

Athletic Hall of Fame Inductee



Marsha Kinney: Queen of Ephrata High track in the early 1970s to be honored at induction ceremony on Sept. 28

**BY STEVEN SMITH
of the Journal**

EPHRATA – Marsha Lance has chosen a simple life. Retirement, travel, spending time with family and friends, the life many dreams can become real someday.

It's a far cry from the time when Marsha Kinney was a record-setting, championship-winning track and field machine at Ephrata High. When she was the best female athlete in school history.

And it was those days that will make Marsha Kinney-Lance one of the first 13 inductees in the new Ephrata High Hall of Fame.

The 63-year-old Lance is one of seven athletes, a community volunteer, four coaches and one state title team that will be inducted on Hall of Fame weekend Sept. 27-28. She will join the others for community introductions during halftime of the Ellensburg-Ephrata football game on Sept. 27 and will be with the first Hall class for induction ceremonies on Sept. 28 at St. Rose of Lima School.

Lance was a pioneer in the history of Ephrata High girls track, as well as Tiger track in general. From 1972 to 1974, she won five individual state titles, a mark for the girls team she still maintains – the only other five-championship trackster at Ephrata was Jonnie Green, the former Tiger sprinter who ran at the school from 2012-2014.

Both Lance and Green also share another distinction, having been part of the school's first track state championship teams. The Ephrata girls won their title in 1973, which was also the very first state championship in school history – the Tiger boys were first at the state 2A finals in 2012.

As Marsha Kinney, she was a three-sport athlete at Ephrata but if you asked Tiger fans of the era (early 1970s), her legacy came on the track – first for coach Ray Cross, who passed away before her junior season, then for new girls mentor George Smethers.

"In grade school, I was always one of the fastest kids in my class. In junior high, I loved being on the track team," she said. "There was a girl in the ninth grade I really looked up to and I wanted to do what she did."

In high school, it would be primarily under Smethers' tutelage that Kinney would become the best female track athlete in school history – her resume includes five state championship medals (four individual, one relay); an 11-time district title winner; an AAU Junior Olympic pentathlon winner; and a national-record setting AAU high jumper.

For Smethers, Marsha Kinney was like finding treasure. He took over the job as girls track coach in 1973 after Cross had passed away, and his very first team won the state title with Kinney as one of the leaders.

"She had natural ability, she worked very hard at it and she was coachable – she would listen to what we told her. I'd say she was the best I coached," he said. "She was a great person and a great athlete. All of those girls were great to work with."

Her first state title came in the spring of 1972, her sophomore year – she won the high jump at 5 feet, 2 inches. As a junior in 1973, she was second in the high jump but won the state long jump and ran with Deb Agranoff, Lisa Lybecker and Susan Schuh to win the 440-yard relay enroute to capturing the team crown.

"We won the title with the girls we had, which meant a lot to us," Lance said. "The kids today, they have so much more than we did. All we really had was a lot of natural ability and talent.

"Maybe we were breaking some kind of glass ceiling. We just never saw it that way."

She won both the long jump and high jump gold medals in 1974 when she was a senior and just missed a third title that year. "I was in the finals of the 80-yard hurdles but I hit one of the hurdles with my knee and that almost stopped me – I finished dead last," she said.

Kinney is still the school record holder in two events. She went 17 feet, 9-3/4 inches in the long jump to win the state championship in 1973 and 5-feet, 7 inches in the high jump at an AAU meet in Goldendale just after she graduated.

She didn't match that height in the high jump when she and classmate Dodi McAlpine competed in the national AAU Junior Olympics district meet – she only went 5-6 1/2 at the Inland Empire districts in Spokane. But because the meet was nationally-sanctioned by AAU, an event that qualified her to continue on to regional competition, it put Lance into the national record book at the time.

She did run track in college, walking on to join the team at Washington State. She got one college offer, from Seattle Pacific University – "they offered me \$600 for my first year. I had to find the rest."

"I love track and I wanted to keep going in college, so I sent my resume to colleges all over the country to try and get a scholarship," Lance said. "But at the time, there was no money and not much of a future in women's track. That's my only regret – all of the rest, I wouldn't change anything."

After a couple of seasons at WSU, Lance left school to train for the Olympics – she didn't make it but it wouldn't have mattered if she had. Lance was training for the 1976 games in Moscow, but the Americans didn't attend that year – President Jimmy Carter ordered the United States contingency to boycott the games in protest over the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan.

"We didn't go to the Olympics, I got hurt. After that, I just lost interest and gave up track."

So, after college and a life of family and work, Lance and her husband, Jerry, made the life transition into retirement last year – she said they sold their home in Yakima and now travel the country in a motor home. The couple has been married 35 years and have two sons and a new grandchild.

She worked for a Yakima dentist for 20 years but was forced into an early retirement at age 50 when she was diagnosed with Myelofibrosis, a type of bone marrow cancer that disrupts the body's normal production of blood cells. She underwent a stem cell transplant, receiving cells from a gentleman in Georgia she'd never met and was not a relative of any kind, Lance said.

"A few years after the transplant and I recovered, we flew down to Nashville to meet him. It was amazing – it felt like I had known him my whole life," she said. "Now I hear from him every year on my birthday, the day I received my transplant."

After she recovered, Lance returned to the work force with a non-profit optometrist service – she would eventually work her way up to the title of clinic director until her second retirement.

And when she and her husband turn the motor home in the direction of her hometown in September, Lance will become honored by her alma mater "in the best way."

"This is really an honor, something I never even considered," she said. "Maybe I got it because I was a standout individual athlete. I just know I'm looking forward to seeing everyone."

