



Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame announces 2019 inductees

Honorees reflect the county's rich and diverse sports heritage.

The Hickory Metro Sports Commission's Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame 2019 class highlights the county's championship football tradition and its rich auto racing heritage.

"This is another very worthy and outstanding group. We are recognizing some really fantastic people who have brought, pride, honor and esteem to Catawba County sports history," said Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame Chairman JuJu Phillips. "The Selection Committee did a fantastic job in nominating some very deserving individuals."

The Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame's Class of 2019 includes:

- Catawba College all-time interceptions leader, three-sport Maiden athlete and current Western Carolina University coach Keith Henry.
- Two-time NASCAR Cup Champion Crew Chief, auto racing broadcaster and Richard Childress Racing Vice President of Competition Andy Petree.
- Lenoir-Rhyne University Hall of Fame linebacker and college football coach for 35 years, Georgia State coach Brad Lawing.
- Baseball and softball champion, motorsports public relations mainstay and local athletics supporter Dennis Punch.
- All-American running back, NFL player and athletic director John Mackorell (1912-1980).
- Undefeated North Carolina 3A State Football Champion 1996 Hickory High School, the Hall of Fame's 2019 Team of Distinction.

Established in 2000, the Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame recognizes the extraordinary efforts and achievements of athletes, coaches, teams and contributors, while also reinforcing a sense of history and tradition in Catawba County. This year's inductees will join 89 Hall members recognized in a permanent display at Hickory Highland Recreation Center and www.hickorymetrosports.com.

New inductees will be celebrated during the annual Hickory Metro Sports Commission's 19th Annual Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame Banquet on Monday, May 13 at the city of Hickory's Highland Recreation Center.



"We believe this year's class is very deserving and will be extremely well received," Phillips said. "We look forward to celebrating their many accomplishments with them, their families and friends."

The 2019 Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame banquet recognizes the Peoples Bank Scholar Athletes of Excellence from the public and private high schools throughout Catawba County. Many of these student athletes participate in multiple sports, and some are at the top of their academic class. From the county's finalists, one male student athlete and one female student athlete will be awarded a \$1,000 scholarship, courtesy of The Cody Law Firm.

Tickets for the Hall of Fame banquet go on sale April 8 for \$25 each. The May 14 banquet includes a meal catered by Boxcar Grille of Claremont. Tickets are available at high schools throughout Catawba County and the Hickory Highland Recreation Center.

Biographical information for each of 2019 inductee follows.



Keith Henry

All-American and South Athletic Conference Hall of Famer Keith Henry is the leading vote-getter in the 2019 Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame induction class. He holds the record for career interceptions at Catawba College (20) where he is also a Hall of Fame member and former defensive coordinator for the 2015 Indians team that won the SAC crown. Henry has coached at the collegiate level more than 25 years, including more than a decade at Wake Forest University, which won the 2006 Atlantic Coast Conference while he was a leader on the defensive coaching staff.

“Keith Henry is one of the best all-around athletes to come out of Maiden High School,” Phillips said. “Keith has enjoyed success on the field and on the sidelines at the next level to make him Hall of Fame worthy.”

A three-sport athlete at Maiden, he was the team’s most valuable player in 1984, and the quarterback/defensive back won All-Conference status in three seasons. He scored 996 career points on the basketball court, and he was the team’s 1985 Outstanding Defensive Player. He was a two-time all-conference pick in basketball and baseball, and was a baseball All-State Honorable mention in 1985.

“It didn’t matter the sport, Keith was clearly the leader by outstanding play and as a vocal leader,” wrote long-time Maiden coach Fred Byrne in support of Henry’s nomination. “What impressed me about Keith was not how good he could cover at corner or come flying in to blow up a ball carrier but his determination to be something more than a millworker ... and to make a living doing what he loved.”

Henry was an all-conference selection all four years of his Catawba College career, which included All-American honors in 1986, 1987 and 1988. The team captain in 1987 and 1988, Henry was Catawba’s Harvey Stratton Player of the Year in 1988.

After two seasons playing with the Arena Football League’s Albany Firebirds and Charlotte Rage, Henry began his collegiate coaching career. During a three-year tenure at North Carolina A&T, he coached defensive backs and distinguished himself as MEAC Baseball Coach of the Year for a role he held two years. He served on Jim Grobe’s football coaching staff for 17 years at Ohio University and then Wake Forest. Those Ohio teams went 27-20-1, while during a three-year period at Wake Forest the Deacons posted a 28-12 record.

Henry was named running backs coach at University of North Carolina-Charlotte in 2017 after four years on the staff his his alma mater Catawba. In March 2019, he joined the Western Carolina staff to coach defensive backs and serve as special teams coordinator.



Andy Petree

Two-time NASCAR Cup Championship crew chief for Dale Earnhardt Sr. (1993,1994), Andy Petree won 25 cup series races as a crew chief and established himself as a auto-racing broadcaster for ESPN and FS1. He's won two races as a Cup series owner and now serves a Vice President of Competition for Richard Childress Racing.

"Catawba County is known far and wide as the birthplace of many NASCAR greats," Phillips said. "Andy Petree falls in that category as a championship crew chief."

A Newton-native, Petree got his start at Hickory Motor Speedway alongside NASCAR and Catawba County Sports Hall of Famer Dale Jarrett. After guiding the DAJ Racing team in HMS Late Model and then NASCAR Busch Series success, Petree landed a job as crew chief for Leo Jackson and driver Harry Gant. Later he was hired by RCR as crew chief for Earnhardt, before returning to Jackson's organization and ultimately buying a team from the Jackson brothers. He owned the team from 1997-2003.

"Following his ownership venture, Petree was recruited to join two of his Newton-Conover High School friends in the ESPN broadcast booth," ESPN/ABC Sports broadcaster Dr. Jerry Punch wrote in support of Petree's Hall of Fame nomination. "This marked the first time three announcers (Jarrett, Petree and Punch) from the same hometown and high school had ever hosted major sporting events on national television. The '3 Newton Boys' hosted all major ESPN/ABC NASCAR races and events for three years."

Petree returned to the competition side of auto racing with RCR in 2017. RCR driver Austin Dillon won the Daytona 500 in 2018 and fellow RCR drivers Daniel Hemric, Tyler Reddick and Kaz Grala post strong performances weekly.

Petree is a first-ballot nominee to the Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame.

Brad Lawing

For 35 years, Lenoir-Rhyne Hall of Famer Brad Lawing has played an integral role in the success of college football's most successful teams and players. Now a Georgia State University defensive coach, Lawing was recruiting coordinator for 17 years as part of a career coaching portfolio that includes Appalachian State, South Carolina, Michigan State, North Carolina, Florida and Florida State. He's coached in 17 playoff or post-season bowl games, and he coached more than 30 players who have advanced to the National Football League, including six first-round selections.



“Brad Lawing has been one of the best recruiters for decades in college football,” Phillips said. “He was an outstanding hard-nosed athlete at St. Stephens and Lenoir-Rhyne. That no-nonsense approach for nearly four decades as a coach has made him a Catawba County Sports Hall of Famer.”

Lawing was a three-sport athlete at St. Stephens High School, before attending Lenoir-Rhyne where he distinguished himself as a linebacker. As a Lenoir-Rhyne senior in 1979 he was voted team captain and later won the Lee Kirby Award (Team Before Self), at the time, the highest honor awarded to an Bears football player. He won the team’s Best Defensive Player award in 1978 and the Sportsmanship Award in 1979. Lawing, who also played baseball at Lenoir-Rhyne, finished his career as a Bear with 159 tackles, 151 assists, six fumble recoveries, four interceptions and three sacks. Lawing was inducted into Lenoir-Rhyne’s Hall of Fame in 2015.

Lawing’s coaching career began at Appalachian State University on Coach Mack Brown’s staff, and his five years as defensive line coach included back-to-back Southern Conference championship teams and a 1-AA semifinalist finish. During 17 years divided over two stints at South Carolina, Lawing’s defensive standouts became familiar pro football names: Jadeveon Clowney, Melvin Ingram, Corey Miller, Gerald Dixon, Henry Taylor and defensive end John Abraham, who went on to be a five-time Pro Bowler in the NFL.

From 2008 to 2012, South Carolina finished in the nation’s Top 15 in total defense every year, including a high of No. 3 in 2011. Over that time, the Gamecocks reached a bowl every season and went 11-2 in each of Lawing’s last two seasons with South Carolina. Lawing was a 2011 nominee for the Broyles Award. He has coached on the staff with four national championship coaches, including Brown, Nick Saban, Steve Spurrier and Jimbo Fisher.

Dennis Punch

A standout athlete at Newton-Conover High School and N.C. State University, Dennis Punch has been a member of the National Motorsports Association for more than 30 years, working in public relations, promotions and marketing with Dale Earnhardt, Dale Jarrett, Dale Earnhardt Jr., Tony Stewart, Jimmie Johnson, Danica Patrick, Tommy Houston and other NASCAR and Rolex Sports Car Series drivers. He won six national championships as a softball player, an ACC Championship as a baseball player and helped construct a press box at Newton-Conover’s Gurley Stadium as an athletic booster.



“Dennis Punch has enjoyed a long and very successful career as a NASCAR spokesman,” Phillips said. “People forget he was a stellar athlete at Newton-Conover High School and later as a major contributor to N.C. State baseball in the late 1960s.”

Punch earned 10 letters playing football, baseball and basketball at Newton-Conover. As a football player, he won the first Golden Helmet Award for Most Outstanding Player in 1966, and he played on the Lions Bowl between Northwestern and Southwestern conferences. On the baseball diamond he was All-Conference, All-Region and a member of the 1966 Conference Co-championship team. As a Red Devil, he was a standout athlete and scholar, earning N.C. West Region Jr. Civitan of the Year in 1965-66, an appointment to N.C. Boys State in 1965 and was named the school’s “Most Athletic” and “Most School Spirit” as a senior.

Punch led N.C. State’s freshman team in hitting as a walk-on and was offered a scholarship. As starting first baseman for three years, he was integral to the Wolfpack’s 1968 ACC Conference Championship team and its first-ever berth in the College World Series. His hit drove in the winning run to give N.C. State its first CWS victory, and he notched three hits in the school’s second series win.

Punch played softball with the Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame Team of Distinction Howard Furniture/Western Steer through the mid-1970s and early 1980s. Before that, he was an All-American in 1974 on the Aetna Industrial National Championship team and a member of the two-time N.C. Champion Broyhill Chiefs baseball team that played in the National Baseball Congress Tournament in 1971.

After his on-field career ended, Punch managed Anheuser-Busch and Busch beer marketing and promotion in motorsports programs. Punch led Busch Series, Busch Pole award and similar promotional programs across six nascar brands. He was recognized with NASCAR awards for “Dedication and Commitment to the NASCAR Busch Grand National Series” in 1988 and 1989.

“Along with his athletic and sports marketing involvement ... Dennis has guided and assisted with many young athletes in the Catawba County area through the years,” according to a letter in support of Punch’s nomination. “He currently volunteers as girls basketball and boys basketball coach Christian Family Academy in Conover. He has earned the respect and possesses the character and high standards of excellence needed to be considered in this prestigious Hall of Fame.”



John Mackorell (1912-1980)

John Mackorell rushed for 3,300 yards at Hickory High School and holds the single-season rushing record set for Davidson College, where he was named an All-American, the school's first and the only football player to receive the honor. A member of the N.C. Sports Hall of Fame and Davidson College's first Hall of Fame Class, Mackorell is also Lees McRae's winningest coach in school history.

"John Mackorell was a true football pioneer in Catawba County football history," Phillips said. "He's still in the Hickory High School record books almost 90 years after he played. He's a nearly forgotten gridiron great."

Mackorell was a dominant, multi-sport athlete who earned 17 letters during his career at Hickory (1927-31). His rushing mark is still third all-time in school history, and the star halfback quickly caught the attention of Davidson College.

"Mr. Mackorell came to Davidson and quickly established himself as one of the best, if not the best, football players that has ever put on a uniform at Davidson College," Davidson College Sports Information Director Jake Brewer wrote in support of Mackorell's nomination. "Believe it or not - that was over 80 years ago."

Mackorell set the school's single-season rushing record during the 1934 season, when he was named to the Associated Press Little All-American team. He received AP All-State honors in 1933 and 1934, and he led the 1933 Davidson baseball team to the Big Five championship. He was drafted by the NFL's New York Giants and played during the 1935 season, in addition to playing a professional baseball stint with the Hickory Rebels.

Mackorell became athletic director for Lees McRae in 1936 and coached football and basketball. He also served as assistant to the president in charge of fundraising from 1936-1946.

"I've seen better passers, runners, punters, blockers and tacklers. But in concert, never have I observed one who combined those attributes as well as Johnny Mackorell. Consequently, he rates as one of the best all around football players I ever saw," former Lenoir-Rhyne coach Pat Shores once wrote of Mackorell.



Team of Distinction: 1996 Hickory High School Football

Hickory High School's 1996 football team won North Carolina's state 3A football championship to become the first 3A team to finish 16-0 in a season. Led by 20 athletes who continued football at the collegiate level, the Tornadoes finished the season ranked North Carolina's No. 1 in both offensive scoring and scoring defense.

"The 1996 Hickory High Red Tornadoes team is a pillar in Catawba County football history," Phillips said. "They were perhaps the most dominant high school football team, not only in Catawba County, but in the history of the N.C. High School Athletics Association."

Hickory's perfect season concluded with a 42-0 shutout of Jamestown Ragsdale to cap off a year where the Tornadoes outscored opponents 767-99. The team's smallest margin of victory was a 19-point 33-14 win at Freedom. The Tornadoes shut-out opponents seven times, three times in the playoffs. Catawba County Sports Hall of Fame member David Elder won the N.C. Associated Press Coach of the Year award for the 1996 Tornado team that was part of a five-year run that went 56-10. The team was named among the NCHSAA "Notable 90" football teams in 2004.

Hickory rushed for 5,833 yards during the 1996 season and was led by athletes who received significant post-season recognition, including college football opportunities.

- Jamel Patterson: Offensive Player of the Year, All Conference, All Unifour, All Piedmont, All State Honorable Mention, Player of the Year (Charlotte Observer, WBTV). Signed with Ohio University.
- Michael Collins: All Conference, All Unifour, All Piedmont, All State, Shrine Bowl Captain. Signed with Wake Forest.
- Daniel Willis: Team MVP, All Conference, All Unifour. Signed to play basketball at Lenoir-Rhyne.
- Ty Hunt: Defensive Player of the Year, All Conference, All Piedmont, All State Honorable Mention, Shrine Bowl (scored winning touchdown in 1996 game). Signed with East Carolina.
- Jovian King: Most Outstanding Defensive Player in 1996 Championship Game. Signed with Mississippi Gulf Coast Junior College.
- Chris Nelson: All Piedmont Honorable Mention, All Conference Academic Award.
- Jovan Hoover: All Conference. Signed with Western Carolina.
- Johnnie Dillingham: All Conference, All Unifour. Signed with Gardner Webb.
- Lee Wilson: All Conference, All State Honorable Mention, Offensive MVP in 1996 State Championship Game. Signed with Catawba.
- Kennada Propst: All Conference. Signed with N.C. A&T.
- Kerwin Graham: All Conference. Signed with Winston-Salem State.