

VIRGINIA SPORTS HALL OF FAME



Media Release

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Virginia Sports Hall of Fame Announces 2024 Inductees

51st Induction Weekend events to be held, April 19 & 20, in Henrico County

VIRGINIA BEACH, VA – Champions on the field. Champions off the field. The Virginia Sports Hall of Fame’s Class of 2024 is a unique collection of individuals that have made a measurable impact in the box score and beyond.

The class, as selected by the Hall of Fame’s Board of Directors and Honors Court Committee, features athletes, coaches, and contributors that have connections throughout the Commonwealth. The Class of 2024 is as follows:

- **Jill Ellis**, from Robinson Secondary school in Fairfax, VA scored 32 goals as forward for William & Mary women’s soccer in the 1980s before a stellar coaching career led her to the top of her profession. In 14 seasons as an NCAA Division-I head coach with The University of Illinois and UCLA, Ellis compiled a record of 248–63–14, and her teams made 8 appearances in the Women’s College Cup. Following her collegiate career, she spent the next 20 years with the U.S. Women’s National Team, including 7 years as head coach (2012, 2014-2019). During that time, Ellis would lead the USWNT to back-to-back Women’s World Cup Championships, in 2015 and 2019. In 132 matches as head coach, Ellis led the USWNT to a record of 106-7-19. Ellis has previously been inducted into the U.S. Soccer Hall of Fame.
- **Rick Jeffrey**, a native of Richmond and graduate from Hampden-Sydney College, is the 2024 Virginia Sports Hall of Fame *Distinguished Virginian Award* recipient. Jeffrey’s impact on sports was felt across the Commonwealth during his 36 years with Special Olympics Virginia, the last 22 of those as President. The longest serving President in SOVA history, Jeffrey continually grew the number of sports offerings and competition experiences in Virginia, while helping the

VIRGINIA SPORTS HALL OF FAME

organization reach never before seen financial milestones and community impact measurements.

- **Craig Littlepage**, spent a total of 45 years on the grounds of the University of Virginia, first as an assistant coach on the men's basketball team (1976-1982, and 1988-1990), and then in athletics administration from 1990-2017, the last 16 serving as Director of Athletics. During his time as AD, the Cavaliers were one of the most successful programs in the nation, winning 76 Atlantic Coast Conference Championships, and 13 National Championships. The 76 conference championships were the most by an ACC member school during that time. In addition to his role as AD, Littlepage chaired the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament Selection Committee, 2005-2006, and was a member of the USA Basketball Board of Directors, 2005-2008. In 2021 he was selected for induction into the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics Hall of Fame.
- **Chris Long**, from St. Anne's-Belfield School in Charlottesville, was a 2x All-ACC selection, 2007 ACC Defensive Player of the Year, Dudley Award winner, and Unanimous 1st Team All-American for UVA Football. The #2 overall pick in the 2008 NFL Draft by the St. Louis Rams, Long would go on to play 11 seasons in the NFL with St. Louis, New England, and Philadelphia. Long would register 332 tackles, 70 sacks, and 15 forced fumbles during his career, while also being a part of two Super Bowl winning teams in New England (LI) and Philadelphia (LII). His impact has extended well beyond the gridiron through his Chris Long Foundation. For his charitable efforts, Long has been the recipient of the NFL Players Associations Alan Page Community Award (2018), and the Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year Award (2018).
- **LaShawn Merritt**, from Manor High School in Portsmouth, VA (formerly Woodrow Wilson High School), is one of Virginia's most decorated track & field athletes. After sweeping the 100, 200, and 400 meter sprints at the 2004 VHSL state championships, Merritt took his success global. Merritt appeared in 3 Summer Olympiads, 2008, 2012, and 2016 bringing home a total of 4 medals, 3 gold and 1 bronze in the 400m dash, and 4x400m relay. His success on the international stage went beyond the Olympic games. An 8x World Champion, Merritt won an additional 23 medals in international competitions, 19 gold.
- **Hal Nunnally (posthumous)**, a native of Petersburg, VA led Randolph-Macon College men's basketball for 24 seasons, with a 431-232 record. Nunnally led Randolph-Macon to 20 winning seasons, ten 20-win seasons, ten NCAA tournament appearances, and an appearance in the 1977 NCAA Division-II National Championship game. He earned 11 coach of the year awards, including six from the National Association of Basketball Coaches in the South Atlantic District (1977, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1989, 1990). He has previously been inducted into the Randolph-Macon Athletics Hall of Fame.

VIRGINIA SPORTS HALL OF FAME

- **Dave Smith**, from Roanoke, graduated from Virginia Tech and began his career in athletics as the first Sports Information Director in Ferrum College's history. In 1975 he moved over to his alma mater where he would stay for the next 40 years. Beginning as an Assistant SID for the men's basketball and baseball programs, he would work his way up to Associate Athletics Director, and become the primary football communications contact in 1998. Following his retirement in 2015, the College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) named Smith the recipient of a CoSIDA Lifetime Achievement Award and the Virginia Sports Information Directors (VaSID) presented Smith with its Distinguished Service Award.
- **Paul Woody**, a native of Roanoke, and a Virginia Commonwealth University alumnus, spent 40-years as a sportswriter and columnist for the Richmond News Leader, and Richmond Times-Dispatch. Beginning in 1980, Woody served as the Richmond paper's primary beat reporter for its Washington Redskins (now Commanders) coverage. For his coverage on the NFL and other events, Woody has been the recipient of 15 Pro Football Writers of America awards, 10 Virginia Press Association Awards, 3 Associated Press Sports Editors Awards, and 2 U.S. Basketball Writers Association Awards.
- **Monica Wright Rogers**, from Forest Park High School in Woodbridge, VA was named the 2006 Gatorade Virginia Player of the Year for women's basketball and was a McDonald's High School and WBCA All-American. She is a 2x VHSL 3A State Champion. After committing to play collegiately for the University of Virginia, she would re-write the Cavaliers record books. During her four years at Virginia, Wright Rogers set program career records for total points (2,540), scoring average (19.1 ppg), field goals made (962), field goal attempts (2,207) and 25-point games (28), and ranks 4th on the all-time list with 372 steals. A 3x All-American, Wright Rogers was named the 2010 ACC Player of the Year, ACC Defensive Player of the Year and WBCA National Defensive Player of the Year. Following college she would play 7 seasons in the WNBA, winning two WNBA Championships, and was named to the 2010 All-Rookie Team.

The 9-person class will be celebrated as part of 2024 Induction Weekend, April 19-20 in Henrico County. The 2024 Induction will be the first in the Hall's 52-year history to be held outside of Hampton Roads.

"The Class of 2024 highlights everything that is great about sports in Virginia," says Will Driscoll, Executive Director of the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame. "From their accomplishments on the field, to the impact they have created in their communities through sports, this class embodies the Hall's core values, *Recognition, Impact, and Integrity.*"

Additionally, the Hall of Fame is still accepting nominations for its newest award, the *Sportsperson of the Year* award. The award will be presented to an athlete, coach, team, administrator and/or individual who supports athletics, and who has

VIRGINIA SPORTS HALL OF FAME

distinguished themselves through outstanding athletic achievement during the 2023 calendar year. The award will be presented during the 2024 Induction Ceremony. Sports person of the Year award nominations are open to the public, and will be accepted through December 31. More information can be found on the Hall's website.

2024 Induction events will include a Sponsor Welcome Reception on Friday, April 19, *Breakfast with Champions* the morning of Saturday, April 20, and the *Hall of Fame Reception & Induction Ceremony* later that evening. 2024 Induction Weekend sponsors include The Henrico Sports & Entertainment Authority, The Beck Foundation, Richmond Region Tourism, Optima Health, DAVCON Inc., White Claw Hard Seltzer, WTVR-TV, ESPN Radio Richmond 106.1, and the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Tickets, sponsorship, and advertising opportunities for 2024 Induction Weekend are available now. Event and ticket information can be found at the Hall of Fame's website, www.vasportshof.com. Any questions regarding the Induction Weekend events can be directed to Will Driscoll, driscollw@VaSportsHOF.com

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About the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame:

Since 1972, the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame has been proud to honor Virginia's contributions to the world of sports. As the Commonwealth's official hall of fame, our mission is to honor athletic excellence, serve as a nonprofit resource highlighting philanthropy through sports, while inspiring sports fans through programming and engaging entertainment.