



Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame
501 Broadway
Nashville, TN 37203
(615) 242-4750

Minutes
Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame Nomination Committee Meeting
April 23, 2024

The Nomination Committee of the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame ("TNSHOF") met this day at 1:00 PM CT for a meeting with a physical location at 312 Rosa L Parks Ave, 13th Fl., Nashville, TN 37243 and hosted via WebEx with available call-in numbers. Notice being given seven (7) days prior on the TNSHOF website and Facebook page. The meeting was called to order at 1:00 PM CT. Roll was called and a quorum was established, with the following members present.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Dane Bradshaw
Harold Graeter
Kenny Hawkins
Chris Massaro
Brad Lampley¹
Candice Lee²
Art Sparks

GUESTS PRESENT

Brad Willis, TNSHoF, Executive Director
Andi Grindley, TDTD Outreach Projects Coordinator
Alicia C. B. Widrig, Attorney and Secretary

AGENDA

Welcome, Massaro

Housekeeping

- Pursuant to T.C.A. § 8-44-108(a)(d), the determination of necessity for conducting the TNSHOF meeting electronically was read into the record and rendered as essential to continue the business of the Board, in order to consider business as requested by the Board.
- Approved the April 26, 2023 Minutes of the Nomination Committee TNSHOF without a reading, as the Minutes were provided to members in advance of the meeting. **Motion**, by Graeter with second by Massaro. No discussion, move to a roll call vote:

¹ Lampley joined at 1:04 PM CT.

² Lee joined at 1:03 PM CT.

Dane Bradshaw	Yes
Harold Graeter	Yes
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	Yes
Brad Lampley	
Candice Lee	
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion carries.

New Business/Discussion Items, Willis

1. Discussion of Proposed Nomination Criteria Amendments

- Nomination Committee to consider proposals and other aspects to issues impacting Nomination Criteria (Presentation of proposals submitted), Willis
 - Lampley, Proposes adding one more preferred inductee to each division, along with an additional statewide at-large inductee, bringing total class to sixteen (16) inductees maximum per year. Proposal aims to reduce logjam created by several new professional franchises and their number of potential candidates.
 - Graeter, Proposes allowing Board Members to bring nominees to the floor on the day of regional nomination meetings, to allow for additional candidates to be considered that may have not been nominated in advance.
 - Fulmer, Proposes changing Automatic or Preferred Candidate structure, in that the current structure means that potentially less qualified individuals make the class over more qualified individual. Change the automatic invites to a Legacy invite that ensures a full vote on all candidates.
 - Fulmer, Proposes expanded class for Class of 2024, the Hall's 60th Class of inductees.
- Discussion, Willis, Those are the four (4) proposals that were provided through the channel of board meetings and will defer to Massaro to lead the discussion.
 - Proposal #1 (Lampley)
 - Graeter, think it's a reasonable request, see a log jam but not totally on board; understanding the addition of the professional franchises causing more candidates. Would support.
 - Massaro, like the concept but like to walk before run seems like a big expansion percentage wise – perhaps modify and see each region get one on a rotating annual basis. Expanding by two (2) rather than four (4).
 - Graeter, If currently at twelve (12) in the context of the banquet and T.V. special – what changes would this cause if do increase; for example, if adding four (4)?
 - Willis, T.V. Special could work through it but would drastically change the format. At one (1) hour show and focusing on each inductee for ninety (90) seconds to two (2) minutes. If go to sixteen (16), would need to be adjusted. More concerned about the banquet, to ensure the banquet is not too long.
 - Hawkins, Can shorten packages with T.V. With the banquet do not want the event to be longer than it needs to be. Every Hall of Fame has a log jam. Think it should grow a little bit but not too much.
 - Lee, Is there an opportunity to compromise? Test Lampley's proposal as a pilot class due to the anniversary year.

- Sparks, Would rather spend time and effort in 2025 to get time and effort to get those past inductees coming. Going to sixteen (16) concerned about the banquet. Method did not allow inductees to talk for ten (10) minutes. If retain the current format with Mike Keith asking questions then is not concerned. Would like to spend more effort in 2025 getting prior inductees to return since it's the 60th induction banquet.
- Bradshaw, Think both Lampley's proposal and what Lee is saying could work. Like the increase, tough to make the decision in the end.
- Lampley, Persuaded by what's being said; don't want to make a Class too large – do have a log jam to resolve. Not opposed than two (2) more each year than Massaro suggested or make it just two (2) additional state-wide. Do like having individual grand division groups having autonomy – not supportive of third proposal.
- Bradshaw, Get little guys in, have a few more selections then allows for it.
- Greater, Maybe another compromise to what Lampley did, Lee's thoughts for next year. Add one preferred 12 – 15; increase of three (3).
- Massaro, Think should expand by three (3) full board. Easiest is that every division gets one. Rotator one (1) with state-wide (2).
- Graeter, **Motion**, Each division adding one (1). But want to tie into expanded class. Twenty-five (25) is beyond the pale. Make the addition effective for 2025 do increase but see one (1) per division as preferred. Second by Lee. Further discussion,
 - Bradshaw, Would like to see slightly more catch-up opportunity for 2025.
 - Lampley, wants to see larger for 2025.
 - Willis, Lee's initial thought of a pilot, like that concept, Graeter one (1) preferred to each. More aggressive than fifteen (15) in 2025. Go forward with three (3) preferred one in each region, three (3) extra at-large would get eighteen (18) then would be fifty (50)% increase in six of the class. Introduces additional preferred. Nine (9) total at-large, nine (9) preferred. Using whole as a pilot program for growth.
 - Sparks, If going that high- should remove limitation on posthumous candidates.
 - Massaro, Think it should raise to same percentage. Raise one (1). One (1) of the six (6).
- Graeter, withdrawn **Motion** and propose a new Motion, of three (3) permanent, preferred additions, with each region having one (1) for an increase to fifteen (15). Second by Hawkins. No further discussion, move to a roll call vote:

Dane Bradshaw	Yes
Harold Graeter	Yes
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	Yes
Brad Lampley	
Candice Lee	Yes
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion carries, for presentation to the Board.

- Proposal #2 (Graeter)

- Massaro, Think this is reasonable.
- Graeter, **Motion**, Day of regional meetings day of by Board members, Second by Massaro. No further discussion, move to a roll call vote:

Dane Bradshaw	Yes
Harold Graeter	Yes
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	Yes
Brad Lampley	Yes
Candice Lee	Yes
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion carries, for presentation to the Board.

- Proposal #3 (Fulmer)
 - Graeter, retention of automatics is important to protect various sport inclusion and representation of smaller schools.
 - Sparks, Last few minutes of every meeting there are important discussions on state-wide versus preferred; there are deserving candidates in the western region that some will not know about.
 - Graeter, agree here to protect sport and athletes because the big guys will get taken care of.
 - Massaro, Think so much autonomy in each region and that local is best, those in the neighborhoods know what is best for each division. Think that's a good quality as a hall.

No further discussion on Proposal #3; no wish to vote on furthering Proposal.
- Proposal #4 (Fulmer)
 - Willis, Prior the number twenty-five (25) has been thrown out because it agreed with the year (2025).
 - Graeter, Those that want to address the back-log, would satisfy – addressing the issue – making state-wide vs. the local vote?
 - Massaro, Would go up to five (5) state-wide.
 - Hawkins, Adding fifty (50) percent of current class then three (3), preferred and then add three (3) at-large – there's six (6) over twelve (23), gets to eighteen (18) but at fifteen (15) now.
 - Willis, If fifteen (15) is the starting point, adding three (3) at-large would get to eighteen (18), or take and grow to twenty (20), add preferred to each and then two (2) at-large.
 - Willis, If say have extra at-large, are then putting it on the region to have an extra at-large to put into the pool.
 - Graeter, Perhaps ten (10) as at-large.
 - Willis, picking six (6) from fifteen (15).
 - Massaro, As Willis has to lead the process adhere to his point, in front of a full board it is cumbersome to vet thirty (30) candidates for slots over zoom. Where expend energy put that within the regional meeting.
 - **Motion**, Hawkins, Each region gets three (3) preferred (nine (9) total) and seven (7) at-large nominations. From twenty-one (21) board picks eleven (11). Posthumous needs to be part, adding one (1) extra to fit with the percentage. Add five (5) at large for 2025, get additional two (2) at-large nominees. Second by Massaro. No further discussion, move to a roll-call vote:

Dane Bradshaw	Yes
Harold Graeter	Yes
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	Yes
Brad Lampley	Yes
Candice Lee	Yes
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion carries, for presentation to the Board.

2. Discussion of Process of Honorees, Willis

3. Discussion of Honoree Categories, Massaro

- Tennessean of the Year
 - Nominees
 - Bill Dance
 - MK Fred Smith
 - Dr. Glenda Glover
 - Taylor Swift
 - **Motion**, Graeter, Dance as Tennessean of the Year, second from Hawkins. No further discussion, move to a roll call vote:

Dane Bradshaw	No
Harold Graeter	Yes
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	Yes
Brad Lampley	Yes
Candice Lee	Yes
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion carries, for presentation to the Board.

- Pat Summitt Lifetime Achievement Award
 - Nominees
 - Thomas Wilson
 - Jack Elder
 - Ottis Phillips
 - **Motion**, Lee for Jack Elder with second by Hawkins. No further discussion, move to a roll call vote:

Dane Bradshaw	Yes
Harold Graeter	Yes
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	Yes
Brad Lampley	Yes
Candice Lee	Yes
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion carries for presentation to the Board.

- David Williams Significant Historical Achievement Award
 - Nominees
 - Massaro, A couple of categories both Thomas Wilson and Jack Elder could meet requirements. Believe Thomas Wilson should be considered for David Williams.

- **Motion**, Hawkins with second by Lampley. No further discussion, move to a roll call vote.

Dane Bradshaw	Yes
Harold Graeter	Yes
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	Yes
Brad Lampley	Yes
Candice Lee	Yes
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion carries for presentation to the Board.

- Legacy Award, Massaro, Thank you to Bradshaw for spear-heading this new award and honoring those prep teams.
 - **Motion**, Graeter to honor White Station High School 2000-2004 with second by Massaro. No further discussion, move to a roll call vote:

Dane Bradshaw	Abstain
Harold Graeter	Yes
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	Yes
Brad Lampley	Yes
Candice Lee	Yes
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion carries for presentation to the Board.

- Pro Team of the Year
 - Nominees:
 - Nashville Predators
 - Nashville SC
 - Memphis Grizzlies
 - **Motion**, for the Nashville Predators to be named Professional Team of the Year by Bradshaw with second by Lampley. No discussion, move to a roll call vote:

Dane Bradshaw	Yes
Harold Graeter	No
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	Yes
Brad Lampley	Yes
Candice Lee	Yes
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion carries for presentation to the Board.

- Pro Athlete of the Year
 - Nominees:
 - Alysha Clark, Las Vegas Aces
 - Josef Newgarden, Racing
 - Mookie Betts, Los Angeles Dodgers
 - Drew Gilbert, Houston Astros Farm System

- **Motion**, for Josef Newgarden to be named the Professional Athlete of the Year by Hawkins with second by Graeter. No discussion, move to a roll call vote:

Dane Bradshaw	Yes
Harold Graeter	Yes
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	Yes
Brad Lampley	
Candice Lee	Yes
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion carries for presentation to the Board.

- Amateur Female Team of the Year
 - Nominees:
 - Middle Tennessee Basketball
 - Tennessee Softball
 - Middle Tennessee Softball
 - Vanderbilt Women's Basketball
 - Memphis Soccer
 - Tennessee Cross Country
 - Tennessee Swimming
 - Tennessee Tennis
 - Tennessee Volleyball
 - Bearden High School Dance Team
 - **Motion**, for the University of Tennessee Softball to be named Amateur Female Team of the Year by Bradshaw with second by Lee. No discussion, move to a roll call vote:

Dane Bradshaw	Yes
Harold Graeter	Yes
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	No
Brad Lampley	
Candice Lee	Yes
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion carries for presentation to the Board.

- Amateur Female Athlete of the Year
 - Nominees:
 - Savannah Wheeler, Middle Tennessee Women's Basketball
 - Rickea Jackson, Tennessee Women's Basketball
 - Mya Jones, Memphis Soccer
 - Kiki Milloy, Tennessee Softball
 - Rebeka Mertena, Tennessee Tennis
 - Jacious Sears, Tennessee Track & Field
 - Jordan Fusco, Tennessee Soccer
 - Paige Peters, Vanderbilt Bowling
 - **Motion**, for Morgan Price to be named the Amateur Female Athlete of the Year by Graeter with second by Lee. No discussion, move to a roll call vote:

Dane Bradshaw	Yes
Harold Graeter	Yes
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	No
Brad Lampley	
Candice Lee	Yes
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion carries.

- Amateur Male Team of the Year
 - Nominees:
 - Tennessee Men's Basketball
 - Memphis Football
 - Tennessee Baseball
 - Middle Tennessee Tennis
 - Tennessee Football
 - Tennessee Swimming & Diving
 - Vanderbilt Golf
 - **Motion**, for Freed-Hardeman to be named the Amateur Male Team of the Year by Graeter with second from Hawkins. No discussion, move to a roll call vote:

Dane Bradshaw	Yes
Harold Graeter	Yes
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	No
Brad Lampley	Yes
Candice Lee	
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion carries for presentation to the Board.

- Amateur Male Athlete of the Year
 - Nominees
 - Blake Burke, Tennessee Baseball
 - Dalton Knecht
 - Lineker Rodrigues dos Santos, Memphis Soccer
 - Stijn Slump, Middle Tennessee Tennis
 - Seth Henigan, Memphis Football
 - David Jones, Memphis Basketball
 - James Pearce Jr., Tennessee Football
 - Jaylen Wright, Tennessee Football
 - Alaba Akintola, Middle Tennessee Track
 - Byrden Hattie, Tennessee Swimming & Diving
 - Caleb Surratt, Tennessee Golf
 - Johannus Monday, Tennessee Tennis
 - Enrique Bradfield, Jr., Vanderbilt Baseball
 - Bick Maldonado, Vanderbilt Baseball
 - Gordon Sargent, Vanderbilt Golf
 - Lee, arguably the best amateur golfer in the year and announced he is returning to Vanderbilt though he could have turned pro.

Excellent student, certainly biased. He is absolutely one of the most elite athletes to ever come through Vanderbilt.

- o **Motion**, for Dalton Knecht to be named the Amateur Male Athlete of the Year by Hawkins with second from Bradshaw. No discussion, move to a roll call vote:

Dane Bradshaw	Yes
Harold Graeter	No
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	No
Brad Lampley	
Candice Lee	No
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion results in essentially a tie – Committee requests Board consider Knecht and Sargent as potential co-awardees.

4. Final Vote For Honorees to Forward to Full Board, [Agenda Item rendered unnecessary due to the committee members voting on categories individually].

Closing Remarks,

- Willis, Will take all proposals to the full board next Thursday May 2, 2024. After that meeting a full class of inductees and honorees will be set.
- Massaro, Thank you for all the discussion and thought process and thank-you to Tony Stinnett who puts together all superlative awards. Thank you to those on the Committee who picked up who was missed.

As there was nothing further, Massaro motioned for adjournment with second by Graeter. No further discussion, move to a roll call vote.

Dane Bradshaw	Yes
Harold Graeter	Yes
Kenny Hawkins	Yes
Chris Massaro	Yes
Brad Lampley	
Candice Storey Lee	Yes
Art Sparks	Yes

Motion Carries. Meeting adjourned at 2:47PM CT.

Approved:

Date

Alicia C. B. Widrig
Attorney for the TNSHOF, acting Secretary
Department of Tourist Development

Nomination Criteria Change Proposals

Brad Lampley: Proposes adding one more preferred inductee to each division, along with an additional statewide At-Large inductee, bringing total class to 16 inductees maximum per year. Proposal aims to reduce logjam created by several new professional franchises and their number of potential candidates.

Harold Graeter: Proposes allowing Board Members to bring nominees to the floor on the day of regional nomination meetings, to allow for additional candidates to be considered that may have not been nominated in advance.

Phillip Fulmer: Proposes changing Automatic or Preferred Candidate structure, in that the current structure means that potentially less qualified individuals make the class over a more qualified individual. Change the automatic invites to a Legacy invite that insures a full vote on all candidates.

Phillip Fulmer: Proposes expanded class for Class of 2025, the Hall's 60th Class of Inductees.

Professional Sports Team of the Year:

Nashville Predators: The Nashville Predators clinched their 16th postseason appearance after being written off following a tough start to the campaign. As of April 16, the Preds fashioned a 82-47-30-5 record, good enough for the sixth playoff spot in the Western Conference. The Preds shook off a 5-10-0 start by grabbing points in 20 of 33 games between Thanksgiving and the All-Star break. They put together the longest point streak in franchise history (18) following the break, and also had an eight-match win streak, the second-longest in franchise history.

Nashville SC: The 2023 Nashville SC season was the fourth season for Nashville SC as a member of Major League Soccer (MLS), the top flight of professional soccer in the United States.

The club moved from the Western Conference to the Eastern Conference for the 2023 season and played 34 regular season matches between February 25 and October 21. Nashville SC also participated in the Leagues Cup, a knockout competition for all MLS and Liga MX clubs in July and August. They finished as runners-up, hosting the Leagues Cup final against Inter Miami CF and losing in a penalty shootout. The club entered the U.S. Open Cup in the third round and advanced to the Round of 16, where they were eliminated by Miami.

Nashville qualified for the MLS Cup Playoffs—**their fourth consecutive postseason**—by finishing seventh in the Eastern Conference. They were eliminated in the first round by Orlando City SC, losing the first two games in the best-of-three series by a 1–0 scoreline.

Memphis Grizzlies: The Memphis Grizzlies qualified for the playoffs for the third consecutive season and won the Southwest division title for the second straight season in 2022-23. The Griz were upset in the first round of the playoffs by the seventh-seeded Los Angeles Lakers in the first round. In 2023-2024, the team struggled with injuries, and failed to make the playoffs.

Professional Athlete of the Year:

Alysha Clark, Las Vegas Aces: Alysha Clark dedicated the 2023 WNBA season to her late father and then helped the Aces claim their second consecutive WNBA title, the third of Clark's career. Clark, a Mt. Juliet native and standout at MTSU, was instrumental in helping the Aces to the title. She was named the league's Sixth Player of the Year. Clark averaged 6.7 points and 3.4 rebounds per game, while shooting 44 percent from the field, including 39 percent from 3-point range. Clark enters the 2024 season ranked third in league history in two-point field goal percentage (.577).

Josef Newgarden: In 2023, Hendersonville native Josef Newgarden swept the Iowa Speedway weekend and nearly became the first driver ever to win every oval race on the schedule with wins at Texas and Indianapolis. After a thrilling last-lap pass, Newgarden won the **2023 Indianapolis 500** in his 12th attempt at the "Greatest Spectacle in Racing". He went on to finish fifth in the standings, his eighth consecutive season finishing in the top-five in championship standings.

Mookie Betts, Los Angeles Dodgers: Betts, a Nashville native, finished second in the voting for Most Valuable Player in 2023. Betts hit .307 with 39 home runs and 107 RBI, adding 40 doubles.

Drew Gilbert, Houston Astros Farm System: Drew Gilbert was selected for the Futures Game. The former Vols baseball standout and first-round pick of the Houston Astros in 2022, started the year with High-A Asheville and within a month secured a promotion to Double-A Corpus Christi.

Female Amateur Team of the Year:

Middle Tennessee Basketball: The Lady Raiders posted a 30-5 overall record and upset No. 6 seed Louisville in the first round of the NCAA Tournament before falling to defending national champion LSU. MTSU won 20 straight during one stretch and went 16-0 in Conference USA.

Tennessee Softball: Tennessee won its first SEC regular season championship since 2007 and its first SEC Tournament title since 2011, winning both crowns in the same season for the first time in program history. The Lady Vols secured a 50-win season (51 wins) and reached the national semifinals at the College World Series.

Middle Tennessee Softball: Middle Tennessee set a program record with 42 wins and had its best finish in postseason play ever, finishing in the Top 32 teams in the NCAA Tournament after advancing to the regional final. The Blue Raiders defeated No. 5 Alabama, 4-1, to force a decisive game in the Tuscaloosa Regional. They dropped a 1-0 decision in the decisive game, falling on a seventh-inning home run. The Blue Raiders won Conference USA to earn the league's automatic berth into the NCAA Tournament.

Vanderbilt Women's Basketball: The Vanderbilt Women's basketball team, led by third year head Coach Shea Ralph, returned to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in 10 years in 2023/2024. Finishing with a 22-8 record and a 6th Place SEC finish. Vanderbilt defeated Columbia in the First Four, the Lady Commodores first NCAA Tournament win in 11 years. The Lady Commodores were eliminated in the NCAA Tournament in the round of 64 by Baylor.

Memphis Soccer: Memphis reached the NCAA Tournament Round of 16 before falling to Pittsburgh. The Tigers posted an impressive 20-2 overall record, including a 17-game win streak. Memphis won the American Athletic Conference Championship, as well as the West Division title.

Tennessee Cross Country: Tennessee capped a strong season with a sixth-place finish at the 2023 NCAA Cross Country Championships. It marked the program's best finish since 1989 when they also finished sixth and tied for the second-best finish in Lady Vol history. Tennessee won the NCAA South Regional to earn an automatic qualifying spot in the National meet. It was their first region crown since 2005.

Tennessee Swimming: The Lady Vols earned their second-best finish in program history at the 2024 NCAA Championships, placing fourth overall. Tennessee boasted 11 podium performances and 17 top-16 finishes, both of which marked the third-most in program history.

Tennessee Tennis: Tennessee finished the year 21-6 and 11-2 in the SEC. The 11 SEC wins marked the most single-season conference wins in program history. The Lady Vols advanced to the Round of 16 in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2010.

Tennessee Volleyball: Tennessee advanced to the regional semifinals for the first time since 2005. The Lady Vols finished second in the SEC with a 15-3 record. Tennessee swept 19 opponents in 31 matches. The Lady Vols boasted one of the nation's top offenses, ranking inside the Top 5 nationally and leading the SEC in three categories.

Bearden High School Dance Team: The Bearden High School Dance team was named 2024 National Champions, their fourth consecutive national championship season.

Female Amateur Athlete of the Year:

Savannah Wheeler, Middle Tennessee Women's Basketball: Middle Tennessee point guard Savannah Wheeler was named Conference USA and Most Valuable Player of the Conference USA Championship. Averaged 17.5 points, 5.0 assists, 4.4 rebounds and 1.1 steals. Wheeler scored double figures in 30 of 35 games, including 16 consecutive to end the season.

Rickea Jackson, Tennessee Women's Basketball: Selected by the Los Angeles Sparks with the No. 4 overall pick of the 2024 WNBA Draft. Jackson led the SEC in scoring at 20.2 points per game and contributed a team-high 8.2 rebounds, while adding 2.3 assist per game. Her single-season scoring average was the ninth-best ever recorded by a Lady Vol.

Mya Jones, Memphis Soccer: Mya Jones, the 2023 Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame Female Amateur Athlete of the Year, posted another sensational campaign in 2024. Jones, a senior, helped lead Memphis soccer to a 20-2 record and the Round of 16 in the NCAA Tournament. Jones was honored as the AAC's Offensive Player of the Year following her nine goals and 11 assists during the regular season. Jones led the conference in assists per game, points per game, total assists and total points.

Kiki Milloy, Tennessee softball: Kiki Milloy was a driving force in Tennessee's march to the College World Series. Milloy led all Division I players with 25 home runs, setting a Lady Vols single-season record. A consensus first-team All-American, Milloy hit .406 and set another Tennessee single-season record with 86 runs scored. She also had 56 RBIs and slugged .929.

Rebeka Mertena, Tennessee Tennis: Rebeka Mertena earned first-team All-SEC honors and helped lead Tennessee to the Round of 16 in NCAA Women's Tennis. Mertena went 14-4 during dual competition while boasting a perfect 5-0 SEC record at No 2.

Jacious Sears, Tennessee Track & Field: Jacious Sears was named the USTFCCA South Region Track Athlete of the Year. Sears placed third in the 100-meter and fourth in the 200-meter at the NCAA Championships, the best finish by a Lady Vol in both events since 2005. Sears won the SEC Commissioner's Trophy at the SEC Outdoor Championships, an award given to the top overall scorer at the conference meet. Sears scored 20.5 points, winning the 100-meter with a school-record sprint of 10.96 seconds, and finishing second in the 200-meter.

Jordan Fusco, Tennessee soccer: Jordan Fusco was named First-Team All-SEC after totaling six goals and four assists during her junior campaign. She tied for the team lead in total points with 16.

Paige Peters, Vanderbilt Bowling: Paige Peters was named first-team All-America by the National Tenpin Coaches Association. She won the Warhawk Classic and was all-tournament in three other events. In all, Peters recorded five Top-15 individual finishes.

Male Amateur Team of the Year:

Tennessee Men's Basketball: Tennessee fashioned a sterling 27-9 mark and reached the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament for just the third time in program history, where it dropped a 72-66 decision to Purdue. The Vols won the rugged SEC regular season with a 14-4 league ledger. They finished fifth in the final Top 25 polls.

Memphis Football: The Tigers became the fifth team in program history to register 10 or more wins, finishing with a 10-3 record, including a win in the season finale when Memphis took down Iowa State in the Liberty Bowl, 36-26.

Tennessee Baseball: The Vols reached the College World Series for the sixth time before losing a pair of games to LSU in Bracket 2. The Vols finished the year with a 44-22 record. Tennessee won the Clemson Regional and survived the Southern Miss in the Super Regional. They went 1-2 in the CWS, defeating Stanford, while losing to LSU twice.

Middle Tennessee Tennis: Middle Tennessee claimed its fourth consecutive Conference USA championship in 2023. The Blue Raiders defeated Tulane, 4-0, to advance to the Round of 32 in the 2023 NCAA Championships for the fourth time in program history, before falling to Mississippi State.

Tennessee Football: The Vols fashioned a 9-4 record and defeated Big Ten West champion Iowa, 35-0, in the Citrus Bowl on New Year's Day. Tennessee finished third in the SEC East standings. Tennessee finished the season ranked in the Top 25 nationally in eight different team categories. Three of the Vols' four losses came against teams ranked 11th or higher in the final College Football Playoff poll.

Tennessee Swimming & Diving: Tennessee earned its best finish at the NCAA Championships since 2001, placing sixth nationally. Tennessee boasted 11 podium performances – the most since having 16 during the 2001 campaign – and 14 top-16 finishes. During the meet, the team broke six program records and posted 12 new Top-10 times in school history.

Vanderbilt Golf: Vanderbilt claimed six tournament titles during 2022-23 on its way to earning the top overall seed in the NCAA Championships. The Commodores concluded the 2022-23 season with their ninth consecutive NCAA Championship appearance and six tournament titles. They finished second at both the SEC Championships and NCAA Auburn Regional.

Male Amateur Athlete of the Year:

Blake Burke, Tennessee baseball: As of 4/17, Blake Burke was hitting .422 with 13 home runs and 36 RBI. Burke's outstanding play keyed the Vols to a 31-6 record and No. 2 national ranking. The junior first baseman has been named a DIBaseball Midseason All-American. Belted his 41st career home run to break the program record for round trippers when he did so against Auburn.

Dalton Knecht, Tennessee Men's Basketball: Dalton Knecht, was a NCAA Unanimous First-Team All-American (AP, NABC, Sporting News, USBWA). Knecht was the SEC Player of the Year and a finalist for the Wooden Award, Naismith Trophy Player of the Year and Lute Olson National Player of the Year. He led the Vols to the Elite Eight and broke the program record for points in a NCAA Tournament game with 37, in the Elite Eight matchup with Purdue. Knecht averaged 21.7 points and 4.9 rebounds per game.

Lineker Rodrigues dos Santos, Memphis Soccer: Lineker Rodrigues dos Santos was named to the United Soccer Coaches All-American third team following a brilliant season for the Tigers. Rodrigues dos Santos also was named the AAC's Offensive Player of the Year and was also an All East Region First-Team selection. He collected 14 goals while dishing out seven assists in 2023. He produced eight game-winning goals.

Stijn Slump, Middle Tennessee Tennis: Stijn Slump was named the 2023 Conference USA Player of the Year for the second straight year. He was also a named First Team All C-USA for singles and doubles. Slump posted a 17-8 singles record, primarily playing at No. 1. He was ranked as high as No. 59 in singles by ITA.

Seth Henigan, Memphis Football: Seth Henigan was named MVP of the Liberty Bowl after leading Memphis to its 10th win of the season. Henigan was a second-team All-AAC selection, and the Tennessee Sports Writers Player of the Year in football statewide. Henigan completed 318-of-476 passes for 3,883 yards and 32 touchdowns. He finished the season ranked fourth in the NCAA in passing yards, fifth in touchdowns and seventh in total offense.

David Jones, Memphis Basketball: David Jones was named first-team All-American Athletic Conference after producing an All-American type season. Jones averaged 21.7 points, 7.6 rebounds and 2.1 steals. He led the AAC in scoring and field goal makes (215), while ranking second in steals per game, free throws made (169) and double-doubles (10).

James Pearce Jr, Tennessee football: Pearce earned first-team All-SEC honors after putting together a dominant season. Pearce was second in the SEC and first among defensive linemen with 8.5 sacks. He was also tied for fourth in tackles for loss, totaling 13, to go with 15 QB hurries. According to PFF.com, Pearce was the highest graded defensive lineman in the SEC.

Jaylen Wright, Tennessee football: Wright was tabbed a second-team selection the AP All-SEC team, finishing the regular season with 1,013 yards on just 137 carries. His 7.4 yards per attempt led all FBS running backs with at least 100 carries. Wright recorded six 100-yard rushing games, which was second in the SEC.

Alaba Akintola, Middle Tennessee Track: Alaba Akintola earned second-team All-America honors for the 2023 NCAA Division I Outdoor Track & Field season. Akintola finished 13th in the 100-meter with a time of 10.07 at the NCAA Championships, and he finished 16th in the 200-meter with a time of 20.46. He won both events at the C-USA Championships.

Bryden Hattie, Tennessee Swimming & Diving: Bryden Hattie capped one of the most successful campaigns of his career as SEC champion and NCAA bronze medalist on platform. He was the only SEC diver to advance to two championship finals during NCAAs. He garnered a pair of All-America First-Team honors after posting the two highest finishes for the conference during the meet at third (platform) and fifth (3-meter). He became the fifth athlete in SEC history to claim consecutive SEC Male Diver of the Year accolades.

Caleb Surratt, Tennessee Golf: Caleb Surratt become the first Tennessee golfer ever to be named a first-team All-American when he was so honored by PING. Surratt was also the SEC Freshman of the Year and a First-Team All-SEC selection. Surratt was a consistent force in Tennessee's lineup. He posted a program-record, single-season stroke average of 69.58, while setting another program record in round of par or better with 27. Surratt recorded seven Top 10 finishes and two individual titles, including the individual title at the SEC Championship, which tied for the second-lowest 54-hole score in SEC Championship history.

Johannus Monday, Tennessee Tennis: Johannus Monday earned ITA All-America honors and SEC Player of the Year following his dynamic season in 2023. It marked the third consecutive year Monday has been named ITA All-American. He boasted a 19-3 record, including a 16-3 (9-1 SEC) mark at No. 1 singles.

Enrique Bradfield Jr., Vanderbilt Baseball: Enrique Bradfield was named to the 2023 NCBWA All-America third team and earned second-team All-SEC honors. He led the SEC in stolen bases in 2023 with 37. He totaled 69 runs scored to lead the Commodores and had the third-most hits on the team.

Nick Maldonado, Vanderbilt Baseball: Maldonado anchored the Vanderbilt bullpen, recording eight saves while earning second-team All-SEC honors and third-team NCBWAA All-American honors. Maldonado held opposing hitters to a .135 average and allowed just five earned runs in 22 appearances for a 1.44 ERA.

Gordon Sargent, Vanderbilt Golf: Gordon Sargent has been named a semifinalist for the 2024 Ben Hogan Award. As of April 17, Sargent is the No. 1-ranked golfer in the World Amateur Golf Rankings. He has posted four Top 5 finishes during the 2023-24 season, while he holds a scoring average of 69.92 through eight tournaments. Sargent was the low amateur at the 2023 U.S. Open. He was selected the National Player of the Year by Golfweek, in addition to earning first-team All-America honors from the Golf Coaches Association of America and Golfweek. He was also the SEC Player of the Year.



Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame Nomination Form

NOMINEE INFORMATION

NAME Bill Dance TN of the Year

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ ALTERNATE PHONE _____

SPORT Outdoors/Fishing

CAPACITY OF INVOLVEMENT Champion Fisherman, Current Namesake of Bill Dance
Signature Lakes Program in Tennessee
(player, coach, official, administrator)

NOMINATOR'S INFORMATION

NAME Mark Ezell

ADDRESS 312 Rosa L. Parks Avenue, 13th Floor

CITY Nashville STATE TN ZIP 37243

PHONE _____ ALTERNATE PHONE _____

Please include a three-hundred word biographical narrative.

Forward all information to:
The Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame
501 Broadway Avenue
Nashville, TN 37203

Contact tnsports@bellsouth.net with any questions.

Bill Dance, professional bass fishing's first superstar, has taught generations to fish. Dance began competing – and winning – in bass tournaments in the early 1960s. With over 2,000 shows under his belt since 1968, he has educated millions of fishing enthusiasts as host and producer of "Bill Dance Outdoors" and "Bill Dance Saltwater", airing respectively on the Outdoor Channel and Sportsman Channel. From his production studio in Collierville, Tenn., Dance oversees a fishing empire that includes his TV shows, tackle endorsements, how-to seminars, and a series of popular "blooper" videos. Dance has written seven books and his articles have been published in Sports Afield, Field & Stream, Bassmasters, Outdoor Life and more.

Dance's accomplishments, techniques, and fishing savvy have been recognized through countless awards, including 23 national B.A.S.S. titles, three-time B.A.S.S. Angler of the Year, 40 top-ten finishes and eight-time Bassmaster Classic Qualifier. In 2021, Dance received his Honorary Doctorate from the University of Tennessee for his outstanding contributions to the sport. Country superstar Luke Bryan also celebrated the fishing legend in 2021 with the release of an ode titled "Bill Dance." For over five decades, Bill Dance has served as an ambassador to the state of Tennessee, always filmed or photographed wearing his trademark orange and white University of Tennessee cap.



Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame Nomination Form

NOMINEE INFORMATION

NAME MIL FRED SMITH

ADDRESS 942 South Shady Grove Rd.

CITY Memphis STATE TN ZIP 38120

PHONE 901-818-7576 ALTERNATE PHONE _____

SPORT TENNESSEE OF THE YEAR

CAPACITY OF INVOLVEMENT Philanthropist, Community Leader
(player, coach, official, administrator)

NOMINATOR'S INFORMATION

NAME LARRY VENTURA

ADDRESS 570 NORTON ST

CITY Memphis STATE TN ZIP 38152

PHONE 785 587 7834 ALTERNATE PHONE _____

Please include a three-hundred word biographical narrative.

Forward all information to:
The Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame
Attn: Brad Willis
501 Broadway
Nashville, TN 37203

Contact tnsports@bellsouth.net with any questions.

Subject: Re: TSHF Update 3-21-24
Date: Tuesday, April 2, 2024 at 9:02:33 PM Central Daylight Time
From: Kenneth Hawkins
To: Brad Willis
Attachments: image001.png, Outlook-0a3p1jvp.png

TSU President Glenda Glover – Tennessee State University announced a hockey team in 2021 becoming the first hockey team at a historically Black college or university. The Tigers dropped the puck in 2023 and will begin play at the club level in 2024, with aspirations of playing NCAA Division I soon and adding a women's team.

Taylor Swift – Donated \$1 million to help Tennessee residents affected by deadly tornadoes in December of 2023. The superstar singer-songwriter donated to the Tennessee Emergency Response Fund at the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee; the organization's CEO Hal Cato confirmed in a statement to CBS News. Swift was born in Reading, Pennsylvania, but moved to Hendersonville, a suburb of Nashville, as a teenager to pursue her country music career.

Kenny Hawkins
Sports Director
News Channel 11-ABC Tri-Cities
338 E. Main Street
Johnson City, TN 37601
423-434-4544 Office
423-262-7948 Cell
khawkins@wjhl.com
www.WJHL.com



WJHL does not discriminate in advertising contracts on the basis of race, ethnicity or gender and further requires that in the performance of all WJHL advertising agreements, WJHL requires that each party not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity. This e-mail and any files transmitted with it are the property of Nexstar Media Inc., are confidential, and are intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom this email is addressed and/or as indicated in the applicable file. If you are not one of the named recipient(s) or otherwise have reason to believe that you have received this message in error, please notify the sender and delete this message immediately from your computer. Any other use, retention, dissemination, forwarding, printing, or copying of this e-mail is strictly prohibited.

Subject: Amateur Team

Date: Monday, March 4, 2024 at 12:02:37 PM Central Standard Time

From: Brad Willis

To: Brad Willis

Massey

Memorials, Sports - Bearden High School dance team, 2024 national champions - A RESOLUTION to honor and congratulate the 20232024 Bearden High School dance team for winning its fourth consecutive national championship.

Brad Willis

Executive Director

Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame



Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame Nomination Form

NOMINEE INFORMATION

NAME White Station High School 2000-2004

ADDRESS _____

CITY Memphis STATE TN ZIP _____

Nominator's → PHONE 901-268-7333 ALTERNATE PHONE _____

SPORT Men's Basketball

CAPACITY OF INVOLVEMENT Team
(player, coach, official, administrator)

NOMINATOR'S INFORMATION

NAME Dane Bradshaw

ADDRESS 401 Whitehall Rd

CITY Chattanooga STATE TN ZIP 37405

PHONE 901-268-7333 ALTERNATE PHONE _____

Please include a three-hundred word biographical narrative.

Forward all information to:
The Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame
Attn: Brad Willis
501 Broadway
Nashville, TN 37203

Contact tnsports@bellsouth.net with any questions.

10/20/2023

Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame Committee,

I am formally nominating the Memphis White Station High School Men's Basketball teams (2000-2004) for the Legacy Award. Led by Hall of Fame Coach Terry Tippet, the five-year run the Spartans had was truly historic. What this era stood for goes well beyond the numbers, but I will start there:

- 5-year record of 176-12 (93.6%) in the most competitive class & national scheduling
- 4 AAA State Championships
- Multiple nationwide, high profile tournament championships
 - Bass Pro Tournament of Champions (4x)
 - Beach Ball Classic (1x)
- 26 players went on to college level including 16 Division I

Those accomplishments validated the program, but I believe it pales in comparison to what made the White Station program so unique.

The Spartans were known for their "platoon" system. Starting 5 would play the first 4 minutes of each 8 min quarter and the second five would sub in for the remainder. Rinse, repeat. In fact, the 2002 state champions were so deep, it required a 15 man rotation: Starting 5, second 5, and third 5. The talent and depth were impressive, yes, but more impressive is to have that much talent buy in to playing half the game (or less) for the best of the team. The 2002 championship team's leading scorer, for example, averaged 9.4 points per game. A team full of selfless stars that were ok not even averaging double digits at the high school level.

To imagine a world where players (and their parents) wanted to be on a team where they played less, scored less, but won more seems like wishful thinking. However, it existed at White Station.

Under Terry Tippet's guidance, these teams could run you out of the gym with their athleticism, alley oop dunks, and highlight worthy plays yet also beat you with discipline, poise, and IQ which is what allowed the Spartans to take down some of the nation's most prominent programs.

To this day 20 years later, I have people come up and say, "I used to love watching those White Station teams play." I can't recall anyone saying how much they loved watching a certain player, it is always the same "those White Station teams."

This era won as a team and it's only fitting they go in to the TNSHOF as a team.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dane Bradshaw

Nomination
Committee



Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame Nomination Form

NOMINEE INFORMATION

NAME Thomas Wilson

ADDRESS N/A (Deceased)

CITY Nashville STATE TN ZIP

PHONE N/A ALTERNATE PHONE

SPORT Baseball

CAPACITY OF INVOLVEMENT Baseball Team Owner and
(player, coach, official, administrator) Baseball League Administrator

NOMINATOR'S INFORMATION

NAME Dr. Harriet Kimbro-Hamilton

ADDRESS 103 River Dr.

CITY Old Hickory STATE TN ZIP 37138

PHONE 615-487-1144 ALTERNATE PHONE 615-357-0957

Please include a three-hundred word biographical narrative.

Forward all information to:
The Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame
501 Broadway Avenue
Nashville, TN 37203

Contact tnsports@bellsouth.net with any questions.

Tumbleweed Pictures, LLC

450 7th Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030 | www.tumbleweedprod.com

September 28, 2023

Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame
Attr: Selection Committee
501 Broadway
Nashville, TN 37203

Dear Selection Committee,

I'm writing in support of including Thomas Wilson into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame. I've been amazed to learn of his accomplishments in business, sports and community building. I'm the filmmaker behind the critically acclaimed documentary "The Other Boys of Summer". The film explores civil rights through the lives of the Negro League baseball players. It's narrated by the legendary Cicely Tyson and features exclusive interviews with the men (and a woman) who played alongside of Jackie Robinson and changed baseball and America forever.

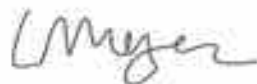
In speaking with players, historians and family members and learning about the challenges and achievements of these humble individuals I'm inspired to do my part to preserve the legacies of these unsung civil rights trailblazers. Most of this generation has already passed on, leaving it up to us to make sure their stories are not lost forever.

During a recent trip to Nashville I had the honor of working with the Nashville Sounds, Fisk University and a number of researchers and historians to learn more about some of the Tennessee legends I hadn't read much about. Tom Wilson stands out to me as somebody who deserves to be recognized for his achievements so that his legacy can be preserved and celebrated.

During the first half of the 20th century, baseball like many things, was segregated. But rather than give up on their dreams baseball players and businessmen came together to form the Negro National and Negro American Leagues. Rube Foster is considered the father of Black Baseball as he gathered 8 team owners together in Kansas City in 1920 to sign the charter for the Negro National League. This was a professional business that generated income and created vibrant Black communities. Tom Wilson became the President of the Negro National League in the 1930s and was instrumental in the success of the league and an integral part of Nashville history. He built one of the first Black-owned ballparks. Wilson Park in Nashville drew teams and fans to the city. Negro League teams would travel along the "chitlin circuit" with Jazz greats like Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington. There were Black-owned hotels, restaurants, clubs, cleaners, doctors and dentists, newspapers and even banks. The Negro Leagues were a big part of the success of these businesses and creating thriving communities. Tom Wilson was one of the founders of the Negro Leagues and a "Change Agent" long before the term was coined.

By honoring Mr. Wilson with inclusion into the TSHOF generations of Tennesseans can learn about his accomplishments and seek out additional info about his life and impact on Nashville and the nation.

Sincerely,



Lauren Meyer
Executive Producer/Director

Tumbleweed Pictures
450 7th St
Hoboken, NJ 07030



THOMAS T. WILSON
1883-1947

Negro League Team Owner
& League Administrator



Candidate for the
Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame 2022

NASHVILLE
ELITE
GIANTS



CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

He was the owner of the Nashville/Baltimore Elite Giants Baseball Team. It was one of the longest running Negro League Baseball organizations in the country 1920-1950.

In 1928, he built Tom Wilson Baseball Park, the only Black-owned stadium in the South.

He served as President of the Negro Southern League, 1930 & 1935.

He helped fund the first East-West All-Stars Game, 1933.

He served as President of the Negro National League, 1936-1946.

He provided leadership for the California Winter League.

He was a pioneer in the growth of the Negro League, locally in Nashville, TN, regionally with the Negro Southern League, and on the national level as the President of the Negro National League between the years of 1930-1947.

Mr. Wilson had a direct impact on the baseball careers of the following players:

National Baseball Hall of Famer, Norman Stearnes
Mexican Baseball Hall of Famer, Burnis Wright
Tennessee Sports Hall of Famer, Henry Kimbro
National Baseball Hall of Famer, Roy Campanella
Tennessee Sports Hall of Famer, James Gilliam
Joseph Black, and many more

**BASEBALL PORTFOLIO
OF
MR. THOMAS WILSON
(1883-1947)**

**Professional Baseball Team Owner
and Baseball League Officer**

Submitted in support of the nomination of Mr.
Thomas Wilson to the Tennessee Sports Hall of
Fame

TABLE OF CONTENT

Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame Nomination Form Mr. Thomas Wilson.....	1
--	---

INTRODUCTION:

Thomas Wilson Biography.....	3
------------------------------	---

LETTERS OF SUPPORT:

Mr. Doug Scopel.....	5
----------------------	---

Mr. Ronnie Greer.....	6
-----------------------	---

Mr. Larry Lester.....	7
-----------------------	---

Mr. Skip Nipper.....	8
----------------------	---

Dr. Harriet Kimbro-Hamilton.....	9
----------------------------------	---

ARTICLES OF REFERENCE:

Tom Wilson's Park Historical Marker.....	11
--	----

Elite Giants Need Two To Be Dixie Champion.....	12
---	----

Nashville Giants in First Night Game.....	13
---	----

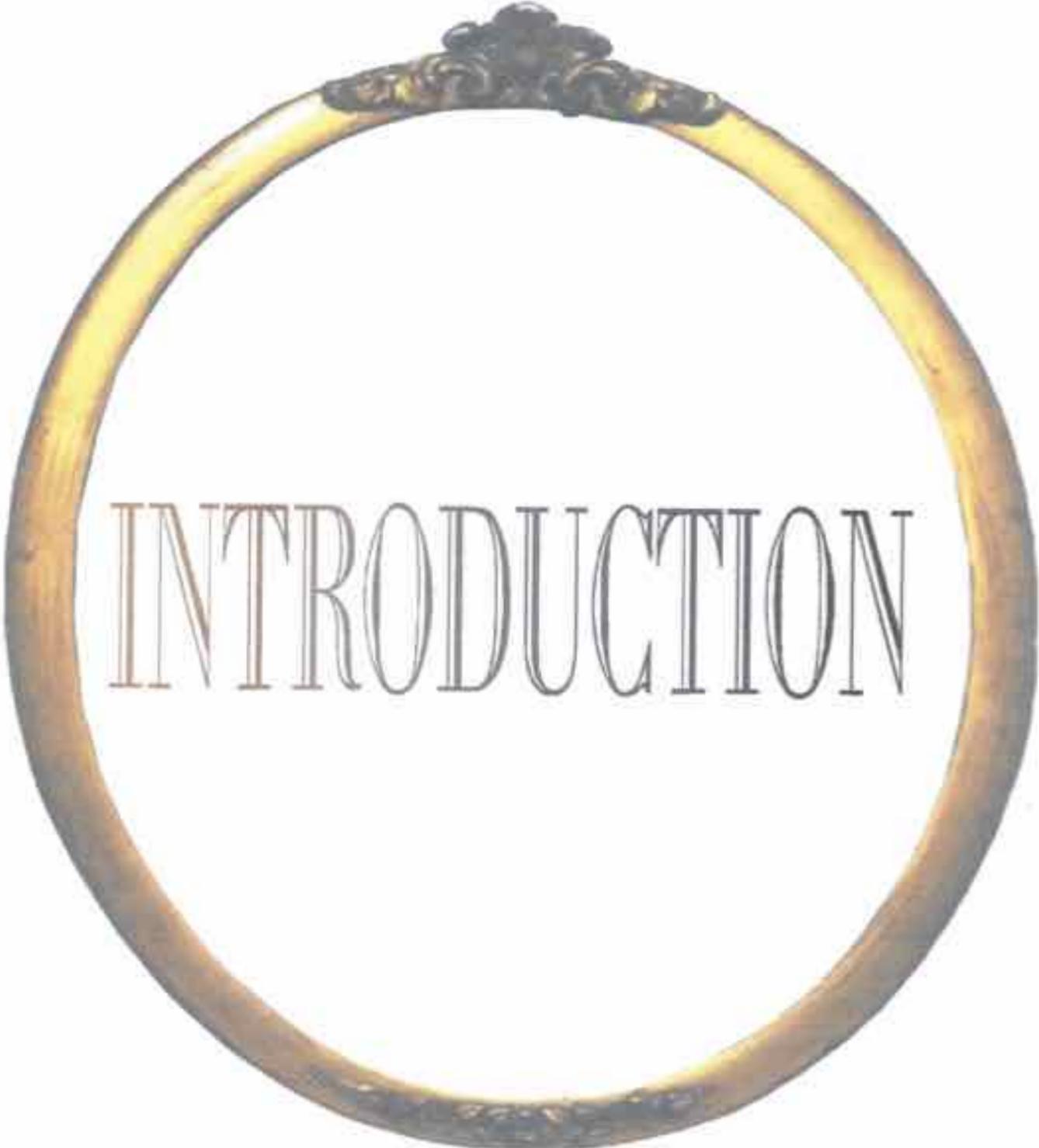
1933-1962: The Business Meeting of Negro League Baseball.....	14
---	----

A TRIBUTE:

Championship Teams.....	16
-------------------------	----

Prominent Players.....	17
------------------------	----

E. S. Rose Park Diamond Plaque.....	18
-------------------------------------	----



INTRODUCTION

THOMAS WILSON BIOGRAPHY

A Prominent Businessman, Baseball Pioneer, and National League Leader

Born: 1883, Atlanta, GA

Died: 1947, Nashville, TN



Mr. Wilson moved to Nashville with his parents where they attended Meharry Medical College becoming doctors. With a passion for baseball, Wilson's vision of promoting black baseball in Nashville heighten when he met Rube Foster (Father of Negro League Baseball & National Baseball Hall of Famer) in 1914 when his Chicago Giants played the Nashville Capital City League team in 1914.

He developed the Nashville Elite Giants into Negro League baseball history by evolving the team into the more famous Negro League team, Baltimore Elite Giants.

During his leadership he helped jump start several baseball greats career starting with Nashville's **Norman "Turkey" Stearns** (National Baseball Hall of Famer, 2000), Nashville's **James "Junior" Gilliam** (National League's Rookie of the Year, 1953), Milan's **Burris "Wild Bill" Wright** (Mexico Baseball Hall of Fame, 1972), and Nashville's **Henry Kimbro** (Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame) (Kimbrow-Hamilton, 2015).

Highlights of His Historical Career:

He was one of the founding members of the **Negro Southern League, 1920** (Plott, 2015).

In 1929, he built the only southern black owned baseball stadium in the country (Lanctot, 2004).

The Tom Wilson Park was given a Historical Landmark Plaque by the Tennessee Historical Commission, 2003.

Served as **President of the Negro Southern League, 1929 & 1936** (Plott, 2015)

Served as **President of the Negro National League (1938-1946)** (Lanctot, 2004)

Proposed the idea of and helped financed the first **East-West All-Star Game** at Comiskey Park, 1933 (Mills, 2019).

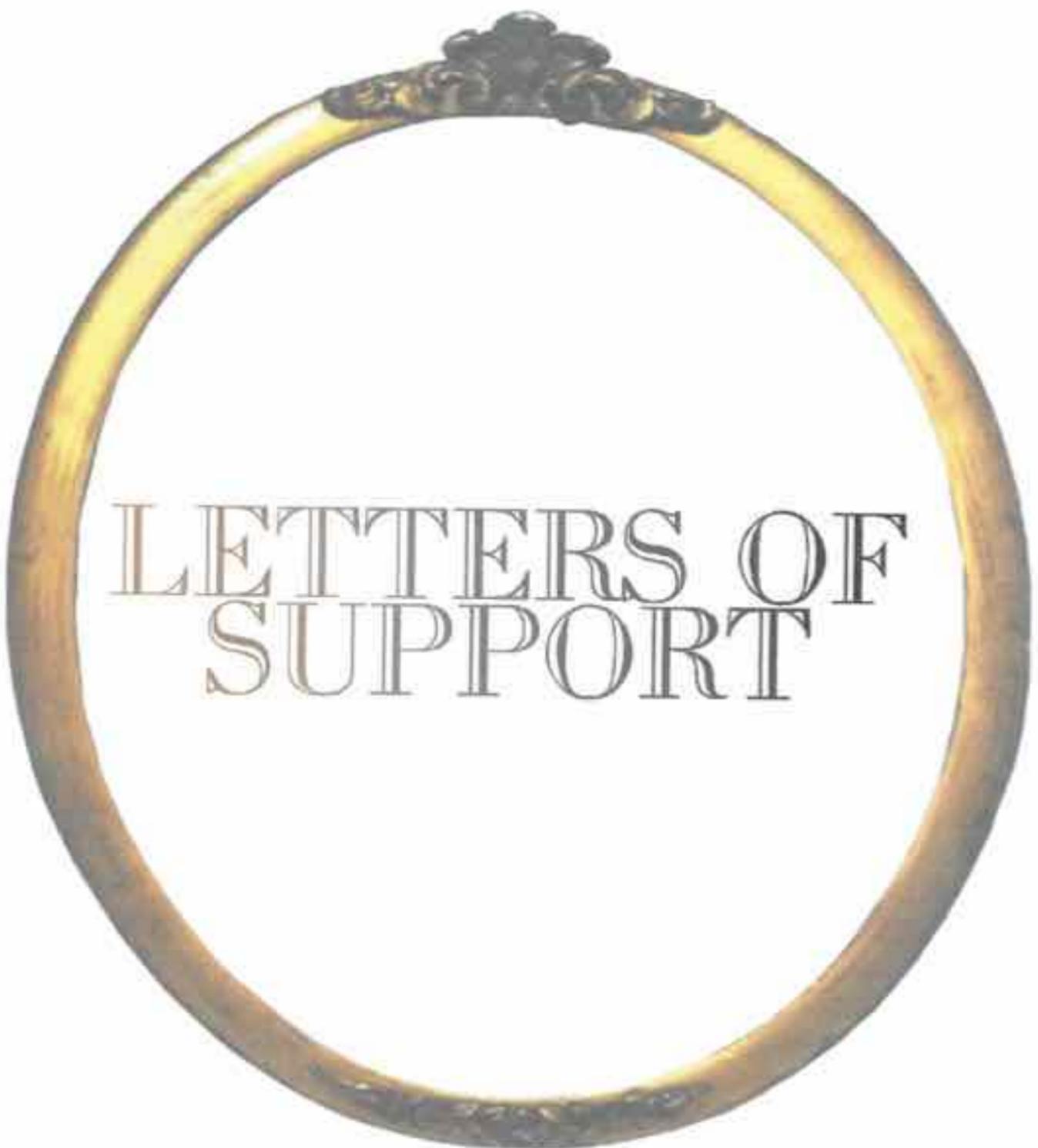
He increased player salaries as league president (Lanctot, 2004).

He is credited with making the Negro National League a 2 million dollar enterprise by 1945 during his tenure as President of the NNL (Mills, 2019).

During the 1930s he was one of the leaders of the **California Winter League** (McNeil, 2002).

THOMAS WILSON BIOGRAPHY

Named the 6th out of the **Top 10 Most Influential People in Nashville's Baseball History** by Skip Nipper (Author and Baseball Historian)



LETTERS OF
SUPPORT



May 27, 2020

Tennessee Sports Hall Of Fame
Bridgestone Arena
501 Broadway
Nashville, TN 37203

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter to express the Nashville Sounds' support of the recommendation/nomination of Tom Wilson to be included in a future Tennessee Sports Hall Of Fame induction class.

Baseball in Nashville, especially among the minority communities, would not be what it is today without Mr. Wilson's many important contributions. And without his ambition, Nashville's Negro League history would not be anything near as robust as it is.

His foundation of the Elite Giants and their home ballpark, Wilson Park, was instrumental in the growth of America's national pastime in not only Middle Tennessee but throughout the South.

The Nashville Sounds honor Mr. Wilson's individual contributions as well as the great history of the Elite Giants through signage and messaging here at First Horizon Park to preserve and carry forward his legacy.

We hope to see Mr. Wilson soon honored to take his rightful place alongside the many significantly and impactful persons who serve as members of the Tennessee Sports Hall Of Fame.

Sincerely,

Doug Scopel
Vice President of Operations, Nashville Sounds





Mr. Ronnie E. Greer, Sr.
W. O. Smith Music School Events Manager
Former Metro Councilman of 17th District, 1999--2007
Nashville, Tn. 37204

Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame Committee
501 Broadway Ave.
Nashville, Tn. 37203

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing this letter in support of the nomination of Mr. Tom Wilson for the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame. Mr. Wilson was the owner of Nashville's entry into the Negro Baseball League, the Nashville Elites. To ensure that his team had a place to play, Mr. Wilson built the first black-owned stadium in the South here in Nashville. The team eventually moved its operations to Baltimore Md. where they became the Baltimore Elite Giants and had noticeable success.

Mr. Wilson has been recognized by the Tennessee Historical Society for his contributions and I feel that it would be fitting that he be included in the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame. He was a force in the sports arena on the local and national level when it came to the historic Negro Baseball League.

Thank for your consideration,

Mr. Ronnie Greer, Sr.

Ronnie E. Greer Sr.

11 June 2020

Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame
 Attn: Hall of Fame Selection Committee
 501 Broadway
 Nashville, TN 37203



Dear Selection Committee

Larry Lester, a co-founder of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, chairman of the Society for American Baseball Research's (SABR) Negro Leagues Committee and CEO of NoirTech Research, Inc., ask me to write on his behalf, why I, **Thomas T. "Smiley" Wilson**, should be considered for induction into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame.

Although I was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1890, at an early age our family moved to Nashville, TN. My parents Dr. J.T. Wilson and Dr. Carry Wilson studied medicine at Meharry Medical College, the leading southern Negro medical school of its day. Coming from an affluent family, I was afforded the opportunity to pursue many entrepreneurial interests.

I was owner of the **Paradise Ballroom** and chairman of the board for the **Pride of Tennessee Elks Lodge No. 1102**. In 1913, I organized the **Nashville Elite Giants**, later a member of the Negro Southern League in 1920. Due to a declining economy in 1929, I was forced to my club to Columbus, OH (1929-34), then to Washington, DC (1936-37) and finally to Baltimore in 1938. As an owner, I had the privilege of managing several future National Baseball Hall of Famers; **Roy Campanella**, **Leon Day**, **Biz Mackey**, **Willie Wells**, **Ray Dandridge** and **Turkey Stearnes**, along with **Wild Bill Wright**, who should be in Cooperstown.

While in Nashville, I built **Wilson Park** in the Trimble Bottom section, one of the first Black-owned ballparks in the nation. The activities at Wilson Park soon became so widespread that the White spectators outnumbered the Black spectators. Even the **Nashville Vols** of the Southern Association used my park for spring training, because my park was a larger venue and didn't have the tendency to flood during the raining season.

Did I mention I was President of the **Negro National League**, a position I held for nearly a decade, until 1946, when Branch Rickey signed Jackie Robinson to a Dodger contract. Later, at the age of 57, I became ill and succumbed to heart failure at my country home near Nashville in May of 1947.

Thank you for reading about my career in sports and I hope you feel I am worthy to join fellow TSHOF colleagues **Wild Bill Wright**, **Junior Gilliam**, **Norman "Turkey" Stearnes** and **Henry Kimbro** into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame.

I remain,

Thomas T. Wilson
 Thomas T. Wilson.

NoirTech Research, Inc.

P.O. Box 380146 -- Kansas City, MO 64138

816.589.7940

www.LarryLester42.com - NTResearch@comcast.net

"We are drowning in Information but starving for Knowledge."

SKIP NIPPER

23 4th Ave.

Mt. Juliet, TN 37122

262downright@gmail.com

May 19, 2020

Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame
Honoree Committee
Bridgestone Arena
501 Broadway
Nashville, TN 37203

To Whom It May Concern,

In consideration of Tom T. Wilson's nomination as an inductee into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame, I wholeheartedly endorse his selection.

A baseball man, but also a successful entrepreneur, Wilson purchased the Nashville Standard Giants, renamed them Elite (pronounced Ee-light) Giants, and built his own park for them to play in. He moved his team from Nashville to Cleveland, Columbus, and Washington, D.C. before eventually landing in Baltimore where the team found success.

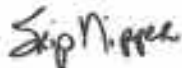
Those teams gave us Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame members Norman "Turkey" Stearnes and Henry Kimbro. National Baseball Hall of Fame inductees Biz Mackey, Satchel Paige, and Willie Wells, along with Stearnes, played for Wilson.

He formed local teams, the Black Vols and Cubs, as affiliates to feed players into his team in Baltimore. Those local teams gave us Jim "Junior" Gilliam and Clinton "Butch" McCord, both members of the TSHOF.

Although he moved his team to various cities, he maintained his residence and office in Nashville. As president of the Negro Southern League and Negro National League, his influence on all Negro League teams reached across the United States until his death in 1947.

Few can match Wilson's ambition, vision, and fortitude, and I hope he can take his place in the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame.

Sincerely,



Skip Nipper
Baseball Historian

*Dr. Harriet Kimbro-Hamilton
103 River Dr.
Old Hickory, Tn. 37138*

June 18, 2020

Tennessee Sport Hall of Fame
501 Broadway
Nashville, Tn. 37138

Dear Committee Members:

It is my pleasure to recommend and support the nomination of Mr. Thomas Wilson to the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame. He was a visionary ahead of his time during his era. Here is a man that changed Nashville's history by promoting sporting and entertainment events that included every community. As a successful businessman, he lifted the economic level of the African American community that is evident today. The city of Nashville was also lifted on a national level as he nurtured the success of the Elite Giants baseball organization.

I myself have an indirect connection to this great man because he recruited my father, Henry Kimbro, to play for him with the Nashville Elite Giants baseball team that later became the Baltimore Elite Giants. He changed my dad's social and economic position in life through baseball. The most important contribution was being a successful African American entrepreneur.

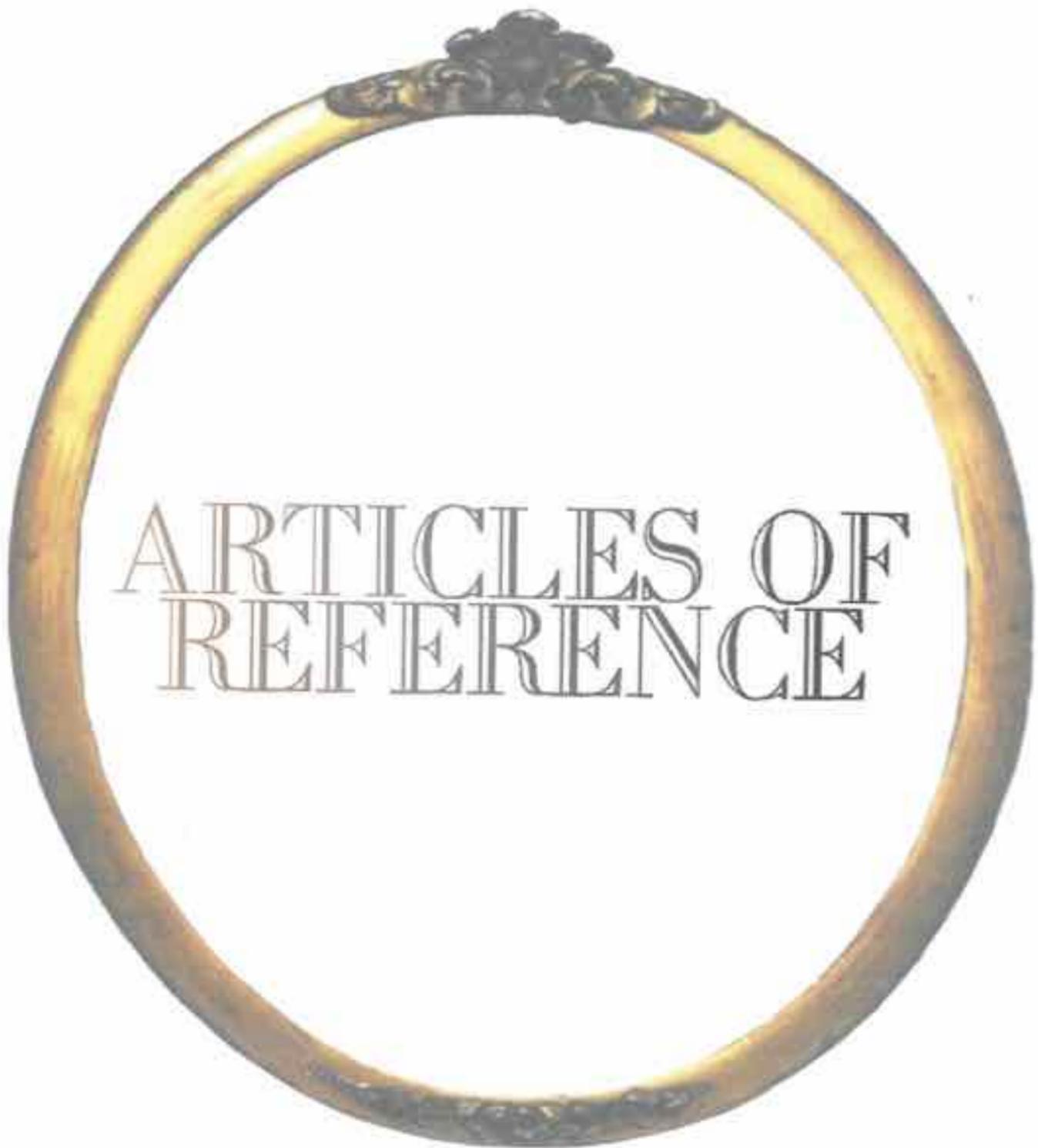
My father became a successful businessman because of Thomas Wilson. He sent four out of five of his children to college due in part to his social-economic status. Mr. Wilson also gave numerous opportunities for local talent to rise and shine. Men like Mr. Norman "Turkey" Stearns, the only native Tennessean to be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame benefited from his vision.

In my book called Daddy's Scrapbook: Henry Kimbro of the Negro League, a daughter's perspective, I summarized Mr. Wilson by saying, "when Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947, many were prepared to realize the opportunity due to the efforts of men like Tom Wilson who, with others, helped to build the bridge that made that dream possible."

Please give Mr. Thomas Wilson every consideration to take his place in Tennessee sport's history by being inducted into Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame.



Thank you for your time,
Dr. Harriet Kimbro-Hamilton



ARTICLES OF
REFERENCE



Nashville in Davidson County, Tennessee — *The American South (East South Central)*

Tom Wilson Park / Thomas T. Wilson 1929-1946 / 1883-1947

Inscription.

Tom Wilson Park 1929-1946

Formerly located near this site was Tom Wilson Park. It opened in 1929 and was home to the Nashville Elite Giants baseball team of the Southern Negro League. Owned by Thomas T. Wilson, the facility was one of two African-American owned professional ballparks. Wilson Park also hosted spring training sessions for the Nashville Vols, a minor league team of the Southern Association. Spring training games brought such baseball greats as Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and Roy Campanella to the park. In 1946, Tom Wilson resigned and discontinued all ball activities at Wilson Park.

Continued



By Don Morris, April 18, 2014

1. Tom Wilson Park side of marker

Thomas T. Wilson 1883-1947

Thomas T. Wilson, a businessman, sportsman, and founder of the Nashville Elite Giants, began his baseball association with the Nashville Maroons in 1909. He organized the Nashville Elite Giants in 1921. Besides being an owner, Wilson served as secretary and president of the Negro Southern League and vice chair, treasurer, and president of the Negro National League. After quitting baseball and ceasing ball activities at the park, he opened the Paradise Ballroom on the same site. Entertainers included Lionel Hampton, Cab Calloway and Sarah Vaughn.

Erected 2003 by Tennessee Historical Commission. (Marker Number 3A 198.)

Topics and series. This historical marker is listed in these topic lists: [Entertainment](#) • [Sports](#). In addition, it is included in the [Tennessee Historical Commission](#) series list.

Location. 36° 8.717' N, 86° 45.855' W. Marker is in Nashville, Tennessee, in Davidson County. Marker is on 2nd Avenue South (US 41A) north of Hart Street, on the right when traveling north. [Touch for map](#). Marker is at or near this postal address: 1200 2nd Avenue S, Nashville TN 37210, United States of America. [Touch for directions](#).

Other nearby markers. At least 8 other markers are within walking distance of this marker. [St. Patrick Catholic Church](#) (within shouting distance of this marker); [Hubbard House](#) (about 700 feet away, measured in a direct line); [First Steam Locomotive](#) (approx. 0.2 miles away); [James Carroll Napier](#) (approx. 0.3 miles away); [May Hosiery Mills](#) (approx. 0.3 miles away); [Major Henry M. Rutledge](#) (approx. 0.3 miles away); [Felix K. Zollicoffer](#) (approx. 0.3 miles away); [William Driver](#) (approx. 0.3 miles away). [Touch for a list and map](#) of all markers in Nashville.

ELITE GIANTS NEED TWO TO BE DIXIE CHAMPIONS

The Nashville Elite Giants play the Chicago American Giants in the second play-off for championship Sunday, Monday and Tuesday in Sulphur Dell. The Elites won 2 out of 3 in Chicago and have only 2 more to win to be Negro Southern league champions. The Elites with the addition of Dukes, Porter and Bankhead have made threats of winning the series and the negro world series.

Clipped By:



harloo
Mon, May 25, 2020

NASHVILLE ELITE GIANTS IN FIRST NIGHT GAME

Kansas City Monarchs to Be Opponents.

The baseball fans of Nashville as well as the idly curious will have a chance to see what night baseball is like when Nashville Elite Giants meets the Kansas City Monarchs, one of the most famous negro teams. Wednesday night at 8 o'clock out in Wilson Park. The Monarchs, owned by J. Leslie Wilkenson of Kansas City, Mo., are pioneers in his field, having created a mild sensation in baseball circles all over the country with their undertaking.

Clipped By:



harloo
Mon, May 25, 2020

1933-1962: The Business Meetings of Negro League Baseball

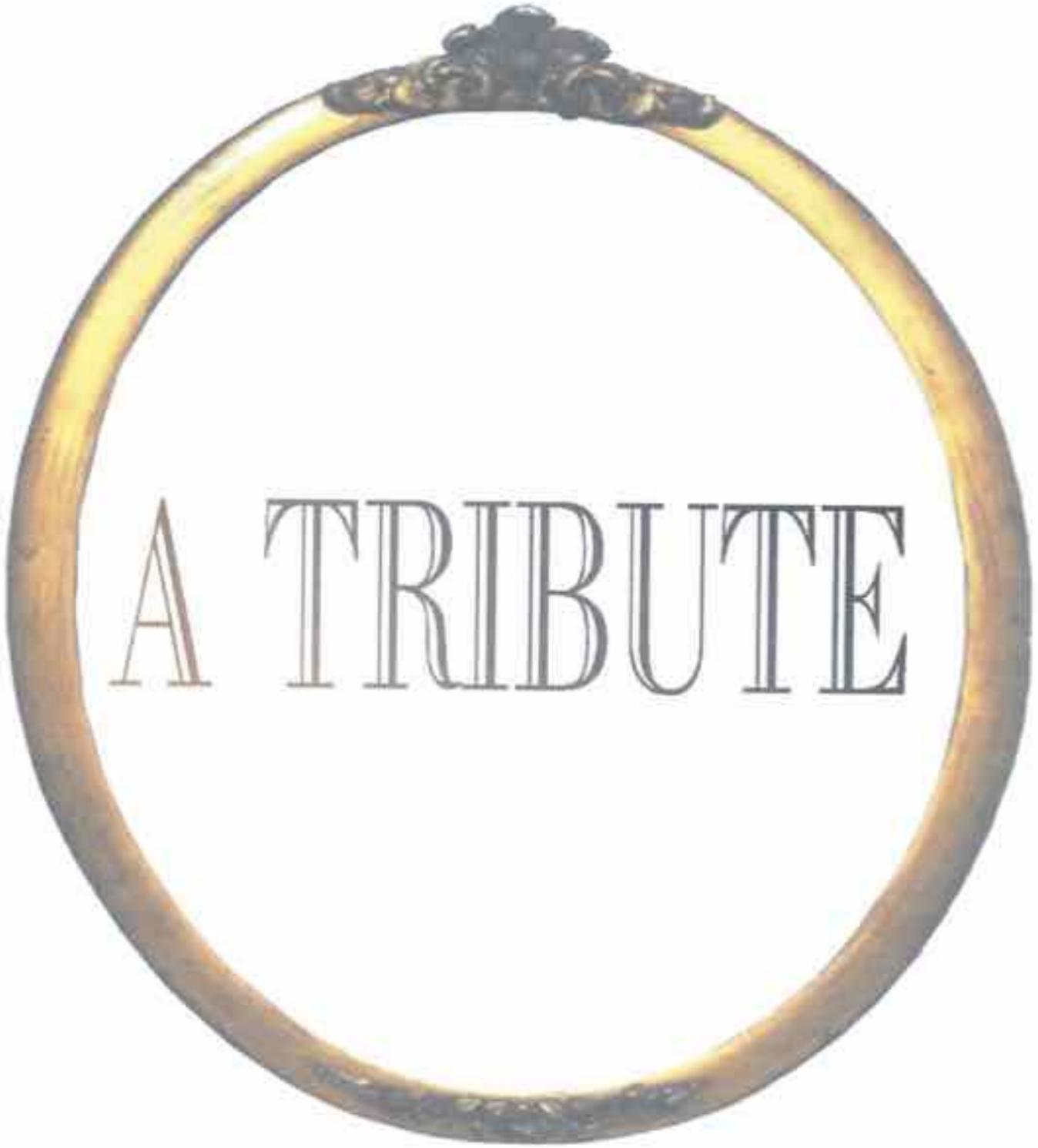
By Doron Goldman

Editor's note: This article, originally published in <https://sabr.org/latest/sabr-digital-library-whos-first-replacement-players-world-war-ii> "Baseball's Business: The Winter Meetings, 1958-2016" (<https://sabr.org/latest/sabr-digital-library-baseballs-business-winter-meetings-1958-2016>) (SABR, 2017), was honored as a 2018 McFarland-SABR Baseball Research Award (<https://sabr.org/latest/corbett-goldman-win-2018-mcfarland-sabr-baseball-research-awards>) winner.



Negro League baseball magnates meet at the Hotel Teresa on June 20, 1946, in New York City. The owners had all attended the Joe Louis boxing bout the night before. The meeting was to plan the second-half schedule for the 1946 season. Left to right: Syd Pollock (Indianapolis Clowns), Tom Wilson (Baltimore Elite Giants), Tom Baird (Kansas City Monarchs), W.S. Martin (Memphis Red Sox), J.B. Martin (NAL President and Chicago American Giants), Ernest Wright (Cleveland Buckeyes), Fay Young (Chicago Defender writer), Wilbur Hayes (Buckeyes), and Tom Hayes Jr. (Birmingham Black Barons). (National Baseball Hall of Fame Library)

By Doron Goldman



A TRIBUTE

**NASHVILLE
ELITE
GIANTS**



TOM WILSON'S ELITE GIANTS CHAMPIONSHIP RECORD

THE NEGRO SOUTHERN LEAGUE CHAMPIONS

1921 Nashville Elite Giants

1922 Nashville Elite Giants

1929 Nashville Elite Giants

1932 Nashville Elite Giants

**Source: The Negro Southern League, A Baseball History 1920-1951
(2015)**

THE NATIONAL NEGRO LEAGUE CHAMPIONS

1939 Baltimore Elite Giants

1949 Baltimore Elite Giants

**Source: The Baltimore Elite Giants
Sport and Society in the Age of Negro League Baseball (2009)**

NASHVILLE ELITE GIANTS

TOM WILSON'S ELITE GIANTS ROLE CALL OF PROMINENT PLAYERS WHO STARTED IN HIS ORGANIZATION

1. **NORMAN "TURKEY" STEARNES** from Nashville, Tn. (Nashville Elite Giants)
Mr. Stearnes is the only native Tennessean in the National Baseball Hall of Fame (2000)
2. **BRUCE PETWAY** from Nashville, Tn. (Nashville Elite Giants)
Mr. Petway was a semi-finalist for the National Baseball Hall of Fame (2006)
3. **HENRY KIMBRO** from Nashville, Tn. (Nashville Elite Giants)
Mr. Kimbro was a candidate for the National Baseball Hall of Fame (2006)
4. **ROY CAMPANELLA** from Philadelphia, Pa. (Washington Elite Giants)
Mr. Campanella was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame (1969)
5. **JAMES "JUNIOR" GILLIAM** from Nashville, Tn. (Baltimore Elite Giants)
National League Rookie of the Year (1953)
6. **JOSEPH "JOE" BLACK** from Plainfield, NJ (Baltimore Elite Giants)
Mr. Black was the first African American pitcher to win a world series game (1952)



In honor of the
100th ANNIVERSARY
OF NEGRO LEAGUE
BASEBALL,

this plaque recognizes Nashvillians who
were players or team owners during the
Negro League era.

JAMES ABERNATHY
Left Fielder, 1945-1948

DAN BLACK
Catcher, 1950

WILLIAM "SOO" BRIDGEFORTH
Team Owner, Nashville Elites, 1951-1954

SIDNEY BUNCH, JR.
Center Fielder, 1954

ELLIOTT COLEMAN
Pitcher, 1954-55

WESLEY "DOC" DENNIS
First Baseman, 1942-1948

ED "LEFTY" DERRICK
Pitcher, 1945-1949

JAMES "JUNIOR" GILLIAM
Second & Third Baseman, 1946-1950

HENRY KIMBRO
Center Fielder, 1937-1953

ED MARTIN
Pitcher, 1951-1952

CLINT "BUTCH" McCORD
First Baseman, 1947-1950

BRUCE PETWAY
Catcher, 1906-1925

NORMAN "TURKEY" STEARNES
Center Fielder, 1923-1942

TAYLOR SMITH
Pitcher, 1948-1953

TOM WILSON
Team Owner, Baltimore Elites, 1921-1947

JIM ZAPP
Left Fielder, 1942-1954

May these great men inspire young people across
Nashville to pursue their dreams of playing
professional baseball.

DEDICATED
FEBRUARY 29, 2020



July 2, 2021

Dr. Harriet Kimbro-Hamilton
Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame
501 Broadway
Nashville, TN 37203

Dear Dr. Kimbro-Hamilton:

Recently heard that there is an effort to induct Nashville/Columbus/Washington/Baltimore Elite owner, Tom Wilson, into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame. This is an effort that I would like to strongly support. When in Nashville during recent times and doing some consulting work for the Music City Baseball group, read and learned a great deal about Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Wilson's vision and leadership led the Nashville Elite Giants through some difficult times, and eventually the solvency of the franchise. In addition to being an owner and team officer, he held numerous positions in the Negro Southern League and Negro National League. He is also credited as a primary force behind organizing the first East-West All Star Game in 1933.

This leadership helped start the City of Nashville's love of the game of baseball and started the cities involvement in the sport. The contributions from Mr. Wilson definitely have earned him a position in the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame. Hopefully, he will be able to take his deserved place in the Hall.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

David Dombrowski
President, Baseball Operations
The Phillies



The Phillies • One Citizens Bank Way • Philadelphia, PA 19148 • 215-463-6000



August 23, 2021

Brad Willis, Philip Fulmer
Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame
Bridgestone Arena
501 Broadway
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

Dear Brad and Philip,

In 2005 the Babe Ruth Birthplace Museum in Baltimore opened a second sports attraction, Sports Legends Museum at Camden Yards, to house its burgeoning collection. Sports Legends proved to be a defacto state sports museum, with exhibits on Baltimore's Orioles, Ravens and Colts, the Maryland Terrapins, the Maryland State Athletic Hall of Fame, and local athletes like Michael Phelps, Cal Ripken, Junior and Sugar Ray Leonard.

One of Sports Legends most impactful and crowd-pleasing exhibitions was a gallery devoted to local Negro League baseball, specifically Baltimore's Elite Giants, a team that won championships in 1939 and 1949 with stars like Roy Campanella, Junior Gilliam, Leon Day and Henry Kimbro.

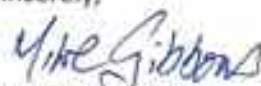
It has come to my attention that there is an ongoing effort to have the Elites' owner, "Smiling" Tom Wilson, inducted into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame. I fully support his nomination. In addition to molding the Elites into one of the Negro Leagues more famous franchises, Tom Wilson's endless promotion of Black baseball led to his serving as a founding member of the Negro Southern League in 1920 and the construction of Tom Wilson Park in 1929, the only southern Black-owned baseball stadium in America.

Additionally, Tom served as President of the Negro National League (1938-1946) and conceived and financed the first East-West All-Star Game at Comiskey Park in 1933. Baseball historian Skip Nipper named Tom Wilson the 6th out of the top 10 most influential people in Nashville's baseball history in his 2015 book, "Baseball in Nashville."

Thanks to Tom Wilson, Baltimoreans continue to celebrate the legendary and historic accomplishments of his Elite Giants, the last chapter of his impactful life as a baseball entrepreneur and executive. Here's hoping the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame will commemorate the first chapter of Tom's baseball legacy in Nashville by inducting him into the Hall of Fame.

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Michael L. Gibbons
Chairman Emeritus/Historian
Babe Ruth Birthplace Museum

Center For Negro League Baseball Research

(972) 394-4700

DR. LAYTON REVEL
Director

1409 Carroll
Carrollton, TX 75006

June 17, 2022

Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame
501 Broadway Ave
Nashville, TN 37203

Dear Sir,

I was asked by the daughter of Henry Kimbro to provide you some background information on Tom Wilson who is being considered for induction into your hall of fame.

Our organization has conducted research into Negro League baseball history for over 35 years and has a world-class museum (Negro Southern League Museum) in Birmingham, Alabama. We are considered as one of the leading experts in Negro Baseball League history.

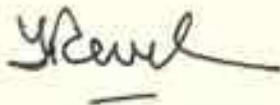
When Dr. Kimbro-Hamilton asked me about Tom Wilson and his importance to Negro League baseball, I was very familiar with his career and contributions to black baseball.

When evaluating the career of Tom Wilson, I think it is important to take the following points into consideration.

- Individually as a team owner and sports promoter Tom Wilson did more for black baseball in Tennessee than any other individual.
- Tom Wilson's baseball career can be traced back to 1909 when he took over the Nashville Maroons. After the Maroons he formed the Nashville Elites in 1913. During his career he owned/operated the following teams: Nashville Standard Giants (1918-1920), Nashville Elite Giants (1921-1934), Cleveland Cubs (1931), Columbus Elite Giants (1935), Washington Elite Giants (1936-1937) and the Baltimore Elite Giants (1938-1947).
- It is important to keep in mind that he had to run several of these clubs in very difficult financial times and he always put a successful team on the field.
- Needless to say he was the top owner in your state of black baseball teams.
- He also served as an officer in the Negro Southern League and the Negro National League on multiple occasions. Several of the most prominent positions he held were President of the Negro Southern League, Vice-Chairman of the Negro National League and President of the Negro National League.

- Tom Wilson promoted dozens of sporting events in Nashville over the years.
- Wilson also invested in the black community when he built Tom Wilson Park (1929-1946) for his baseball team in the all-black Trimble Bottom neighborhood of Nashville. This was one of only three baseball parks in the entire country owned by an African American.
- When Branch Rickey signed Jackie Robinson in 1945, Tom Wilson took a very strong stand for the rights of black owners during the integration of Major League Baseball (MLB).
- As a businessman in Nashville he owned and operated the Paradise Ballroom which was a very successful business venture.

In conclusion from our perspective as Negro League historians, Tom Wilson was the most influential man and important figure in the history of black baseball in Tennessee.



Dr. Layton Revel

Executive Director
Center for Negro League Baseball Research
and
Founder of Negro Southern League Museum

June 22, 2022

Mr. Brad Willis
Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame
Bridgestone Arena
501 Broadway Ave
Nashville, TN 37203

Dear Mr. Willis:

I am the youngest daughter of Norman Thomas "Turkey" Stearnes the Major Leaguer/Negro Leaguer inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 2000. My father was also inducted into 4 other Baseball Hall of Fames that included the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame in 2010. The latter one is very dear, because my father is the greatest player ever from the state of Tennessee, and the only one born in the state that is currently in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

This is a letter of support for Tom Wilson and should be added to his nomination package. My research has shown that Tom dedicated his life to remain committed to forming and preserving the Nashville Standard Giants/Nashville Elite Giants, one of the teams my father played for while barnstorming from city to city during extremely segregated and difficult times. Tom was called a Nashvillian and was the pioneer responsible for securing baseball for the Nashville African-American population.

Although Tom was not a star player, he was one of the most successful businessmen who laid the foundation for Black players such as my father and Henry Kimbro, (both Tennessee Sports Hall of Famers) and Black teams for many years. Tom's loyalty to the Black community, as well as his business endeavors and contributions should result in him being inducted into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame.

My father's induction at Cooperstown happened twenty-one years after his death and his induction into the TSHOF happened thirty-one years after his death. Tom Wilson died in 1947. That was seventy-five years ago. Please finally give him the accolades that are long overdue.

Sincerely,



Joyce Stearnes Thompson, Daughter of "Turkey" Stearnes
855 Meadow Ridge Circle #103
Auburn Hills, MI 48326
248-882-1103

Non.
Candidate



Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame Nomination Form

NOMINEE INFORMATION

NAME JACK G. Elder

ADDRESS 1637 Grainger Springs

CITY Spring Hill STATE TN ZIP 37174

PHONE 615/293-3044 ALTERNATE PHONE _____

SPORT _____

CAPACITY OF INVOLVEMENT Administrator
(player, coach, official, administrator)

NOMINATOR'S INFORMATION

NAME Same as Above

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ ALTERNATE PHONE _____

Please include a three-hundred word biographical narrative.

Forward all information to:
The Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame
Attn: Brad Willis
501 Broadway
Nashville, TN 37203

Contact tnsports@bellsouth.net with any questions.

Jack G. Elder

Application Biographical Narrative

Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame

My name is Jack Elder and I am humbly submitting my Application for the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame. In this statement, I am providing a brief overview of my background and my leadership role during the launching and early development of one of Tennessee's most unique, life changing, remarkable, and inspiring sports stories which opened the joy of sports training and competition to a new population of participants. I would like to thank Brad Willis, Executive Director of TSHF, for encouraging me to submit my application.

Sports have always been an important part of my life and my participation has included being a participant, coach and administrator. I have a Bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at El Paso and a Master's degree from Pan American University. After earning my Master's degree, I had a very unique opportunity to be a part of a small select group to earn an additional graduate degree (ED.S.) from George Peabody College in "Physical Education and Recreation for the Handicapped". While doing field work, I learned of a new program called Special Olympics, founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver. To make a long story short, that was in 1972 and in 1973, I was selected as the first salaried Executive Director of Tennessee Special Olympics. During my tenure as Executive Director, with the help of many, we quickly became recognized as one of the strongest and best managed Special Olympics program in the United States. Over time, we were able to grow into a statewide and year-round program that included approximately 8,000 volunteers and 13,000 Special Olympic athletes participating in local, area and state competition in 14 different sports. We established 16 Area programs across the State, serving every county in Tennessee. On a personal note, that may be of special interest to the Committee, in 1984, I was honored and humbled to be named by the *Nashville Banner* as "Sportsman of the Year" for my work with Special Olympics. Being named to the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame would be a dream come true for me personally but would also shine a light on Special Olympics and the thousands of Special Olympic athletes in Tennessee.

October 31, 2023

Brad Willis
Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame

Dear Selection Committee Members,

As I hope you are aware, I submitted, at the encouragement of Brad Willis, an application for consideration by the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame Selection Committee last year. I provided a large number of materials that described my life-long love of sports and my personal involvement as an athlete, coach and administrator. I focused mostly on my long tenure with the Special Olympics program. As described, I served as Executive Director in the establishment, growth and success of the early years of Tennessee Special Olympics program and, later, I served in a leadership position with the International Special Olympics office. In June, I was notified by Brad that my application was reviewed carefully by the Selection Committee in both areas of Administrator and life-time achievement. He also shared that I missed being selected for induction into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame "by a hair". Brad also tried to somewhat relieve my disappointment by reminding me that my application would again be considered for the next class. He also shared that it was common that many inductees had been were denied on their first year of consideration. I understand the very difficult decisions that the Selection Committee had to make and I appreciate all the time and effort given to my consideration.

I recently met with Brad to question what more I could do to leap over that "hair" that went against me during my first year of consideration. One suggestion, especially in the life-time achievement category, was to identified some areas where I stayed involved in sports after my employment with Special Olympics. First of all, I turn 80 years old on December 6th, 2023 but remain active in golf, tennis and pickle ball. Second, I have stayed active in sports organizations. I was honored to serve for several years on the Board of Directors of the Nashville Sports Council. Following rotating off the Board, I continued working with the Sports Council by serving for several years on their newly established Charity Committee (served one term as Chair of the Committee). One of our main goals was to promote and review applications from high school senior athletes for being selected to receive scholarship funds to go toward their college tuition. The criteria we used for scholarship funds was based on athletic accomplishments, academic achievements and community service work. We received a large number of applications and final decisions were difficult. Later, I was honored to be selected by the Williamson County Mayor to serve on the Board of Trustees of the newly created Williamson County Sports Authority. A few non- sports related activities include serving on Boards and Committees at the national, state, city, school, community, and church levels. I will also add that I served in an

Executive Service position during Governor Phil Bredesen's administration. I have also served on Advisory Councils for past Governor, Bill Haslam and current Governor, Bill Lee.

Being in the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame would be a dream come true. Aside, from it being my highest honor, my induction would also bring the recognition of all the Special Olympic athletes, parents, coaches, volunteers and supporters that shared in the hard work and dedicated efforts in the pursuance of the dream and mission of the Founder of Special Olympics, Eunice Kennedy Shriver. During those early years of the Tennessee program, we built one of the strongest and best managed programs in the United State and created one of the most remarkable, inspiring and inclusive sports stories in Tennessee history. After more than 50 years, the history and strong foundation from those early years are still benefiting the program today.

My entire life has been dedicated to public service and I intend to continue that course until I am no longer able. I appreciate that you again have the opportunity to review my application and I pray that you will find a way to get past that "hair" and, this time, find me worthy of selection into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame. If needed, I will be glad to answer any questions and/or provide any additional information. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jack G. Elder

Reflection Summary

Jack G. Elder

A Look Back

Special Olympics – A Special Time

This "Reflection Summary" has been prepared to offer members of the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame Selection Committee, with a broad and detailed reflection on my over 25 years in leadership positions during the early development and growth of the Special Olympics program. I will mainly focus on my time as Executive Director of Tennessee Special Olympics and some of my background that led to my personal interest and strong passion for the vision and mission of the program. It always felt that this is where God wanted me to be.

Sports have always been an important part of my life. I knew at an early age that I wanted to be a teacher and coach. After earning my bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at El Paso, I returned to the high school that I had graduated from four years earlier as a teacher and coach. A dream realized. Approximately seven years later, Pan American University in South Texas offered me a wonderful opportunity to be a Graduate Assistant and earn my Master's Degree. Upon earning my Master's Degree, a very unique opportunity was made available to be part of a small select group to earn a graduate degree at George Peabody College in Nashville. The program, funded by the Federal Government, led to an ED.S. Degree and was the first graduate degree offered in the specific field of "Physical Education and Recreation for the Handicapped". The graduate program also included a full tuition waiver and a generous monthly stipend. As part of our class work, each student was required to complete work in the field and I learned that a new program called Special Olympics, founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, was being developed to provide sports training and athletic competition for individual with intellectual disabilities (during most of my time with Tennessee Special Olympics the term used for the disability of our athletes was mental retardation). It came to my attention that NC Hibbett, Recreational Director at Clover Bottom Development Center for children and adults with Intellectual disabilities, had already learned of the program and was working with the National Office as volunteer Director to introduce the Special Olympics concept to others, especially, several other Developmental Centers in Tennessee serving individuals with severe disabilities. My visits with Mr. Hibbett and researching more about the new program, led me to want to do more with the program in Tennessee and to join with Mrs. Shriver's vision of developing Special Olympics programs in every State, as well as, other countries. To make a long story short, that was in 1972 and in 1973 my Peabody Advisor (Dr. Cecil Morgan), Mr. Hibbett, and a small group of other individuals, including me, helped to develop a Grant that would provide some seed money to develop a state-wide Tennessee Special Olympics program. The Grant was funded, and I was selected to be the first salaried Executive Director of Tennessee Special Olympics. With a very lean budget, we were blessed that George Peabody

College, a leading College in the teaching and research of Special Education, also believed in the Special Olympic mission and vision, and agreed to provide office space in the Kennedy Center on the Peabody College campus to serve as the program's State Headquarters. The State Office remained in the Kennedy Center for approximately 20 years. During most of that same period of time, the Vanderbilt University campus served as Olympic Village and competitions site for our largest event, the Special Olympics State Spring Games. Approximately 1,000 Special Olympic athletes, 350 coaches and 500 volunteers would come together for the three-day event. It was a special treat for the Special Olympic athletes to stay on the Vanderbilt campus and compete on the same athletic venues as the Vanderbilt athletes.

During the program's early development, as the lone employee and a newly created Board of Directors, early goals were to gain certification from Special Olympics International as an accredited State program and to meet all other legal requirements of establishing a new program, including obtaining a 501(c)3 designation as a not-for-profit charitable corporation with the IRS. A large amount of my time, through the early development, was to spread the message of Special Olympics (the program was virtually unknown), search for volunteers to help develop local and area programs and identify athletic sites to hold training and competitions. Main targets were Colleges and Universities, Parks and Recreation Departments, School Districts, and other organizations willing to help host and support various Special Olympic events. Many of these sites also recognized the value and mission of the program and named an in-house staff person to help manage the program. Through time and hard work, the program was able to gain additional financial support from individuals, grants, foundations, corporations and fund-raising events. The media was also a valuable tool in helping to educate more people about the mission and goals of the program and spotlight the events and the Special Olympics athletes. During those early years, I did sense that there were some people that did not feel that our Special Olympians should be considered athletes but after learning more and/or experiencing the effort, joy, skill, sharing and courage of the Special Olympics athletes, that perception grew much smaller. Also, during my tenure with Tennessee Special Olympics, it was a blessing, to always have a Board of Directors that provided strong leadership and support, in addition to being actively engaged and involved in the program activities. It was also extremely helpful, as an Accredited program, to have strong support and resources from the Special Olympics International Office in Washington, DC.

To make another long story short, with hard work, dedicated efforts, and support from so many, the statewide and year-round program, during my tenure, was able to grow to include approximately 8,000 volunteers and approximately 13,000 thousand Special Olympic athletics competing in local, area and state events in 14 different sports. During my tenure, 16 Area Programs were established across the state to serve every county in Tennessee. The program received many accolades during its development including, being recognized by the International Special Olympics office as one of the strongest and best managed programs in the United States. We were also honored with the "HCA Award of Achievement" for management of a non-profit charitable organization. On a personal note, in 1984, I was honored and humbled to be named by the *"Nashville Banner"* as "Sportsman of the Year" for my work with Special Olympics.

In 1988, after 16 years as Director of Tennessee Special Olympics and after careful thought and prayer, I accepted a position with the Special Olympics International Office in Washington, DC. The position was to run a Regional Office out of Nashville. My role was to work with ten or more states by serving as a trainer, technical assistant, trouble shooter, advisor and to lead an evaluation team for program accreditation. Also, my position with the International Office offered several opportunities to travel to other countries to help establish programs in their country and to accept other special projects as assigned by Mrs. Shriver. A special honor was to serve as the "Head of Delegation" for the first TEAM USA to compete in the first International Games held outside of the United States (Austria). I led a delegation of 143 Special Olympic athletes and 40 coaches to the Games. It was such an honor to work closely with Mrs. Shriver as we strived to obtain her vision of the Special Olympics.

My time with Tennessee Special Olympics was a special time. That special time brought me such joy and pleasure in helping to bring the opportunity of sports participation to a special population of individuals that would not, for the most part, have that experience without Special Olympics. I never made much money but I cannot imagine a job that offered so many wonderful and meaningful rewards. The Special Olympic athletes, the athlete's parents, volunteers, financial contributors, Board of Directors, and so many others were all remarkable to work with and served as an inspiration to me. We always maintained a very small dedicated staff, during my tenure, which were so important in overcoming challenges and reaching many milestones. A major challenge during the early years was to locate, recruit and train volunteer Area Directors located throughout the State. My small staff and I were blessed to always being able to find and maintain a group of compassionate, caring and dedicated individuals, who also embraced the mission of Special Olympics, in this special role. Their efforts to educate and gain support/resources in their area communities to conduct local training and Area games led to helping enrich the lives of thousands of Special Olympics athletes throughout the State. We thank each of our Area Directors for what they did for and meant to Special Olympics.

Special Olympics in Tennessee is still strong. The mission of Special Olympics Tennessee, as stated on their website, "Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competitions in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with Intellectual Disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy, skills, and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and their community." For more information, you can visit their website at Special Olympics Tennessee.

International Special Olympics mission, as stated on their website, "Special Olympics is the world's largest sports organization for children and adults with intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities, providing year-round training and activities to 5 million participants in 172 countries. Special Olympics competitions are held every day, around the world - including local, national and regional competitions, adding up to more than 100,000 events a year." For more information, you can visit their website at Special Olympics International.

During my time with Tennessee Special Olympics (1972 - 1988) we collected many quotes

from individuals inspired by the skill and courage of the Special Olympics athletes. A small sample includes:

"I salute the courage, talents and abilities of these young athletes and I support the spirit, purpose and goals of Tennessee Special Olympics"

Lamar Alexander, Former Governor

"I really believe that Special Olympics is the best example of what being a true winner is all about. I wish every human being in the country could experience this event one time. It is truly something.

Watson Brown, Vanderbilt Head Football Coach

"I have had the pleasure of coaching and seeing the joy in the faces of 11 gold, 5 silver and 4 bronze medal winners in Olympics competition and I have also seen the same thrill and determination on the faces of the athletes of Tennessee as they compete for their own medals in Tennessee Special Olympics."

Ed Temple, Former Tennessee State University Women's Track Coach

"Tennessee Special Olympics is indeed special. All one has to do is see the expression on the faces of the participants to know that it is a competition such as this that portrays the true meaning of athletics. Having covered the major sporting events of our country in the past, there has never been the look of accomplishment on the faces of Jim Plunkett or John Riggins, for instance, that a Special Olympian flashes every time he or she competes. It's hard to tell who receives the greatest reward from Special Olympics – the participant or the volunteer worker".

Joe Biddle, Former Sports Editor, *Nashville Banner*

"The Special Olympics events which I have attended stand out as some of the most heartwarming experiences that I have ever been associated with. Many of their expressions of happiness and excitement after successfully completing in the various events are sights that I shall never forget. I guess that the best thing I could say about Special Olympics is that my father was religious in attending these events in his immediate area and I always thought his judgement of people and causes was the best.

John Mayors, Head Football Coach and Assistant Director of Athletics at Univ. of Tennessee

"The honest competition, unparalleled sportsmanship, and unsurpassed courage these special athletes display illustrate the true meaning of athletics. In essence, Special Olympics is athletics in its purest form. Regardless of the outcome, these participants are all winners".

Pat Summit, Former UT Women's Basketball Coach

"The bright faces you see among Special Olympians make you feel special and a little humble. The exceptional determination and the love these athletes share should be something we all try to show. They deserve everyone's support."

Ned McWherter, Governor of Tennessee

"One of humanity's greatest traits is the competitive spirit. To compete against time, one's self or another is universally appealing and very productive. When we view the competitive spirit in action through Tennessee Special Olympics, we see it in its purest and most constructive form".

Winfield C. Dunn, Sr., Former Tennessee Governor

"Having a son who participates in Special Olympics brought home to me the fact that a great many people put in a tremendous amount of work and love to give these special people their day in the sun."

Roy Mewbourne, Head Baseball Coach, Vanderbilt University

"In my judgement, there is no program so certain to bring out qualities of courage, spirit, sportsmanship and pride in participation. Those who give of themselves in competition all win. But anyone who is touched by the program will feel a share of the victory".

John Seigenthaler, Former President, Editor and Publisher of the *Tennessean*

"Special Olympics has become the world's most viable sports program for mentally retarded athletes. With these young competitors, trying is winning-the glad feeling of doing your best."

Fred Russell, Vice President, *Nashville Banner*

"In all my years of covering sports, this event is truly what athletics is all about"

Tom Siler, Sports Editor (retired), *Knoxville News-Sentinel*

"In a day when winning is all important, one only has to observe and participate in the Special Olympics program to find out what winning is all about. If in fact winning is performing to potential, all of these youngsters are winners."

C.M. Newton, Head Basketball Coach and Athletic Director, Vanderbilt University

"Tennessee Special Olympics provides a wonderful opportunity to reveal the spirit embodied in many young athletes who would otherwise be unable to compete in sports, one of life's great pleasures. Our association with Tennessee Special Olympics is very special to me.

Jo Walker-Meador, Executive Director, Country Music Association

Jack G. Elder

1637 Grainger Springs
Spring Hill, Tennessee 37174

jackge@aol.com
615/293-3044

May 6, 2022

Brad Willis
Executive Director
Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame

Dear Brad,

My name is Jack Elder and I am asking that the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame strongly consider recognizing a remarkable Tennessee sports story. In 1973, I became the first salaried Executive Director of Tennessee Special Olympics. The program was in its very early development at that time. I served as the Executive Director until 1988 when I accepted a position with the International Special Olympics office. The early growth and development of the Tennessee program is a truly inspirational story of opening up sports to a population that had never had the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of sports training and athletic competition. Sports have always played a strong role in my life and I had even decided, at an early age, that I wanted to one day teach and coach. I was able achieve that dream right after graduating from college when I was invited to return to the high school I had graduated from as a teacher and coach. That desire has been my focus throughout my career of public service. I have attached a "reflection" article that I wrote a few years ago around the 50th Anniversary of the Special Olympics program that speaks to my involvement with Tennessee Special Olympics and the remarkable early growth and development of a program that became widely known as one of the strongest and best managed programs in the US. I shared my article with the International and Tennessee offices for historical purposes. I also shared my story with George Peabody College and Vanderbilt University because of their strong support during the early years of the program. Attached is also a copy of an article that appeared in a recent publication of the Vanderbilt Magazine about the program. I have also been invited to provide materials from my time with the Tennessee Special Olympics program to the Vanderbilt University Library Archives to be available to students, faculty and researchers. I have a large collection of materials that I will be donating to the Archives later this year.

I am asking that the Hall of Fame Committee help to share the story of how the powerful vision of Eunice Kennedy Shriver founded a new sports program that enriched the lives of so many special athletes through sports training and athletic competition. I will be glad to personally meet with you and/or your Board members to provide any information needed to help show that this would be a worthy opportunity for your organization to embrace the history of the program and demonstrate that the history of sports in Tennessee should include Special Olympics. It is a remarkable and inclusive story to be shared.

One of the most special honors, which I am sure the Committee can appreciate, was my being named by the Nashville Banner as "Sportsman of the Year" in 1984 for my work and service with the Tennessee Special Olympics program. It was nice to be individually recognized but it was also a special recognition for the Tennessee Special Olympics program, the thousands of people that contributed to its remarkable early success and the recognition to the Special Olympics athletes that benefited from being able to demonstrate their remarkable skills, courage and achievements.

Thank you and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jack Elder

Commentary

Jack G. Elder

A Look Back Special Olympics – A Special Time

Special Olympics recently celebrated the program's 50th anniversary. As someone who spent over 25 years in leadership positions during the early development of the Special Olympics program, I thought that it would be interesting to go back to those early years of the program in Tennessee and to share some of my background that led to my interest and passion for the vision and mission of the program. On the personal side, sports have always been an important part of my life. I knew at an early age that I wanted to be a teacher and coach. After earning my bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at El Paso, I returned to the high school that I had graduated from four years earlier as a teacher and coach. A dream realized. Approximately seven years later, Pan American University in South Texas offered me a wonderful opportunity to be a Graduate Assistant and earn my Master's Degree. Upon earning my Master's Degree, a very unique opportunity was made available to be part of a small select group to earn a graduate degree at George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. The program, funded by the Federal Government, led to an ED.S. Degree and was the first graduate degree offered in the specific field of "Physical Education and Recreation for the Handicapped". The graduate program also included a full tuition waiver and a generous monthly stipend. As part of our class work, each student was required to complete work in the field and I learned that a new program called Special Olympics, founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, was being developed to provide sports training and athletic competition for individual with intellectual disabilities in Tennessee. It came to my attention that NC Hibbett, Recreational Director at Clover Bottom Development Center for children and adults with Intellectual disabilities, had already learned of the program and was working with the National Office, as volunteer Director, to introduce the Special Olympics concept to others, especially, the three Developmental Centers in Tennessee serving individuals with severe disabilities. My visits with Mr. Hibbett and researching more about the new program, led me to want to do more with the program in Tennessee and to join with Mrs. Shriver's vision of developing Special Olympics programs in every State, as well as, other countries. To make a long story short, that was in 1972 and in 1973 my Peabody Advisor (Dr. Cecil Morgan), Mr. Hibbett, and a small group of community individuals helped to develop a Grant that would provide some seed money to develop a state-wide Tennessee Special Olympics program. The Grant was funded, and I was selected to be the first salaried Executive Director of Tennessee Special Olympics. With a very lean budget, we were blessed that George Peabody College, a leading College in the teaching and research of Special Education, also believed in the Special Olympic mission and vision, and agreed to provide office space in the Kennedy Center on the Peabody College campus to serve as the program's State Headquarters. The State Office remained in the Kennedy Center for approximately 20 years. During that same period of time,

the Vanderbilt University campus served as Olympic Village and competitions site for our largest event, the Special Olympics State Spring Games. Approximately 1,000 Special Olympic athletes, 300 coaches and 500 volunteers would come together for the three-day event. It was a special treat for the Special Olympic athletes to stay on the Vanderbilt campus and compete on the same athletic venues as the Vanderbilt athletes.

During the program's early development, as the lone employee and a newly created Board of Directors, one of our early goals was to incorporate the program and obtain a 501(c)3 designation as a not-for-profit charitable corporation with the IRS. A large amount of my time, through the early development, was to spread the message of Special Olympics (the program was virtually unknown), search for volunteers to help develop local and area programs and identify athletic sites to hold training and competitions. Main targets were Colleges/Universities, Parks and Recreation Departments, School Districts, and other organizations willing to help host and support various Special Olympic events. Many of these sites also recognized the value and mission of the program and named an in-house staff person to help conduct the program. Through time and hard work, the program was able to gain additional financial support from individuals, grants, foundations, corporations and fund-raising events. The media was also a valuable tool in helping to educate more people about the mission and goals of the program and spotlight the events and the Special Olympics athletes. Also, during my tenure with Tennessee Special Olympics, it was a blessing, to always have a Board of Directors that provided strong leadership and support, in addition to, being actively engaged and involved in the program activities.

To make another long story short, with hard work, dedicated efforts, and support from so many, the statewide and year-round program, during my tenure, was able to grow to include approximately 8,000 volunteers and approximately 13,000 thousand Special Olympic athletes competing in local, area and state events in 15 sports. The program received many accolades during its development including, being recognized by the International Special Olympics office as one of the strongest and best managed programs in the United States. We were also honored with the "HCA Award of Achievement" for management of a non-profit charitable organization. On a personal note, in 1984, I was honored and humbled to be named by the "Nashville Banner" as "Sportsman of the Year" for my work with Special Olympics.

In 1988, after 16 years as Director of Tennessee Special Olympics and after careful thought and prayer, I accepted a position with the Special Olympics International Office in Washington, DC. The position was to run a Regional Office out of Nashville. My role was to work with ten states and two US territories by serving as a trainer, technical assistant, trouble shooter, advisor and to lead an evaluation team for program accreditation. Also, my position with the International Office offered several opportunities to travel to other countries to help establish programs in their country and to accept other special projects as assigned by Mrs. Shriver. A special honor was to serve as the "Head of Delegation" for the first TEAM USA to compete in the first International Games held outside of the United States. It was such an honor to work closely with Mrs. Shriver as we strived to obtain her vision of the Special Olympics.

My time with Tennessee Special Olympics was a special time. That special time brought me such joy and pleasure in helping to bring the opportunity of sports participation and recognition as an athlete to a special population of individuals that would not, for the most part, have that experience without Special Olympics. I never made much money but I cannot imagine a job that offered so many wonderful and meaningful rewards. The Special Olympic athletes, the athlete's parents, volunteers, generous financial contributors, Board of Directors, and so many others were all remarkable to work with and serve as an inspiration to me. We always maintained a very small dedicated staff, during my tenure, which were so important in overcoming challenges and reaching many milestones. I would like to recognize two of my early staff hires who were by my side throughout most of my time with the Tennessee program and until last year were still a part of the Tennessee staff. These dedicated people are Ron Bollinger and Carolyn Russell. These two people were such a large part of the program's growth and development and touched so many lives in a positive way. I am so proud of their work and service.

Today, Special Olympics Tennessee is strong. The mission, according to their website, is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competitions in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with Intellectual Disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy, skills, and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and their community. For more information, you can visit their website at Special Olympics Tennessee.

International Special Olympics, as stated in their website, is the world's largest sports organization for children and adults with Intellectual Disabilities, providing year-round training and competition to 5 million athletes in 172 countries. The International Office conducts Regional, National and International Games. For more information, you can visit their website at Special Olympics International.

During my employment with Tennessee Special Olympics (1972 – 1988) we collected many quotes from individuals inspired by the skill and courage of the Special Olympics athletes. A small sample includes:

"Tennessee Special Olympics is indeed special. All one has to do is see the expression on the faces of the participants to know that it is a competition such as this that portrays the true meaning of athletics. Having covered the major sporting events of our country in the past, there has never been the look of accomplishment on the faces of Jim Plunkett or John Riggins, for instance, that a Special Olympian flashes every time he or she competes. It's hard to tell who receives the greatest reward from Special Olympics – the participant or the volunteer worker".

Joe Biddle, Former Sports Editor, *Nashville Banner*

"The honest competition, unappalled sportsmanship, and unsurpassed courage these special athletes display illustrate the true meaning of athletics. In essence, Special Olympics is athletics in its purest form. Regardless of the outcome, these participants are all winners".

Pat Summit, Former UT Women's Basketball Coach

"I have had the pleasure of coaching and seeing the joy in the faces of 11 gold, 5 silver and 4 bronze medal winners in Olympic competition and I have also seen the same thrill and determination on the faces of the athletes of Tennessee as they compete for their own medals in Tennessee Special Olympics"

Ed Temple, Former TSU Women's Track Coach

"One of humanity's greatest traits is the competitive spirit. To compete against time, one's self or another is universally appealing and very productive. When we view the competitive spirit in action through Tennessee Special Olympics, we see it in its purest and most constructive form".

Winfield C. Dunn, Sr., Former Tennessee Governor

"In my judgement there is no program so certain to bring out qualities of courage, spirit, sportsmanship and pride in participation. Those who give of themselves in competition all win. But anyone who is touched by the program will feel a share of the victory".

John Seigenthaler, Former President, Editor and Publisher of the *Tennessean*

The Special Olympics Oath, recited by athletes at each Special Olympics event, is "Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt".

'Brave in the Attempt'

THE EARLY HISTORY OF TENNESSEE SPECIAL OLYMPICS IS CLOSELY TIED TO PEABODY AND VANDERBILT

BY KIM GREEN

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, with its roots in pioneering research related to disabilities, has long been a nexus for faculty, students and staff who translate that research into practice. In 1968 (having been founded three years earlier), the John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Education and Human Development officially opened, housing the Department of Special Education of George Peabody College for Teachers. That same year Eunice Kennedy Shriver, founder of Special Olympics, opened the first Summer Games in Chicago, a seemingly unrelated event that would become a global movement—and find a home within the Kennedy Center as well.

On a sunny July day at Soldier Field, a thousand young athletes from the U.S. and Canada watched as the Olympic flame was lit and Shriver recited an oath, attributed to the Roman gladiators: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." Shriver's vision captured the imaginations of a group of like-minded folks at Peabody—among them, Jack G. Elder, EdS'73; Cecil Morgan, professor of health and physical education; and Neland Carver Hibbett, MA'60, EdS'75.

Elder, a teacher and coach from El Paso, Texas, had enrolled in a new graduate program at Peabody in 1972, at that time called Physical Education and Recreation for the Handicapped. He did fieldwork with Hibbett, then the recreational director at Clover Bottom Developmental Center, a Nashville institution for people with developmental disabilities. Hibbett had been working to offer Special Olympics programs at Clover Bottom and other state institutions, but the group had a broader vision.

"This might be where God wants to put me," Elder remembers thinking, and he, along with Morgan and Hibbett, wrote a grant proposal to launch a statewide Special Olympics.

Winning that grant provided seed money for Tennessee Special Olympics, which was headquartered in the Kennedy Center at Peabody for nearly two decades. In 1973, Elder became the first salaried executive director and served in that post until 1988, when he became a regional director for Special Olympics International.

In the early years Tennessee Special Olympics focused on spring sports. Track and field, gymnastics and swimming events were held at local high schools, colleges and recreational centers. "We had great support," says Elder, "but we had early challenges." The main challenge was getting a new, ambitious project off the ground at a time when people with disabilities often were hidden away.

A big part of Elder's job was outreach: fundraising, recruiting volunteers and area coordinators all over the state, and initiating training programs and competitions to qualify athletes for state events. To spread the word about their mission, Elder made speeches, wrote articles, met with

media, and even knocked on doors, inviting his neighbors to watch the games. "When people saw what we were doing, they became believers," he says.

Once Vanderbilt built its state-of-the-art track, the university became a mini Olympic village for the statewide spring games. Hundreds of athletes gathered there, stayed in the dorms and competed on campus.

"That was big," says Elder, "for Special Olympics athletes to participate on the same fields where college athletes participate." Elder recalls the festive feel of the event, with opening ceremonies echoing the pageantry of an ordinary Olympic games: the parade of athletes, lighting the torch, welcoming speeches and, always, the oath.

Cecilia Franklin, BS'81, MEd'83, who retired recently after working as a special educator for 37 years, says volunteering with Special Olympics athletes in Peabody's Sunshine Saturday program helped cement her choice of life's work. She recalls beautiful spring days, her fellow student-volunteers doling out hugs and cheers at the finish lines.

"We were in it together, figuring it out," she says. "It opened my eyes and widened my world. It moved me ahead in my journey. It was a window into how much I would enjoy this work."

Carolyn Russell was involved in the Tennessee Special Olympics for three decades—first as a volunteer, and later as a part-time staffer. For years she oversaw volunteers and noted how the experience changed people's attitudes. She recalls how her own children were transformed by attending the events: "They became defenders of people with intellectual disabilities," she says.

Under Elder the Tennessee Special Olympics program became recognized as one of the strongest and best managed. For athletes then and now, after five decades, Special Olympics is a chance to prove what they can do when given the opportunity.

Ron Bollinger directed Special Olympics training and competitions for 32 years, working closely with Elder for part of that time. "There are a lot of misconceptions about people with disabilities," Bollinger says. "But once you meet an athlete, you realize everyone wants to live life to its fullest, to grow, and be accepted as part of society."

"The desire to do their best is what any coach would look for in an athlete," adds Elder, who was named Sportsman of the Year in 1984 by the *Nashville Banner* newspaper for his work. "You saw that on their faces. And you saw the joy of being able to participate."

Kim Green is a Nashville freelance writer and public radio producer whose work has appeared in Fast Company, Parade, The New York Times, NPR and other outlets. She's also a former flight instructor.



PHOTO BY JIM BROWN



PHOTO BY JIM BROWN

Top: Tennessee Special Olympians compete on the Vanderbilt track in the 1980s. **Left:** Members of Vanderbilt's football team award medals at a qualifying event at Nashville's Centennial Park in 1982. **Above:** Sargent and Eunice Kennedy Shriver pose with Jack Elder (right), first executive director of the Tennessee Special Olympics.