

LOCAL SPORT JOURNAL

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MUSKEGON'S MEDALIST

**Mark Grimmette recalls
amazing Olympic career**

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**Local luger Jake Hyrns'
tough tale of barely
missing the Winter
Olympics in 2014, 2018**

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*On the cover: Mark Grimmette carries the flag and leads the American team into the stadium at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, Canada.
Photo/Alamy.com*

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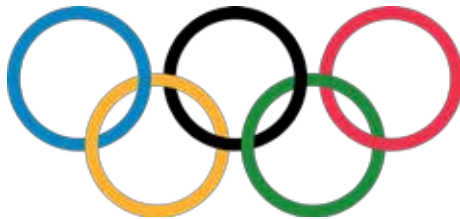
Memories of our *Olympic medalist*

MUSKEGON'S MARK GRIMMETTE COMPETED IN FIVE WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES AND CAPTURED TWO MEDALS

By Steve Gunn
LocalSportsJournal.com

Millions of people around the world - whether they are sports fans or not - enjoy watching the opening ceremonies of the summer or winter Olympic Games every two years.

The main event, of course, is always the Parade of Nations, which features athletes from all of the various countries marching into the Olympic stadium under their national flags.



One of the greatest honors for any Olympian is to be chosen to lead their national team into the stadium, carrying their nation's flag.

In 2010 at the Winter Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia, that honor was bestowed upon Muskegon's own Mark Grimmette, a five-time Olympian, two-time medalist, and a member of the most successful luge doubles team in American history.

"The way they choose the flag-bearer, the team captain from each sport puts forth a candidate, and then they have rounds of voting," said Grimmette, 46, who recently spoke to Local Sports Journal from his home in Lake Placid, New York. "Brian Martin (Grimmette's luge partner) was our captain, and he was in the room voting while I was out in the hallway reading a book.

"He came out and told me I had been selected as the flag bearer. We were both just floored."

By 2010, the Olympics were hardly a new experience for Grimmette. He was in the audience for the 1992 games in Albertville, France. He competed in the 1994 games in Lillehammer, Norway; the 1998 games in Nagano, Japan; the 2002 games in Salt Lake City; and the 2006 games in Turin, Italy.

He was very familiar with the thrill of the opening ceremonies. He knew the excitement of entering the stadium and waving to the crowd, as a worldwide television audience paused to check out the American team.

Grimmette was even one of eight athletes chosen to help carry a tattered American flag, salvaged from the remains of the World Trade Center, into the opening ceremonies of the 2002 Olympics, less than a year after the tragedy of 9/11.

But being the American flag-bearer, with his family and friends back home watching and cheering, was an entirely new thrill for an aging athlete about to compete in his final Olympic



Mark Grimmette, left, and luge partner Brian Martin show off their silver medals at the 2002 Winter Olympic games in Salt Lake City.

games.

"It's an electric feeling," said Grimmette, a 1989 graduate of Reeths-Puffer High School. "When they announced the USA team, and we walked up the ramp, I just remember waving the flag and walking around and hearing the cheers. It was amazing and humbling. I was very honored and humbled to have the opportunity to do that."

Grimmette announced his retirement from international luge competition a few weeks after the Vancouver games, but never left the sport.

He was quickly named Sports Program Director for USA Luge, which works to recruit and develop future generations of American lugers, and still holds that position today.



2002 in Salt Lake City: Grimmette and other athletes carry a tattered flag from the World Trade Center at the opening ceremonies; (at right) Grimmette and Martin competing in an Olympic luge event.



Grimmette will be in Pyeongchang, South Korea for the 2018 Winter Olympics, which began on Feb. 9, but not as an official part of the American team.

Instead he will serve as part of the International Luge Federation Jury, which settles any protests or disputes that may arise during the Olympic competition.

"There are three members of the jury, and should any type of issues come up, it will be our job to rule on that," Grimmette said. "You have to be more impartial. I've had jury positions for a couple of World Cups and World Championships, and it's different. You try to make sure there's a fair playing field. You really have to check your national feelings."

That being said, Grimmette will still be closely watching the USA luge team he helped to develop, and believes the Americans have a chance to do quite well.

"This is a solid team," he said. "They have done really well over the last four years, and showed they can be top performers and medal winners. I'm pretty excited to see them compete."

From Muskegon to Olympic fame

A lot of West Michigan folks have heard the story of how Grimmette got his start in luge, but it's worth repeating.

It was back in the mid 1980s, when he was 14 or 15, living with his family in Laketon Township. One day he woke up to the sound of heavy machinery coming from across the street at the Muskegon Winter Sports Complex at the state park.

He discovered workers building the local luge run, which is still one of only four across the nation.

At first Grimmette was a little put off, because he loved to sled in the winter, and the new luge run was taking away his favorite sledding hill. But he was invited to help with the construction, and he's always loved to build things, so he accepted the offer to pound a few nails.

When the luge run was finished, he decided to give the sport a try, and what followed became U.S. Olympic history.

"Once we finished (with the construction), I tried it and loved it," said Grimmette, a soft-spoken man who is not the type to brag about his successful luge career. "You are six inches off the ice, and it's very fast. What kid doesn't like sledding? This was just a much faster version."

Soon Grimmette immersed himself in the sport, spending hours on the Muskegon luge run and eventually gaining the attention of U.S. luge officials. He traveled to Lake Placid to train, and began the slow process of developing into a top prospect.

"Not necessarily," Grimmette said, when asked if he was an instant success in luge. "In the small races I did OK, but it

was something that took time. I was invited out to Lake Placid for a week-long camp in 87, and the national coach at the time thought I should try to do it more.

"I didn't think too much of that, but then I was invited back to Lake Placid for a month-long camp the following January. From there I made the junior national team and started to work my way up."

Grimmette originally partnered with Jonathon Edwards of Massachusetts in luge doubles, and the two of them became successful on the international scene.

By 1991 they had become the top American luge doubles team, and one of the better teams on the World Cup circuit.

That led them to the 1992 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, where 22-year-old Grimmette and Edwards took

fourth place - the best finish ever for an American luge doubles team - and barely missed winning a bronze medal.

The partnership with Edwards ended shortly after that. Grimmette decided to give luge singles a try, and competed that way for a while. By the time he decided to switch back to doubles, he needed a new partner, so he teamed up with Brian Martin of Palo Alto, California, who was also seeking a new partner.

"At the end of the 94-95 season, I wanted to try doing a little bit more singles luge, and Jonathon and I kind of went



A young Mark Grimmette at his first Olympics in '94 in Lillehammer, Norway.

our own ways," Grimmette said. "During the 95-96 season I did mainly singles, with some doubles on the side. I finally realized doubles was what I liked, and I had a conversation with our coach, and I decided to try it with Brian."

"When we were first on the ice in the fall of 96, we really clicked as a team. We were named to the national team during that fall period. In our first World Cup together we won a bronze medal, and our (American) teammates won the gold and silver. We swept the podium."

"Brian and I really worked together well. We became good friends, and we still are. That's one of the keys to doubles - a good relationship with your teammate. You have to be able to

communicate well in difficult and good times. You've got to have good problem-solving skills together.

"Going down the track together at 70 or 80 miles per hour, you have to make sure you are thinking as one."

A great partnership

Grimmette and Martin became the most successful luge doubles team in American history.

They won a bronze medal in their first event together, a 1996 World Cup meet in Norway. They went on to win the World Cup championship in 1998-99 and 2002-2003, and six bronze medals in World Championship competition.

They piled up a total of 65 medals in international competition, a record for USA luge.

But their most renowned success came in Olympic competition.

In the 1998 games in Japan, they won a bronze medal, one spot behind their American teammates, Chris Thorpe and Gordy Sheer, who took the silver.

The four athletes were the first Americans to ever win Olympic medals in luge, a sport that was long dominated by

Europeans.

"Going into the '98 games we knew we had a good chance for a medal, but the U.S. had never won an Olympic medal in luge, and there was a mountain of pressure on us," Grimmette said.

"We had another (American team) that did really well, and the two teams were kind of pushing one another to higher and higher levels. When we both realized we had won medals, it was pretty amazing."

So how did it feel to be on the Olympic medal podium for the first time?

"The hair on the back of my neck stood up," Grimmette said.

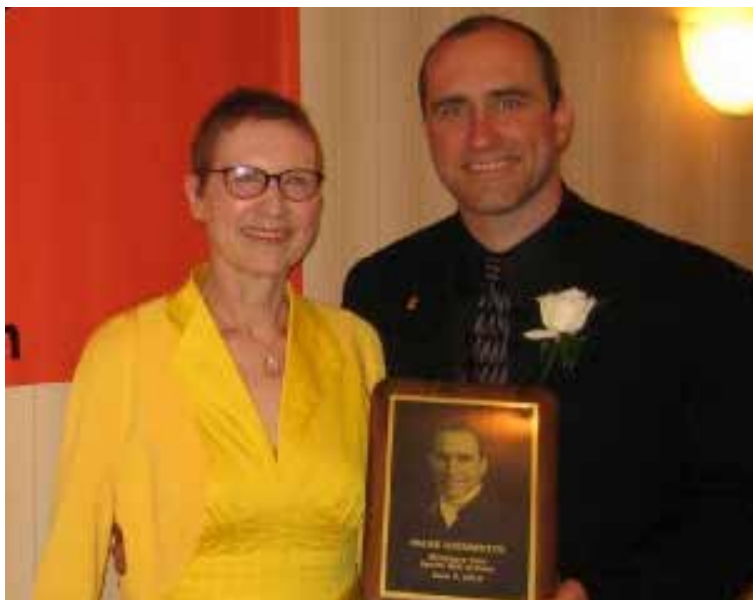
After experiencing the thrill of winning an Olympic medal, Grimmette and Martin stayed together for the next four years, with the goal of doing even better in 2002 in Salt Lake City.

They accomplished that, winning the silver medal. Their total time in their two runs was just over a tenth of a second behind the time of the gold medal team from Germany.

"It's always special to win a medal," Grimmette said. "To be in the top three in the world is pretty amazing. We definitely wanted the top spot, but it wasn't in the cards at that time."

Four years later Grimmette and Martin had very high hopes going into the Torino, Italy Olympics, but their medal streak ended when they wiped out on a difficult turn on their first run.

"We crashed," Grimmette said. "That was a rough one. It



Grimmette and his mother, Jean Van Lente, at his 2010 Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame induction.

was a difficult track for me. Brian and I were sliding fast, but that track took every ounce of concentration and focus, and unfortunately it didn't end up well for us. It happened about halfway down on our first run. It was a mental error on my part. Mental errors in luge are not a good thing."

The 2010 games in Vancouver turned out to be the last hurrah for Grimmette and Martin. By that time they were no longer among the best in the world, and finished ninth.

Not long after the Olympics they announced their retirement.

"I was 39," said Grimmette, who battled nagging back problems during much of his career. "My body was thankful I made the decision. It's not easy to keep your body in that sort of shape. We were fortunate to have that long of a career. We both loved the sport. We would have continued to do it if we could have. But it was time for a new chapter in my life."

Still committed to his sport

It's amazing that Grimmette and Martin had such longevity in luge, considering the year-round demands of training and traveling all over the world for international events.

While they gained their share of success and notoriety, they also gave up a lot, in terms of a normal life, not to mention the money they could have made in a lot of different professions.

Grimmette said he and Martin approached their career four years at a time. After every Olympics, they would discuss their situation at length and decide if they wanted to commit to working toward the next Olympics.

And they always agreed to go on, meaning they had four long years of hard work ahead of them to get another shot at Olympic success.

"The next games were always our focus," Grimmette said.

"We didn't take it one year at a time. We made the decision after each Olympics to go another four years, and we put all of our energy into being successful at the next games. After every Olympics, we had that conversation."

"It was something we loved to do. We love the sport of luge. That's why we stayed in it. We had an incredible passion for it. Sometimes it's not easy or glorious. When you break it down to the simplest form, you have to just love the sport."

"There are times when every athlete says, 'Hey, my friends of the same age are doing this and doing that.' But it's a tangible decision you have to make. You decide to do this and try



Grimmette and Martin on the Olympic medal podium in 2002.

to be successful, no matter what."

These days Grimmette lives in Lake Placid with his wife, Keela, and their three children - Leona, Finn and three-month-old Aurora.

He is still serving as sports program director of USA Luge, a position he has held since shortly after his retirement. He says that most of his work is administrative, but he still has a hand in working with young lugers who are a lot like he was back in Muskegon in the mid 1980s.

"The opportunity came up to work with USA Luge, and I wanted to still contribute to the sport," Grimmette said. "The position I went into was sports program director. The first few years I held a couple of positions besides that - I was head coach of the national team for awhile, and I was a team manager for a few years.

"Now my role is specifically sport program director. My job is overseeing programs for the athletes just getting into the sport, all the way through the Olympic team. The actual coaching I do is more with kids who are just trying it for the first time, and with our 12-14 year old junior D team.

"My job is mostly typing, but I still get to interact with a lot of the younger athletes."

Grimmette still gets back to Muskegon occasionally to visit relatives, although his parents now live in different states. When he has time he also visits the Muskegon Winter Sports Complex, to check out the young athletes developing on the luge track that he helped build.

"I was in Muskegon about a year ago to see some family," he said. "About 2 1/2 years ago I was out there (at the Winter Sports Complex) for a screening camp, to see the kids try it on ice for the first time."

Grimmette definitely does not live in the past, or try to draw too much attention to his amazing luge career.

He has only gone down a luge track twice since he retired,



These days Grimmette is an administrator for USA Luge, but still works with young lugers on the track.

both times at the Muskegon facility.

"The way I describe it is the mind remembers what the body can't do anymore," Grimmette said. "I remember how it feels. I remember what my body needs to do. But it's hard to make my body do that again."

Amazingly, Grimmette keeps his two Olympic medals in his sock drawer at home, instead of in an illuminated glass case where they could be displayed. He said he once used one of the medals as a ball marker at a golf tournament.

While he appreciates the medals, they are not the most important mementos from his successful career.

"They are still there," he said about the medals in the sock drawer. "When we do luge events, it's easy to pull them out and share them. I've had family ask me why I don't do something with them, and I tell them 'I don't know.'"

"The memories I have are special to me."

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Almost an Olympian



Muskegon's Jake Hyrns barely missed making the Olympics twice, but still had a great career

By Steve Gunn
LocalSportsJournal.com

It's funny how a split second - or a bit of rotten luck - can alter someone's dreams.

Jacob Hyrns knows all about it.

Hyrns, who grew up in Laketon Township and attended Reeths-Puffer schools, has come close to becoming the second luger



Jake Hyrns

from Muskegon County, after two-time medalist Mark Grimmette, to make the United States Winter Olympic team.

But he barely missed out, two different times, over the past four years.

Hyrns has been competing in the adult World Cup luge circuit for about six years, while living in Lake Placid, New York and operating out of the Olympic Training Center in that storied town.

In late 2013 he and his former partner, Andrew Sherk, had all but sewn up a spot as the second and final doubles squad on the U.S. team that would compete in the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

The first thing they had to do was qualify for a World Cup event in Park City Utah, by finishing in 12th place or better in the Na-

tion's Cup competition that preceded it.

After that, all they would have needed to do was compete in the World Cup event. They wouldn't have had to win a medal, or even place high. They just had to do their two runs and finish, and they would have been Olympians.

They accomplished their first goal, or so they thought, by finishing third in the Nation's Cup qualifying race.

But the next day Hyrns learned that a coach from the Slovakian team had filed a protest, because he discovered that the "steels" on the Hyrns-Sherk sled (the part that touches the ice on the luge run) had been overheated by the crew that prepares all the sleds for competition.

The steels had been measured for temperature before the competition, but nobody raised a fuss over it, because they were only slightly above the temperature limit.

It was only after the fact that the Slovakian coach learned about it and registered his protest.

Hyrns and Sherk were disqualified from competing in the World Cup event, and suddenly had to compete against another American team, that same day, in a special runoff, to determine who got the final American Olympic spot.

They lost, and their Olympic dream was over.

"It made me angry," Hyrns, 24, said about being disqualified over something he had nothing to do with. "And then, hearing we were disqualified and doing a run-off fairly quickly - we only had a few hours to

prepare. It would have been nice to have a day. It definitely hindered things. I wasn't thinking clearly or properly, because I was still angry."

While the disappointment was crushing, Hyrns decided to stick with the sport. He remained in Lake Placid and stayed on the



Jake Hyrns with first World Cup partner, Andrew Sherk, in 2013.

grueling World Cup tour, competing all over the world for the next four years, in hopes of making the 2018 Olympic squad.

It all came down to the Viesmann World Cup event in Lake Placid in December, not even two months ago. Hyrns and his new partner, Anthony Espinosa, were battling his former partner Sherk and Justin Krewson

for the final spot on the American Olympic squad.

Hyrns and Espinosa needed to finish in the top five of the competition to nail down the Olympic spot, but they finished eighth. The other way would have been for Sherk and Krewson to finish outside the top 10, but they finished seventh.

Hyrns thinks he and Espinosa would have made the top five if they had shaved a tenth of a second off their time.

So Hyrns missed out on his Olympic dream again, for the second time in four years, and he admits it's been tough to deal with.

"I'm still not over it," said Hyrns, the son of Todd and Vanessa Hyrns of Laketon Township. "It's probably going to take getting back home, and doing something else with my life, to get over it. It almost feels like I sat here and wasted a bunch of my life, but I know I really can't say that.

"I still got to travel all over the world, experience so many awesome things, meet some great people, and see so many things that most people will never see."

As it turns out, Hyrns will be back home in Muskegon, doing something else with his life, very soon.

"I am going to retire from the sport," he said. "I've put a lot of effort into it and everything, some people say too much time to just up and leave, but I was married more than two years ago, and I'm ready to start a new life."

A great career

Hyrns will leave behind a pretty remarkable career that has consumed his life since he was very young.

He grew up in Laketon Township, but never had much awareness of the luge run that exists at the Muskegon Winter Sports Complex at the Muskegon State Park.

But his mother worked at Mercy Hospital with Wayne Baird, the former coach of the youth luge league in Muskegon.

"He told my mom about it, and she called me one day on her way home from work and asked me if I wanted to try it," Hyrns said. "I was 11 at the time.

"I really don't remember this part, but my mom told me after my first run down the track, I jumped off the sled and told her 'I was born for this.'"

Just a few months later, Hyrns was part of a group of young Muskegon lugers who traveled to Lake Placid for fun, just to experience the thrill of lugging on a full-sized Olympic track.

While they were there, a national youth competition was going on, with some of

the top young lugers in the nation competing against each other. The Muskegon kids entered, just for fun, and ended up with comparable times to the elite youngsters.

"From there they picked five of us from Muskegon to go back out there for a screening camp," Hyrns said. "It was like a second evaluation. The whole point was to see if you listened and were coachable. I was the only kid from Muskegon, and only one of seven overall, chosen for the (USA Luge) junior development team."

For a few years Hyrns' parents drove him back and forth to Lake Placid every few months to train and compete. By the time he was 15, he moved by himself to Lake Placid to live in a dorm at the Olympic Training Center.

He attended the National Sports Academy, a school in Lake Placid, for one year, then finished his high school work through an online course.

In the meantime, he's been on the road competing, first in junior World Cup events, then the adult circuit, for about a decade. He's been training year-round to compete in about 10 events per year.

Over the past few years he has supported himself by being a member of the New York Army National Guard.

He enrolled in a special National Guard program - the World Class Athlete Program (WCAP) - designed to allow Olympic-caliber athletes to remain in active duty while training full-time in their sports.

But now Hyrns is ready to come home to Muskegon to join his wife, Amee, who is already living here and working at Goober's Bakery in Norton Shores.

He said he will be back in town by the end of February, and hopes to train to become a DNR conservation officer.

"She's actually a New Jersey girl," Hyrns said, when asked about his wife. "I met her at the NSA school. She was a ski racer.

"I told her within a couple of months after we started dating, if we were going to be together long-term, we were going to live in Michigan, and she was fine with that. It's home. I love it. It's a gorgeous place to be. All of the seasons are beautiful."

While he would love to be in South Korea, competing in the Olympics, Hyrns said the disappointment won't keep him from tuning in the games and watching as much as he can.

"I will be watching," he said. "I'm disappointed for sure. It's definitely a bit of a heartache, especially since this is the second time it's happened, but it's still my team. A few of them are really, really good friends. I'm going to be watching all of Team USA."



Jake Hyrns prepares for a run.



Jake Hyrns is consoled by teammate Raychel Germaine after he learned he did not make the 2018 U.S. Olympic team.



A young Hyrns competes in 2007.

ALYZA WINSTON JOINS THE BIG REDS:

Icing on an already good cake

By Andrew Johnson
LocalSportsJournal.com

A lot of people packed into the Mona Shores High School gym, eager to see Alyza Winston's play against her old team, following her transfer to Muskegon High School.

What they discovered is that Winston's new team has a roster with a lot of really good players who are determined to go a long way this season.

Winston is great, but she's the icing on an already very good cake.

As a freshman and sophomore, Winston teamed with Michigan Miss Basketball Jordan Walker to give the Mona Shores girls basketball team one of the best backcourts in the state. The two high-scoring guards led the Sailors to a pair of O-K Black championships and a 40-8 record over two seasons.

But Winston transferred to Muskegon before the start of her junior year. She had to sit out the first eight games of the 2017-18 season due to state transfer rules.

Muskegon rolled to a 6-2 record in her absence, with its only losses coming against 2017 state runner-up East Kentwood and East Grand Rapids.

Then Winston finally became eligible, and the Big Reds literally exploded, going 3-0 and averaging an insane 73 points in her first three games in the lineup.

A good example of their lethal attack came in a non-conference game against a good Kent City squad, in Winston's first game of the season.

The Big Reds won 92-50, and sent a strong message to future opponents by showing off their big guns.

Senior guard Daz'sha Day, who has led the Big Reds in scoring all season, totaled 26 points. Winston finished with 25 points while Da'Shonna Day added 18.

Those results confirmed what Muskegon Coach Rodney Walker had suspected all fall - he would have a very special combination once Winston was able to join his team.

"Before the season started we knew we'd be a good team overall, and I think we proved that," said Walker, whose team is currently 12-2 on the season. "By adding her we knew it would put us over the top as a championship level team in the state,



Muskegon Coach Rodney Walker, flanked by Daz'sha Day (left) and Alyza Winston. Photo/Jason Goorman

because of her ability to score and play defense, which is ridiculous. Her ability to get down the floor and get layups gives us an edge."

The hot start has Winston brimming with new excitement and confidence, after spending about six frustrating weeks watching her new teammates from the sidelines.

"I put in a lot of work these past months, knowing the season was coming up," said Winston, who is currently ranked No. 12 nationally at the point guard position in the 2019 ESPN college recruiting class. "I think that I'm going to have my best season yet this year."

A balanced lineup

The Big Reds' first big game following Winston's return was their visit to Mona Shores.

The game was important. Muskegon came in with a 5-0 record in the O-K Black Conference, while Mona Shores, which has ruled the league for several years, was 4-1.

The Big Reds were also looking for a measure of revenge, after losing by only one point to Mona Shores in last year's district tournament semifinals, following a controversial foul call in the final seconds.

Area fans were certainly interested. While the usual pattern at area high schools is for the crowd to file in during the girls' varsity game, to be on time for the boys' game, this was different.

Hundreds of fans showed up and were seated and excited for the early girls game, and everyone knew why.

Winston, for her part, tried to downplay her return to her former school.

"I'm just staying calm," Winston, who averaged 17.4 points per game for Mona Shores last season. "It's just another game.

"A lot of people think it'll be a big deal. But it's a big game and we're rivals. So I'm just staying humble and I'm going to play my heart out.

"Whatever may be the outcome, will be the outcome."

But as often happens with hyped games, the outcome was not what everyone expected.

Muskegon won 50-39, and Winston was productive, scoring a team-high 16 points before fouling out late in the fourth quar-



Winston in her return to Mona Shores. Photo/Tim Reilly



Diynasti Dowell snags a rebound. Photo/Tim Reilly

ter. But she did not carry her team, as a lot of people expected.

The two teams played a sloppy first half and Muskegon clung to a one-point lead at the break. Then junior guard Diynasti Dowell, who came into the game averaging seven points per game, took control.

She scored 15 points, including 14 in the critical second half, to lead the Big Reds to an important victory.

She started driving the lane, drawing fouls and converted five of six free throws. She also knocked down a big 3-pointer and hit another bucket.

Dowell totaled 10 points in the third, allowing the Big Reds to outscore the Sailors 16-7 and take a decisive lead heading into the fourth quarter.

"Our guards were having trouble getting to the basket and attacking, and they weren't calling the fouls, so they said we had to work inside, and I had to step up my game and work in the post," Dowell said.

After the game, Coach Walker said Dowell is just one example of a gifted player who is willing to do whatever it takes on any given night to win, even when her assignment does not involve scoring a lot of points.

"She's been doing some other things for us this season, and

sacrificing her game so we can get the wins," Walker said. "But tonight she really stepped up offensively for us."

Lofty ambitions

Team balance was also evident for the Big Reds in their next game, a non-conference showdown with Grand Haven, in a matchup of perhaps the two best girls teams in the area.

The Big Reds won 39-37. Winston led Muskegon with 13 points, Daz'sha Day added 12 while Dowell had 10.

Some might have wondered if the chemistry on a 6-2 team may have been upset by Winston's arrival at midseason. But the points seem to be spread around and everybody is contributing, which is a very good sign for the Big Reds.

Walker said everyone on the team has accepted their role.

At the same time, Walker is very happy to have one of the best go-to scorers in the state, for those moments when crucial points are needed in a hurry.

"When needed, she (Winston) will be in a position to get us over the top in the many tough games coming up," he said.

With their roster finally set, Walker and the Big Reds are not shy about talking about their ultimate goal - a Class A state championship.

That's a very lofty ambition for a team that finished 12-10 a year ago, but the Big Reds are convinced they can do it.

The state championship goal was actually set by the players last summer. Walker says it's the job of the coaching staff to push them and help them attain the goal they identified.

"That was their goal," Walker said. "I always set high expectations, but it was their goal. I have to make sure our practice plans are extremely tough to help them reach their goal.

"I think we have a lot of work to do in order to be considered a contender. I think we're solid defensively, but we still have work to do offensively. If you're a player averaging 15 or 16 points a night, we're expecting you to hit that average every night. There shouldn't be dropoffs.

"On offense we have to be more disciplined and understand exactly what we need to do. We still have a few weeks (before the state tournament) to work on those things.

"We're getting there. If we get to that point, we could make a real solid run."

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GENE YOUNG: 1941-2018

The Muskegon area sports community lost a giant figure when longtime broadcaster and Hall of Fame president Gene Young passed away in January

By Jason Goorman
LocalSportsJournal.com

High school sports are a very big deal to a lot of people in the Muskegon area.

Gene Young had a lot to do with that.

Young, a former standout athlete at Muskegon Heights High School, spent years broadcasting high school football and basketball games for local radio stations.

He also played a pivotal role in the development of the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame, which honors and records the achievements of hundreds of local athletes who played on area fields, courts and rinks over the decades.

Young was known to thousands as a loyal supporter and promoter of area athletes and teams, a familiar radio voice who brought the games into our living rooms, and a selfless friend and volunteer.

That's why so many people were saddened to hear that Young, 76, passed away on Jan. 2 following a short illness.



Gene Young and longtime radio partner Jim Moyes.

"Gene Young was a giant, literally and figuratively," said Tom Kendra, a former Muskegon Chronicle sports editor who worked with Young on the Hall of Fame board and in the radio broadcast booth.

"He had an impact in so many areas. Just his unselfishness. He was always looking for whatever he could do to help people out. He was one of the biggest influences in my life. It's a sad day for Muskegon."

Young was born in 1941 in Davenport, Iowa and moved to Muskegon Heights with his family at a young age.

He graduated from Muskegon Heights High School in 1959, after excelling in varsity basketball and baseball.

The tall center played basketball as a freshman at Central Michigan University, then transferred to Otero Junior College and finally Weber State University, where he played for future NBA coaching legend Dick Motta.



Young returned to the Muskegon area after college to begin his career as an educator. He taught and coached in the Reeths-Puffer school district before becoming the community education director at Fruitport Community Schools.

Young was probably best known to the public through his career as a color commentator on local high school sports radio broadcasts.

He had a longtime partnership in the radio booth with friend and colleague Jim Moyes, from 1978 until Moyes' retirement in 2010.

Young continued to broadcast games with Clear Channel Radio through the fall of 2017, when he was able to overcome his health concerns and cover four games.

Moyes recalls the late 1960s, when he was working as a high school sports broadcaster in Traverse City, and had to travel to Muskegon for a boys basketball district championship game.

He invited Young to call the game with him, and later asked him to join him for basketball broadcasts on a full-time basis, when Moyes returned to his native Muskegon in the 1970s.

Young also became Moyes' partner for high school football broadcasts in the 1980s.

"Gene had a great passion for high school sports and truly loved his work," Moyes said. "He was constantly assisting our local athletes.

"I will always cherish the hundreds of games we called in the booth, and the thousands of miles we spent traveling to these contests. Gene could talk non-stop all the way to and fro."

Perhaps Young's greatest professional legacy will be his contributions as the longtime president of the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame board.

He took over the position in 1994, following the death of the Hall's original president, Dick Hedges. One of the highlights on the area sports calendar every year is the Hall of Fame's induction banquet in the spring.

"There's nothing better than saying you're a Hall of Famer," Kendra said. "Gene always looked forward to calling people to tell them they would be inducted.

"He was the heart and soul of the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame, and it's going to be a big challenge for all of us to move forward, but it's what he wants us to do."



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