

# GPSA News



Promoting prominent athletes, sports teams and recreational activities in Pueblo County

VOL. III, ISSUE 6

08.14.2025

## Three Greatest Moments Selected for 2025 GPSA Banquet

The Greater Pueblo Sports Association announced during its May meeting the "Three Greatest Moments in Pueblo Sports History" for the 2025 Banquet in November.

The three listed below are by different Group Era (I: 1913-1987; II: 1988-2005; III: 2006-Present).

### Group I Era (1913-1987):

1965 Pueblo Central wins Class 3A State Football Championship (11-3) against Poudre. Ed Lesar, Head Coach.

### Group II Era (1988-2005):

2004 and 2005 Pueblo South Wrestling becomes first Pueblo teams to win back-to-back Colorado State 4A Wrestling Championships. Jerry Sisneros, Head Coach.

### Group III Era (2006-Present):

Pueblo County's Hunter Willits becomes first Pueblo wrestler to win four consecutive Colorado State Wrestling Titles. Eddie Soto, head Coach.

## GPSA Attends Spirit of a Champions Benefit June 19

The Greater Pueblo Sports Association (GPSA) had several inductees present at the "Spirit of a Champion" Benefit for John Neuman Catholic School. It featured an evening with Pueblo native Joe Pannunzio (2009 GPSA Inductee), an assistant coach with the Philadelphia Eagles of the National Football League (NFL). The event was held at the Occhiato Ballroom on the campus of CSU Pueblo.

GPSA committee member John Barker, Jr., went to the event which included dinner, a live auction for four items (Poker Night with Kevin Kielbach; A ski trip to Crested Butte, CO; Philadelphia trip—two tickets to watch NFL Eagles play that also includes hotel accommodations and an autographed jersey of Eagles running back Saquon Barkley.

Pannunzio then talked to the crowd of approximately 220 on hand about his rise through the coaching ranks and what it takes to be a champion on and off the field.



Joe Pannunzio speaks at the "Spirit of a Champion" Benefit June 19 at CSU Pueblo



Past GPSA Inductees gather for a picture with Joe Pannunzio at "Spirit of a Champion" Benefit for John Neumann Catholic School  
Standing L to R: Dan DeRose (2002), Mike Salardino (2022), Joe Pannunzio (2009), Mark DeRose (2009), John Wristen (2015) and Todd Kelly (2023)



Cocktail Hour and meeting Joe Pannunzio at "Spirit of a Champion" Benefit for John Neumann Catholic School at CSU Pueblo on June 19, 2025

**52 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE PUEBLO COMMUNITY**



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## GPSA In the News

### Committee Member Elly Naill New District 60 Athletic Director

Elly Naill has been named the new Athletic Director for District 60 and started her duties in July. Naill has been a committee member of the Greater Pueblo Sport Association since 2019. She takes over for Aaron Bravo who retired after serving in the same capacity for four years. Naill has 14 years of experience specific to the athletic director role (six years as middle school assistant principal/athletic director and eight years as an assistant principal/athletic director at the high school level). Elly has spent the last eight years (2017) as the assistant principal and athletic director at Pueblo East High School. Congratulations Elly and best wishes from the GPSA on your new job!



GPSA Committee Member Elly Naill  
(Photo courtesy of The Pueblo Chieftain)

### GPSA Inductee Spotlight — Penny Zavichas

Penny Zavichas was inducted into the Greater Pueblo Sports Association in 2002 stating "that it was nice and rewarding to be considered along with all the outstanding athletes who call Pueblo home."

It all begin for Penny in 1955, while slicing balls all over Elmwood Golf Course in Pueblo. Zavichas had no idea this frustration would lead into a career she absolutely loved.

Her journey into the LPGA Teaching Division, a stint on the LPGA Tour and then kicking up dust and divots in 41 states, Canada, Cuba, the Far East, and Antilles Islands, resulted in a six-decade long golf career. Penny just loved to teach.

It has been a long way from that outside-in golf swing (causes a slice) at Elmwood. Penny has pretty much given up teaching presently (bad knees) and she misses it. It has been a long golf career for her.

She has written her memoirs on her golf journey and it is on sale in Pueblo for \$15.00 or on her website [www.pennysgolfbook.com](http://www.pennysgolfbook.com).

Penny is appreciative with all the help in kick starting my career to the fine golfers in Pueblo (and by the way I am glad of the name change back to Elmwood Golf Course).

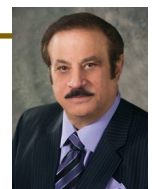


Penny Zavichas  
(2002 GPSA Inductee)

### Coming in the September Newsletter!

- Macartney Award Winners
- GPSA Sponsorship Drive
- Gift Basket Information
- Pueblo Chili Festival Information

**GPSA Newsletter Signup**  
Click to get monthly updates  
on latest News from the GPSA



**Louie Carleo—LDC Properties**  
2025 GPSA Newsletters Sponsor  
(2004 GPSA Inductee)

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**Wed., Nov. 19, 2024 (53rd GPSA BANQUET):**

**Location:** Occhiato Center Ballroom, CSU Pueblo

**Time:** 7:00 p.m.

**Banquet Tickets:** Go on sale Oct. 2, 2025 (More information to come at a later date).



Scan the QR code  
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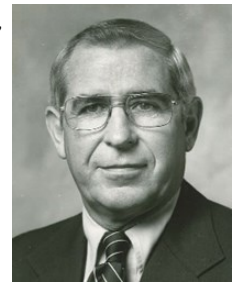
## GPSA Loses Two Inductees and a Committee Member in Summer of 2025

The summer of 2025 saw three more members of the GPSA pass away. Those individuals were Vern Cochran, Richard Pike and Dewie Thornton. Below is a brief overview of their accomplishments which put them in the GPSA Hall of Fame and their obituaries. They join four others who have passed away since the 2024 banquet (Tony Hegler, Nick Graham, David Knapp and Steve Cathcart).

### Vern Cochran (GPSA Induction Class - 1983)

Vernon D. Cochran, a devoted educator, mentor, and sports leader, passed away on May 24, 2025, in Highlands Ranch, CO.

Vern excelled in football and basketball at Central High School, later continuing his athletic career at the University of Denver. His dedication to sports shaped his passion for coaching, where he made a lasting impact on young athletes. Cochran spent 38 years serving School District 60 in Pueblo, working as a teacher, counselor, assistant principal, and ultimately Associate Superintendent before retiring in 1983. His coaching at Central High School led his teams to conference championships every year from 1955 to 1959.



[Vern Cochran — Obituary](#)

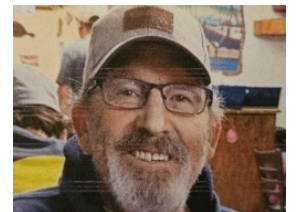
### Richard Alan Pike (15 year GPSA Member)

Richard Pike has been a Greater Pueblo Sports Association (GPSA) member since 2010. He was recruited by Hall of fame Coach Hoy Frakes to be a part of the GPSA. Rich graduated from Centennial High School in 1971 as a loyal Bulldog. He served as a member and vice-president of the Centennial Foundation and Hall of Fame Committee for many years.

He was nominated by Principal Frank Latino and inducted into the Centennial Athletic Hall of Fame in 2005 for wrestling and football. The Pike family presented the Jerry Pike Most Valuable Wrestler Award (chosen by the coaches) for the regional wrestling tournament for 50 years in honor of their brother Jerry, a 1964 Bulldog State Champion. Richard's brother Ron was a respected Centennial head wrestling coach and an accomplished state wrestling official. Pike graduated from Southern Colorado State College (CSU-Pueblo).

He retired from the Division of Youth Corrections, Pueblo Youth Services Center, in December, 2008, after 20-plus years of service.

Richard passed away unexpectedly on June 26, 2025.



[Rich Pike — Obituary](#)

### Deward "Dewie" L. Thornton (GPSA Induction Class - 1998)

Deward grew up in Pueblo and attended Central High School, graduating in 1954. He was a three-sport standout for the Wildcats from 1952-54, playing basketball, baseball and track.

He went to Pueblo Junior College (PJC) and graduated from Western State College in Gunnison, CO. At PJC, Thornton played two seasons each of basketball and baseball. He was the captain of the PJC basketball team that played in the National Junior College Tournament (1955-56). He was awarded a basketball scholarship to Western State College. He started his teaching career in Salida, CO and eventually moved back to Pueblo to teach in District 60. "Dewie" taught middle school and high school and finished his career as Principal at Centennial High School, retiring in 1993.

In addition to teaching, Thornton coached basketball, wrestling, baseball, football and track. He also spent over 20 years as a basketball official at the high school and college level and 15 years as a baseball official at the high school, college and semi-pro level.

Thornton died peacefully on June 27, 2025, surrounded by family.



[Dewie Thornton — Obituary](#)

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