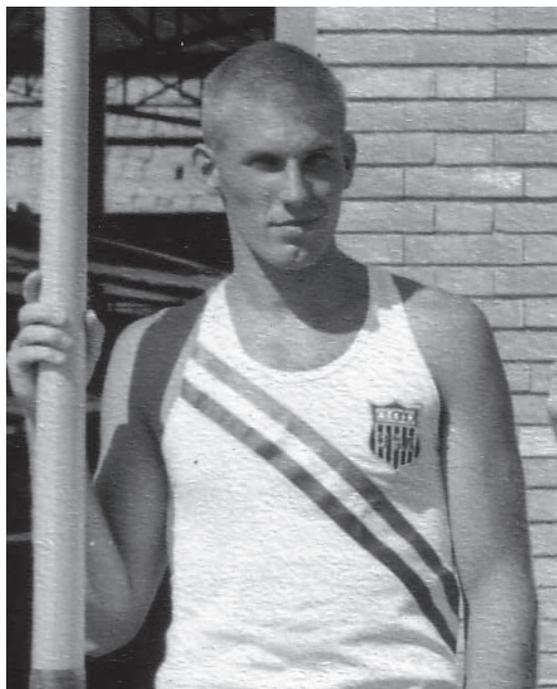


# TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY SPORTS SPOTLIGHT

NEWSLETTER OF THE SHANAMAN SPORTS MUSEUM

JUNE 2022 | VOL.3 NO.2



John Sayre won a Gold Medal in the 1960 Rome Olympics in the fours without coxswain.  
Photo courtesy of John Sayre.

## JOHN SAYRE'S OLYMPIC MEMORIES

Imagine a coxswain and eight oarsmen from the University of Washington representing the forces of star-spangled individual freedom and democracy. They enter the waters of a dark empire to joust for glory against athletes representing a nation of autocracy and repression of individuality.

Oh, you've heard about "The Boys in the Boat"?

Yes, that 1936 crew from UW dashed the hopes of Adolf Hitler and his Nazis for a propaganda victory when they defeated Germany's "superior race" by winning Olympic gold in Berlin.

But have you heard about the Boys who breached the Iron Curtain 22 years later?

In 1958, John Sayre, a graduate of Clover Park High School, who had grown up in water activities but never considered the sport of crew before he enrolled at UW, led the varsity Huskies to a startling victory over the Soviet Union. The UW crew, with Sayre as the stroke (the oarsman closest to the coxswain) overcame a season truncated because of sanctions against an athletic program (football) they had no part in. After UW lost to the Soviets on Henley waters in England, the U.S.S.R. invited UW to represent the United States in Moscow, becoming the first American athletes to compete in the communist nation, all while legendary sports broadcaster Keith Jackson chronicled the event for KOMO.

An unexpected victory by John Sayre and the rest of the UW crew dashed the Soviets' hopes for a propaganda-rich victory over the U.S. Still, the event made a deep impression on the Russians, who invited the Huskies to a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion in 2008, which Sayre and teammate Chuck Alm, the crew captain and No. 5 in the boat, attended.

**(continued on page 4)**

## CONTENTS

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| ABOUT US                   | 2 |
| MEMBERSHIP AND DONATIONS   | 2 |
| 2022 AWARD RECIPIENTS      | 3 |
| REMEMBERING STEVE VAN WART | 5 |
| DONNA DENNIS               | 6 |



# 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.

### **Board of Directors**

- Marc Blau, President
- Colleen Barta, Vice President
- John Wohn, Secretary
- Terry Ziegler, Treasurer
- Tom Bona
- Gary Brooks
- Brad Cheney, Emeritus
- Jack Connelly
- Todd Cooley
- Kyle Crews
- Vince Goldsmith
- Don Gustafson
- Dave Lawson
- Doug McArthur, Emeritus
- Chelle Miller
- Gregory Plancich, Emeritus
- Earl Powell
- Terry Rice
- Kate Rue
- Aubrey Shelton
- Willie Stewart
- Steve Wescott
- Bob Young
- Leonard Zarelli, Emeritus

### **Staff**

- Megan French, Museum Curator
- Kim Davenport, Communications Manager/  
Newsletter Editor

### **Contact Us**

[www.tacomasporthmuseum.com](http://www.tacomasporthmuseum.com)  
[marc@tacomasporthmuseum.com](mailto:marc@tacomasporthmuseum.com)  
 (253) 677-2872

### **Follow Us**

Facebook & Instagram: TacomaSportsMuseum  
 Twitter: SportsMuseumTPC

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

### SPONSOR

- Betty Benson
- Michael McNeil – Windemere
- Professional Partners
- Tom Merry – Rainier Asphalt & Concrete
- Debbie Orlando
- Thomas Sinclair

### TEAM

- Terry Beckstead
- Karl Benson
- Brad Cheney
- Tom and Sara Hayward
- Dave and Kim Lawson

### COACH

- Barry Aden
- John M. Bodenhamer

### PLAYER

- Brian G. Kamens
- Tim Templin

## WE WANT YOU!!

SUPPORT THE MUSEUM WITH YOUR  
 MEMBERSHIP OR DONATION TODAY.  
[WWW.TACOMASPORTSMUSEUM.COM](http://WWW.TACOMASPORTSMUSEUM.COM)





Congratulations to the 2022 Tacoma-Pierce County Sports Hall of Fame inductees and the Distinguished Achievement Award recipients.

For complete biographies, visit:  
[www.tacomaathletic.com](http://www.tacomaathletic.com)

Look under Awards and Scholarships > Awards



2022 Tacoma-Pierce County Sports Hall of Fame members  
 Front Row L. to R.: Kian Coye-Tuell and Matt Tuell (representing Tom Tuell, the Golfing Gorilla), Joey Gjertsen, Dan Wolfrom (representing Paige (Wright) Olson, Hillary Butler, Sherriden May, Walt Horn and Johnny Spevak.

Back Row L. to R.: Guy Renfro (representing Sarna (Renfro) Becker, Eric Simonson, Blake Surina, Debbie Miller, Christy (Kubista) Brandt, Jennifer Kubista and Tyce Nasinec.  
 Photo courtesy Michael Sage, Sage Photography

**DOUG MCARTHUR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

**Wendy Malich**  
 Athletic Director,  
 Franklin Pierce School District

**Tim Thomsen**  
 Athletic Director,  
 Sumner-Bonney Lake School District

**CONNELLY LAW OFFICES**  
**EXCELLENCE IN OFFICIATING AWARD**

|                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Basketball</b> | Rick Fox          |
| <b>Football</b>   | Jeff Ausbun       |
| <b>Softball</b>   | Bill Schey        |
| <b>Soccer</b>     | Pat Muir          |
| <b>Volleyball</b> | Jerry Aeschlimann |
| <b>Wrestling</b>  | Kevin Bauers      |

**FIRST FAMILY OF SPORTS AWARD**  
**The Armstrong Family**

Parents Frank and Ivy and children Eloise, Dorothy, Bayyinah, Frankie, David, Dennis, Al and Beverly.

**FROSTY WESTERING**  
**EXCELLENCE IN COACHING AWARD**

**Joe Clark**  
 Lakes High School boys' cross-country coach  
**Robi Turley**  
 Sumner High School girls' soccer coach

**DICK HANNULA MALE AND FEMALE AMATEUR**  
**ATHLETE OF THE YEAR AWARD**

**Kendall Burks**  
 Soccer, Stadium High School and  
 University of Washington  
**Zyonna Fellows**  
 Volleyball, Mt. Tahoma High School and  
 University of Arizona

**2022 TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY SPORTS HALL**  
**OF FAME INDUCTEES**

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>Athletic Trainer</b> | Walt Horn  |
| <b>Boys Basketball</b>  | Tyce Nasinec                                     |
| <b>Girls Basketball</b> | Debbie Miller                                    |
| <b>Football</b>         | Johnny Spevak                                    |
|                         | Hillary Butler                                   |
|                         | Sherriden May                                    |
| <b>Golf</b>             | Golfing Gorilla<br>(Tom Tuell)                   |
| <b>Mountaineering</b>   | Eric Simonson                                    |
| <b>Soccer</b>           | Joey Gjertsen                                    |
| <b>Swimming</b>         | Paige (Wright) Olson                             |
| <b>Track</b>            | Sarna (Renfro) Becker                            |
|                         | Blake Surina<br>(and Team Handball)              |
| <b>Volleyball</b>       | Christy (Kubista) Brandt<br>and Jennifer Kubista |

## Sayre, cont. from page 1

Sayre was part of another historic achievement when he and three teammates from the Lake Washington Rowing Club - fellow Tacoma product Dan Ayrault, Stanford; Ted Nash, Penn; and Rusty Wailes, Yale - rowed a four-man boat without coxswain to a gold medal at the Rome Olympics in 1960.



Sayre at a 50-year reunion of the 1958 race against the Russians on the Moscow river with the UW crew at age 72.  
Photo courtesy of John Sayre.

Let the 85-year-old Sayre tell the story in his own compelling words set forth in a letter he wrote to his posterity:

“We were set to row on the beautiful Lake Albano where the pope has a summer castle. It was an extinct volcano crater and a perfect, calm rowing course.

“In the first heat ... we had a good start, but hit a buoy marking the lanes. Ted Nash’s oar was broken ... making it impossible to take a full stroke. ... We finished second to the British crew. “This meant we had not qualified for the final and had to go through a repechage (a term meaning a second chance in rowing and bicycling) which we had to win or be eliminated. We had a practice row that evening, hit another buoy and broke another oar. Our coach, Stan Pocock, said “I’m running out of oars. Don’t break any more.”

“The next day as we lined up for the repechage heat the [Germans next to us appeared to be laughing at us.] ... This made me mad. The reality of the race and our possible elimination was not funny.

“The race was with six boats, but the Germans were the target. ... At 500 meters ... we were dead last. ... We knew what we had to do and went to work. At 1,000 meters we were a distant second to the Germans, at 1,500 meters a close second. We had 500 meters left to save ourselves for the final.

“At this point our mindset was do or die. The next minute of rowing would either eliminate us or keep us alive. The mysterious power kicked in and we took off. We caught the Germans and set an Olympic record that lasted 12 years. ... Our race with (the Germans) showed us what the final would be like and clearly gave us our plan – row from behind for most of the race and then go for it, no matter what.

“Again (in the final), we were dead last at 500 meters, with the Russians having a big lead because of their fast start. We were a distant second at 1,000 meters, then a close second at 1,500 meters. At this point, after all the problems and tension with broken oars and the repechage heat, we four went through a dangerous mental process, each dealing with it in [his] own way. “In my case, I [thought of] holding on and winning a silver medal in the Olympics. Not bad! But [the reality was that] gold had been our goal from the beginning. We would probably never have a chance like this again. ...

[For Rusty Wailes, the thought was, ‘Winning a silver medal would be like taking an aspirin.’]

“But all four of us thought, ‘Can we do it?’ and mentally said, ‘Hell yes!’

“I yelled, ‘Taking it up.’ The boat seemed to leap out of the water as the mysterious power kicked

in. We sped by the Russians and the late charging Italian crew to win the coveted gold medal by a length. ...

“What is the mysterious power and what did we learn about it?

“... The essential ingredients are your heart and mind. You need to couple your desire to reach for the stars with a conscious willingness to pay a physical price way beyond your training. You need to do this as individuals and as a boat together. Only then can you draw on the mysterious power to become champions.” Sayre’s ensuing years have been varied and fruitful, including working for the U.S. Olympic Committee; helping start the young people’s leadership program Up With People; writing for the outdoor activities-focused magazine “Pace,” and writing for aquatic naturalists Jacques and Philippe Cousteau; working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; helping Northwest nonprofits restore salmon runs; and working to preserve wild lands for wild animals in East Africa.

*Arnold Lytle is a contributing writer for the Shanaman Sports Museum. A sports copy editor at The News Tribune in Tacoma for 24 years, he is now retired and lives in Fircrest, WA, with his wife.*

---

## REMEMBERING STEVE VAN WART

Steve Van Wart (March 5, 1954-March 30, 2022) passed away at the age of 68. He attended Hilltop elementary, Edgemont Jr. High and graduated from Puyallup High School in 1971 where he was an All-American swimmer.

Earning a scholarship to powerhouse Washington, he swam the breaststroke for the Pac-8 champion Husky medley relay team. As a member of the vaunted Tacoma Swim Club under coach Dick Hannula, Steve went to the 1973 National Championship in Louisville. He

swam on the 400-meter medley relay team that broke the American record. He then traveled with the U.S. national team that competed in Norway and Wales and was invited to join the Canadian Olympic team. Steve's parents were Canadian and relocated to Puyallup when his dad worked at Boeing. In 2020, Steve was inducted into the Tacoma-Pierce County Sports Hall of Fame.



Photo courtesy of the Van Wart family

His athletic story was lifelong. Whether golfing, skiing, cycling, hiking or pitching batting practice to his kids, Steve was gung-ho. He was a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, winning national age-group championships in 2006, 2007 and a world federation title in 2008. For years, he competed in Ironman events, then joined the triathlon circuit (swim/bike/run). He ultimately qualified in Florida for a spot on the U.S. Triathlon Team, then finished seventh in his age-group at the 2019 World Triathlon Grand Finale in Lake Geneva, Switzerland, with some 4,000 athletes and 60 countries.

To many, he was simply the Wart Man, an always playful but seriously super-hero mix of successful businessman, talented international athlete, go-to buddy and dedicated father and husband.

Steve died suddenly from a massive stroke caused by a blood clot to his brain. He is survived by his wife Martha, sons Zack and Jake, and sisters Rosemari and Anne-Marie.

## 40 YEARS LATER, STILL NOBODY HAS CAUGHT DONNA DENNIS IN THE 200



Donna Dennis competes in a relay for UW, where she still holds the 200-meter record. Photo courtesy Donna Dennis.

Athletic records are set to be broken, particularly on the track. Advancement in technique, strength training, running surfaces, shoes ... there is a long list of reasons why new low times are consistently set.

But look at the Washington state track record book and you see an anomaly, a record with 40 years of staying power. Donna Dennis, then a senior at Lakewood's Clover Park High School, sprinted 200 meters in 23.39 seconds at the U.S. Junior Track & Field Championships in 1982, setting the state record. Earlier that year she had won the Washington state 200-meter high school race in 24.13 which also still stands as the fastest 200-meter time at the state meet.

"I am shocked it has been 40 years," Dennis said recently from her home in San Antonio. "Around the late 20-year mark, I noticed I still had it and I was like, 'nobody's got this record?' Then it was out of my head. To come back now after 40 years. I don't believe that. That is crazy."

At the U.S. Junior Championships in 1982, Dennis also won the 100 meters and advanced in both events to the 1982 Pan American Junior Championships in Barquisimeto, Venezuela. At the 12-country meet, she won gold in both events. This event came after Dennis had become a high school phenom and before she continued to sprint past most competitors at the University of Washington.

At Clover Park, Dennis was a 3-time 100-meter state champion from 1980-82 posting state meet winning times of 12.2 seconds, 12.03 and 11.98. She was a two-time 200-meter champion. Clover Park was the WIAA state meet champion in 1980 and finished second in 1981 and 1982.

In a 2020 article, Todd Milles, writing for Sportsbook Washington, included Dennis among the top 12 female high school athletes ever from Pierce County.

"I remember there was talk, 'Who is this girl coming out of Tacoma? Who comes out of there running like that?' I didn't understand it. I was like, 'Do you have to come out of a certain place to be able to run?' That doesn't make sense."

It made more sense when people learned she was originally from Texas. The military took her father and the family around the world. She started school in Nuremberg, Germany before landing in Lakewood for high school.

Dennis kept sprinting for the Huskies and has one of the most long-held UW records as well. Her college personal best of 23.40 in the 200 in 1983 is the second-oldest record still held in UW women's track history. Nobody else has even

come all that close in 40 years. The second-best time is 23.70. Dennis's 100-meter best at UW of 11.53 remains the second-fastest in Huskies history.

At UW, Dennis was a three-time NorPac champion in both the 100 and 200. During her sophomore year in a meet at Fresno State, Dennis reached the qualifying time for the 1984 U.S. Olympic Trials. She made the finals of the 200 where eventual Olympics gold and silver medalists in the event (Valerie Briscoe-Hooks and Florence Griffith-Joyner) were in the starting blocks along with her.

"I was nervous," Dennis said. "I remember thinking 'I cannot believe I'm on this platform.' I let my nerves overtake me. I live that in my head over and over again. I've seen that 200 Olympic Trials final race since then. If I could do that again ... "



Donna Dennis, the most accomplished female sprinter in Pierce County history, completes a relay race.  
Photo courtesy Donna Dennis.

After college, Dennis modeled, was a flight attendant, had two sons, became a special education teacher. Currently, at 58, Dennis is an engagement coordinator for Communities in Schools, primarily helping high school seniors stay on an educational path through Palo Alto Community College in South San Antonio.

"I related everything to what I learned in athletics, even in what I do now," Dennis said. "You have to go get it. Nobody is going to give it to you."

Her background as an elite athlete also helped her get through a bout with breast cancer. Now a 5-year survivor, "I am still in shock that I went through it," she said. "I had to pull deep into my athletics to help me get through it. It's hard to think positive when you feel your bones aching – not your muscles as if you've been running track – but your bones ache from going through chemo. I had to take my mind somewhere else."

She would reach into her "toolbox", her archive of memories, searching for strength. "For me personally it was track. That 1984 Trials finals of the 200 was the biggest platform I had, but the worst race I ran. But I'd think, 'Donna, how did you get there?' I had to use that to get through this journey. I realize this happened to me so I can go speak to other women who are going through their journey."

Her two sons, ages 20 and 21 currently, helped her initially get through cancer treatment, and now, she has a granddaughter (Gianna) that has changed her life. "My sons are the reason my heart beats. But when this little girl came into my life, she became the center of my heart."

*Gary Brooks is a contributing writer for the Shanaman Sports Museum. A former reporter for The News Tribune and CBS Sports, Gary is a Certified Financial Planner who owns a registered investment adviser practice.*



SHANAMAN Sports Museum  
of Tacoma-Pierce County  
9908-63rd Ave. Ct. East  
Puyallup, WA 98373