

From small town to big city



Becky (Wiersma) Packard used her basketball skills to get into college and the Ephrata High School Hall of Fame.

**BY STEVEN SMITH
of the Journal**

EPHRATA — Mention the name Becky Wiersma to hardcore fans of Seattle Pacific University women's basketball and they know exactly who she is.

She's that girl who set the assist and steal records for the Lady Falcons.

Of course, that was three decades ago, and before that, Becky (Wiersma) Packard was part of one of the best Ephrata High girls basketball teams in school history.

The 51-year-old Packard will be honored by her alma mater on Saturday, Sept. 28, when she becomes one of the 13 in the inaugural class of the Ephrata High Hall of Fame. The event will take place as part of Hall of Fame weekend, with a banquet set for St. Rose of Lima School.

"When they called, I was so honored, and humbled," Packard said. "Just by the fact that they're finally doing a Hall of Fame for Ephrata and to go in with the first group, it's such a high honor."

Packard was an outstanding three-sport athlete at a time and in a school where there were many who could fit that description — another outstanding athlete who came after her, Heidi Moritz-Saville (EHS 1987-91) will join her as one of the first inductees into the Hall. But as good as Packard was on the volleyball court and on the track for the Tigers, basketball is where she left her mark.

Packard was a three-time all-Caribou Trail Selection in both volleyball and basketball — as a senior, she was all-state and played in the first-ever Washington Girls All-State game. The Tigers gradually climbed the trophy ladder in basketball, finishing fourth in 1984, third in 1985 and second in 1986, losing to Foster High of Seattle in the class A championship contest.

In the spring, Packard would join the Ephrata track team, where she was a state-medal winning hurdler. Her best year was her last when she finished third in the state in the 100-meter hurdles and fourth in the 300-hurdles.

"Volleyball was awesome with coach (Debbie) Landrie. We just kind of grew into it and got to go to state my senior year. She was a great coach and it was a fun group of girls," she said. "But I also loved going from two long seasons in the gym to getting out onto the track. It was a little unusual for me to hurdle because I wasn't tall or long-legged but I was strong and worked hard at it."

Packard was a rarity for Tiger girls basketball from 1983-86, the heart of the school's Decade of Dominance. She was a four-year varsity player, a starter at point guard during a period when the high school game didn't have a three-point line and girls teams had to play with the same ball as the boys — today, the girls game features a smaller basketball.

"Her passing skills and court awareness were amazing, to say the least," said her coach, former Tiger mentor Don King. "Her personality and unselfish work ethic made her the perfect leader. She was an excellent shooter but always looked for the open teammate first."

She would also be honored by the Wenatchee North Rotary Club as a three-time recipient of North Central Washington Sports Awards. She won the Female Prep Athlete of the Year in 1985 and 1986, then was named the top college women's athlete in 1990.

On the court, she was constantly breaking her own school record for assists and in four varsity years, she scored 949 points, putting her 10th on the school's all-time scoring list.

But Packard said she might not be going into the Ephrata Hall had it not been for one of her teammates, the one who is still the all-time leading scorer in Ephrata girls basketball history. Mary Beth Nelson, the 6-foot-3 center, and Wiersma were the Tigers' "dynamic duo. It took the whole team for us to be successful but she was our heart."

"Mary Beth was truly one-of-a-kind, a great teammate and a true competitor. I think some of her best games were when we were up against our toughest competition," Packard said. "She always stepped up huge when playing against another great big girl. She was chill and would go with the flow usually, but she was a beast on the court."

And the Wiersma-Nelson duo would finish their prep basketball careers together in a land far away. In the summer of 1986, the two Tigers joined a Northwest Basketball Camp team that spent three weeks touring Australia.

"Coach King had been taking teams to their camps for years, and I'd been going since I was in the sixth grade," Packard recalled. "For Mary Beth and me to both make that team was very special. It was a pretty big deal."

Packard ended her college recruitment process prior to the start of her senior basketball season when she opted for Seattle Pacific, a smaller Christian university where she would spend four years playing for the Lady Falcons. She established herself as one of the best ballhandlers and defenders in SPU history, as the numbers show.

She played 113 games and dished out 647 assists, which included a single-game mark of 15 in 1989, her senior year in Seattle. She also recorded nine steals in one game – all three remain as school records today.

Through it all, Packard has been steadfast in her beliefs, a strong Christian spirit that she has carried from her high school days to her life as a wife, mother and teacher at a Christian elementary school in Stockton, Calif., where she and husband Darrel now call home. The couple, who met at Seattle Pacific (where he played for the men's basketball team) have three children – sons Sean and Mitch both graduated from

Stockton's faith-based Heritage High School and Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo, while daughter Jenae, also an HHS grad, is preparing for her sophomore season with the women's soccer team at the University of the Pacific.

Becky Packard has also spent 10 years as the JV volleyball coach at Heritage.

"I am really thankful that I was able to grow up in a caring, supportive Christian family. And I was able to make it part of playing basketball," she said. "I had a wonderful opportunity with Northwest Basketball and going to Seattle Pacific was a great opportunity. I was able to grow in my faith. I live my faith."

And to make herself that much better, Packard was also an outstanding student, graduating with a 3.85 grade-point-average as a member of the National Honor Society. From the classroom to the court, it was the complete package that made her who she is today.

"I loved growing up in Ephrata and being part of such a great community. I am super thankful for all the support and enthusiasm from our fans and community for all of Tiger athletics," she added. "It truly was a special high school experience for me and an amazing community in which to grow up, and I am forever grateful."

"Playing three sports, being a student there for four years – it was all such a great experience and such a great era to be at Ephrata. The 1980s were magic," Packard concluded. "I worked hard during the season, in the offseason, I always wanted to be competitive and we all had a lot of fun together. That's what made us successful – to me, if you're not having fun, enjoying the team and the games, then it's not worth it."