove Lutheran Church's softball team, a summer league organized by Orville Imsdahl of Brooten. Anderson fondly recalls Orville as "Mr. Softball," a man who played, umpired, and brought joy to countless children through his love for the game. This early exposure to sports laid the groundwork for what would become an illustrious athletic career.

As Vernal grew, so did his passion for sports. He vividly remembers attending Belgrade basketball games as a child and being inspired by the plaques at the ticket gate that displayed the school's track and field records. By the time he graduated from Belgrade High School in 1971, Anderson's name was etched into that very record board, holding titles in the long jump, 880 run, and the 880 and mile relays.

Vernal's high school years were marked by extraordinary athletic achievements. He earned an impressive 17 varsity letters across four sports: five in track and field, four each in baseball, football, and basketball. His prowess on the field and court did not go unnoticed,

as he was named to the WCCO All-State Team of the Week in both basketball and football during his junior and senior years. In baseball, Anderson achieved a remarkable .587 batting average in 10th grade, showcasing his versatility and skill.

Despite his individual successes, Anderson is quick to credit the many people

who supported him along the way. He speaks highly of the teachers, coaches, and community members who helped farm kids like him get home after practices and games. He recalls Coach Joe Schleper, who placed him at first base despite his nerves, believing in his ability to excel. This belief in Anderson's potential was a recurring theme throughout his life, pushing him to achieve great things both on and off the field.

Beyond athletics, Anderson was deeply involved in his school and community. His list of activities is long and varied: class president, student council member, National Honor Society, B-club president, and involvement in numerous clubs, including the Science Club, Audio-Visual Club, Drama Club, and more. He was also an award-winning member of the band and choir and held leadership roles in Belgrade's FFA chapter.

After high school, Anderson continued his athletic career at Hamline University in St. Paul, where he was a four-year letterman in both football and track and field. He also took up javelin throwing, a new event in the MIAC, and contributed to Hamline's MIAC title wins in his junior and senior years.

During his time at Hamline, Anderson met Janice Gustafson in an Anthropology class. The two married on August 21, 1976, at Big Grove Lutheran Church. Their life together was filled with service, community involvement, and raising two sons, Steven and Jon.

Anderson's path eventually led him to ministry, inspired by his family and the influential pastors in his life. After completing his studies, including Greek at Augsburg College, Anderson became the last person accepted into Luther Seminary that year but was the first to receive a pastoral call. Anderson served in various roles, including as a Chaplain in the U.S. Army, and later as a special director of Congregational Relations at Lutheran Brotherhood.

Vernal Anderson's story is one of resilience, dedication, and service. From the fields of Lake George Township to the athletic fields of Belgrade and beyond, Anderson's life has been shaped by the values instilled in him from a young age. His legacy is not just in the records he set or the games he won, but in the countless lives he touched along the way.

Written by Randy Olson, Bonanza Valley Voice



Vernal Anderson as right back for Belgrade Redmen football team



Vernal Anderson as guard for Belgrade Redmen basketball team