

TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY SPORTS SPOTLITE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SHANAMAN SPORTS MUSEUM

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Kim Butler was the second leading scorer in the Pac-10, averaging 18.6 points per game in her senior season of 2006.
Photo courtesy of Kim (Butler) West.

OLYMPIC MEMORIES

For anybody looking for a quick scouting report on the Bellarmine Prep girls basketball team, here's just the smallest note: If they are up three points late in a game, they will foul you.

They will not give you a chance to hit a deep ball to tie the game on a single shot.

This all tracks back to the 2012 Olympics and a game that still shows up every now and again in the sleep pattern of Bellarmine coach Kim Butler.

“I still have nightmares about this game against France,” clear, competitive frustration rising in her otherwise placid voice nearly a decade after the fact. “I shot two free throws to put us up by three and all we had to do was foul them and put them on the line. Celine Dumerc from France — probably the best point guard in the world at that point — hits a deep, left-handed three and just boom ... we go into OT and then she hits another three to win it there.”

France would go on to win silver, falling only to the dominant United States.

Butler and her Great Britain teammates never won a game, but it was more than that. It was the first ever women's national team for the country and the Brits were hardly overmatched. Every game was competitive, and the team raised the profile of basketball in the host country — where it rarely gets any attention — and was treated with a celebrity status, even getting to meet the Royal Family.

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SHANAMAN Sports Museum

The mission of the Shanaman Sports Museum of Tacoma-Pierce County is to recreate the history of sports in the community by chronicling the evolution of various sports through written, visual and audio mediums and to educate the public about our sports heritage.

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JOIN THE TEAM

The Shanaman Sports Museum honors the history of sports and the rich culture of athletics in Tacoma-Pierce County. To maintain that tradition, the board of directors is pleased to invite the public to show their support by becoming a member.

For more information, please visit our website:
www.tacomasporthmuseum.com/membership

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Tacoma-Pierce County Sports Hall of Fame inductees
 Left to right: Bill Murphy (baseball), Scott Nielsen (baseball), Mylon Watkins (boxing), Brendon Merritt (basketball), Tatum (Brown) Morris (basketball) and Kate Rue (basketball).

Photo by Mike Sage Photography
 See article on page 7 for more details.

Olympic Memories, cont. from page 1

“It’s the pinnacle of every athlete’s dream,” she said. “It was just incredible. Every moment was with that in mind. Such an unreal thing and then to be there and present and not be overwhelmed ... to be one of the greats.”

It was all a bit stunning for Butler, who received dual citizenship in Great Britain before she turned 18, never intending to use it for international play. By then she was clearly on track to a successful athletic career beyond what most could accomplish, capping a successful prep run and heading off to Santa Clara on basketball scholarship. She might have played soccer instead, but as basketball offered better financial incentives as far as tuition, she stuck with hoops and played two years for the Broncos in the West Coast Conference with her older sister Julie. When Julie was diagnosed with lymphoma, Kim transferred and played her final two years at Oregon State in order to be closer to her family. As a senior she was all-conference honorable mention and was second in the Pac-10 in scoring and free-throw shooting, knocking down just less than 77 percent of her chances.

With Julie on her road to recovery, Kim set off on a professional career after college, hooking on with multiple professional teams in Europe. She said it was a lot like the movie “Love & Basketball,” where the game becomes something of a solitary pursuit while the rest of the world is going about their business back home. While playing in Israel in 2007, she was approached by a representative of Great Britain and recruited to be part of the national team building toward the 2012 Olympics as the host country has a team in every competition.

“To have that chance just blows your mind,” she said. “We would be the pioneering team and that would just be amazing.”

Butler was one of three players on the team who was not born in Great Britain, but said she never felt like a “plastic Brit,” referring to the common practice of teams enlisting athletes with tangential — at best — ties to their country to engage in international play. Butler had always felt strong ties to England through her father, Bluey Butler.

“I showed up (in Tacoma) in 1972, fell in love and never left,” he said.

But he made sure his family stayed connected to their British roots, taking them to his hometown of Liverpool, most famously home to The Beatles, but more important to him, Anfield. That’s the storied stadium that serves as home to English Premier League-power Liverpool FC.



Kim Butler takes an elbow from Australia’s Lauren Jackson.
Photo courtesy of Kim (Butler) West.

Bluey said he never really understood the game of basketball when his daughters played and excelled in it, but seeing Kim represent his homeland was a remarkable moment.

“It was tremendous,” he said, still carrying a deep accent. “It was a once-in-a-lifetime thing and it was ... just ... wonderful. I was very proud.”

Butler’s experience at the Olympics was at once surreal — spending time in the cafeteria with folks like Michael Phelps and Serena Williams,

meeting the Royals — and affirming. In the end the Olympics, through the media lens, are dominated by the big names and medal winners, but the core of the event are the Kim Butlers ... the people who have dedicated their lives and bodies to the games. She didn't win a medal, but she averaged 4.8 points, 2.8 rebounds and scored 12 points against the French. She made the stage and played well.

And then it was over.

She had planned to have the Olympics be her career finale, but while her body was ready to quit, her mind was not. She was approached by a club in Riga, Latvia and could not yet walk away.

"My body was ready to be done, but for my mind and my heart ... this was all I've known," she said. "I was not ready to give it up. I did not know what the other side looked like."

She fell into some depression when she was done, struggling to adjust to a world without the game that had often been her world. While friends and family had moved on to other things, she felt like she had not moved at all and was well behind where she should have progressed.

She's spent the past eight years sorting that out and has come up with a post-playing career that uses her strengths. Beyond coaching the Lions, she's a yoga instructor and working on her Master's in Counseling from Northwestern University, which is to say, she's still clearing a pretty high bar every day. She said it can be hard for people to understand what she experienced and the toll it took.

Butler had put so much of herself into the game that it was hardly a vacation. When she retired, she needed shoulder surgery and has no meniscus left in one of her knees.

"I had people say, 'well, now that you are in the real world, what are you going to do,'" she said.

"And that was really pretty hurtful. It all seemed pretty real to me."

Now her goal is to help others, no matter the path, be it coaching or counseling.

"(As Bellarmine coach) it is my job to balance the kids who do see it in their future and those who this will be their only experience. They both deserve to be seen, to play, to get better, to be part of something bigger than just winning and losing. No, I do not take losing lightly ... but my perspective on wins and losses is not what others' might be. I have been on a team since I was seven years old. My mindset is that we are all here to help each other."

by Shawn O'Neal

Shawn O'Neal is a 1991 Spanaway Lake HS grad. He works for the Moscow Daily News and is the Senior Editor of Lindy's College Basketball publication.

THE LOCKER ROOM CHAT

The Locker Room Chat is a video interview series that highlights athletes, coaches, officials, teams and great events, moments and accomplishments in the history of sports in Tacoma-Pierce County. The Locker Room Chat is brought to you by the Shanaman Sports Museum and our sponsor Rainier Asphalt & Concrete.

Watch our social media channels for news of upcoming episodes, and visit our website to watch previous episodes in The Vault:

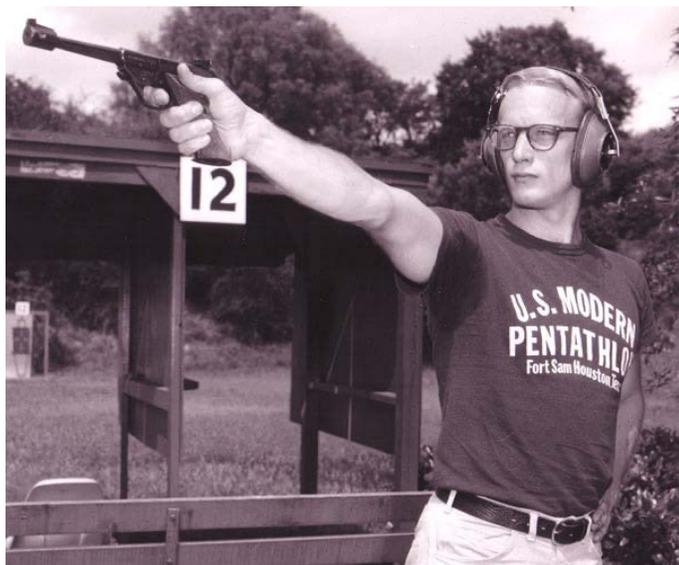
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CHUCK RICHARDS AND THE 1972 MUNICH OLYMPICS

Nearly 50 years have passed since Chuck Richards competed at the Munich Olympics, the pinnacle – and conclusion – of his competitive athletic career. Watching the Tokyo Olympics makes it seem like it was yesterday.



Chuck Richards was the U.S. National Champion in the Modern Pentathlon in 1970, 1971 and 1972.

Photo courtesy of Chuck Richards.

“Everything comes flooding back: meeting the president, being fitted for your uniform, marching in the ceremony,” Richards said. “It’s always nice to reflect a bit and remember the warm feelings for sure.”

The key component to all his fond memories is the recognition that, despite competing in “individual” events, he had a lot of help to get there. From parents to coaches to teammates and even surprise benefactors, Richards recognizes the role a supportive community played in his athletic successes. And that’s something he’s long sought to continue.

“Sports have been my life and my business, and that continues today,” Richards said. “I’m thrilled to be able to live out my dreams as a competitive athlete and a businessperson in sports in kind of

an unconventional way. It’s been very rewarding.”

Born in Tacoma in 1945, Richards discovered a passion and talent for swimming at the local YMCA. By the age of 10, he was showing a lot of promise in the pool. Seemingly out of nowhere – neither of his parents were athletes, and despite his own lack of prowess in other sports – he found his niche.

“I played a lot of other sports, and I really enjoyed them but I was pretty mediocre,” Richards said. “What I liked about swimming was the individuality and accountability. It was you and times and you could see your improvements and successes. You knew where the challenges were in seeing times from other swimmers across the state and country. I liked the specific definition of success.”

Under the leadership of legendary local coaches Dick Hannula and Wally Streeter, Richards became a three-time high school All-American and six-time state champion while attending Stadium High School. But perhaps the most foundational moment for his future came when he was 16 and the Tacoma Swim Club sent him to Los Angeles to attend the national championships.

“It was an eye-opening experience for me,” Richards said. “I’d only competed in the northwest and didn’t expect to qualify for nationals, and I did that summer, and the club and community raised the money to send me and that was also really eye-opening for me that they would do that for me.”

That trip both introduced him to another legendary coach – Indiana University’s James “Doc” Counsilman – and offered him a glimpse into the difference a supportive community can make in the life of an athlete. Both aspects of the experience remained with him, as he chose to continue his swimming career at IU (where he was a two-time All-American) and devoted much

of his post-competition life towards building and providing that same support for future generations of athletes.



Chuck Richards set World and Olympic records in the Pentathlon swim event at the 1972 Olympic Games. Photographs courtesy of Chuck Richards.

“I was always very moved by that and always wanted to find a way to pay it back and express my gratitude,” Richards said.

Richards’ time at IU allowed him to compete on a regular basis with some of the top swimmers in the world. At the conclusion of his college career, he found a new path when he was invited to train to compete in the modern pentathlon. Based on the premise of testing the skills needed by infantry soldiers in battle, the sport comprises five events: fencing, swimming, horseback riding, pistol shooting, and running.

“It was an interesting set of sports and very challenging, but I really loved it,” Richards said. “It was an unexpected opportunity that came into my life at the end of my swimming career, and I’m very thankful for that.”

Seven years of training culminated in the 1972 Munich Olympics, where the USA finished fourth in the team standings for the modern pentathlon and Richards placed ninth in the individual competition. The highlight for Richards came (where else?) in the pool, where he placed first and set a world record for the event.

Since retiring after those Olympics, Richards has devoted his passion for sports and talent for business toward supporting local amateur athletics. He settled in Oregon, and the list of local organizations, academies, clubs, and foundations he either founded, ran, or contributed to is a long one.

One of those key memories that always stuck with Richards was the role the Tacoma community played in helping fund his trip to the national championships all those years ago. Sure enough, he found a way to make sure each successive generation had the same opportunity.

“The one thing I asked my board when we put [a long-running fundraiser] together was that I’d like to send some money to the Tacoma Swim Club to send enough money to cover 10 round trip tickets to the national championships each year,” Richards said. “And we’ve been able to do that and that’s sort of been my contribution back.”

Perhaps someday Chuck Richards will turn on the Olympics to see a swimmer from Tacoma whose career might not have been possible without the backing of a supportive and generous community network. If and when that happens, the memories will come flooding back and his own similar experiences will again seem like only yesterday.



By Tyler Scott

Tyler Scott is a Puget Sound native and Pacific Lutheran University alumnus who has worked in several small college sports information offices in Washington and Oregon and provided freelance high school sports coverage for The News Tribune.

TRIBUTE TO CHAMPIONS INDUCTS ITS 2020 CLASS OF HALL OF FAMERS AND AWARD WINNERS

After 15 months of postponements due to COVID, the 2020 Tribute to Champions took place August 23 with a crowd of 600+ gathering at the Greater Tacoma Convention Center to recognize distinguished award winners and new members of the Tacoma-Pierce County Sports Hall of Fame.

You can watch the event on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/LOf2wvFDiwg>. For the full list of honorees and other details please visit www.tributetochampions.org.

Seattle sports personalities Mike Gastineau and Art Thiel orchestrated the evening of video montages and brief speeches highlighting the accomplishments of athletes, coaches, officials, administrators, and families that have contributed to the richness of athletic history in the Tacoma area.

Prominent members of the new class of Tacoma-Pierce County Sports Hall of Fame inductees included:

- Former Olympian Morgan (Hicks) Wallizer
- UW and NFL standout Dane Looker
- UW All-American volleyball player Christal (Morrison) Engle
- NCAA national champion Brie Felnagle
- Daytona 500 winner Derrike Cope
- and many other deserving individuals.

The Tacoma News Tribune sports staff from 1987-2000 also was inducted. This team earned many Associated Press Sports Editors awards at the peak of local sports media prominence in the Seattle-Tacoma area. The TNT staff included NFL Hall of Fame inductee John Clayton, current national NFL writer Mike Sando, former

columnists Dave Boling, John McGrath and Bart Wright as well as widely-followed beat writers Don Borst, Mike Kahn, Larry LaRue, Bob Condotta and many others.



The News Tribune Sports Staff (1987-2000). Courtesy of Mike Sage Photography

A fitting connection between the past and the future concluded the evening when many members of the 2021 Mount Tahoma High School football team joined the back-to-back (1979-80) state champion T-Birds football squad on stage. Many members of the 1979-80 team were able to attend their induction as the first repeat winners of the state title. Star tailback Mike Vindivich shared memories of those days and what it still means to the players and coaching staff today.



Former Mt. Tahoma cheerleader staff member, Sandy Vindivich Snider, gives star T-Bird tailback (and her brother) Mike Vindivich a congratulatory hug as members of the 1979 and 1980 state champion Mt, Tahoma High School football teams were honored. Photo courtesy of Stace Tyler of Intensity Sports Photography.

