

Nottingham High honors Hall of Fame class

October 2, 2007

By Rob Anthes

When Nottingham High School inducts its second Hall of Fame class on Oct. 12, Northstar supporters will gather to honor championship teams, legendary coaches and former All-State athletes.

But, in actuality, the induction just cements what those supporters already knew: in its 26 years, Nottingham has produced plenty of fine athletes that could serve as models for the Northstars of today.

At an Oct. 12 dinner at Angeloni's on Route 33, 10 individuals — Ronald Nicklow, Roger Hendler, Charlie Iacono, Bob Fitzsimmons, Michael Hinton, Jessica (Gonzalez) Pandolfini, Lori Lubieski, Julie LoPrinzi, Brian Tripp and Barbi Lubieski-Kohut — and the 1990 state champion golf team will officially join the Nottingham High School Hall of Fame. While many of the inductees relish the chance to reminisce about high school and become a permanent part of Nottingham's fabric, most loved the fact they would be role models for athletes that pass through the school's halls and see the Hall of Fame.

"It establishes a tradition and gives the students there something to strive for," said Lori Lubieski, a 1988 graduate, Hall of Fame inductee and one of the best players in Northstar softball history. "It gives them something to aspire to."

The honor has added meaning to Lubieski. She joins her sister Barbi, also one of the best ever to play softball for Nottingham, in this year's class. Last year, their 1987 state champion softball team was honored.

Lubieski, now an assistant principal at Lenape Valley Regional High School in Stanhope, said teachers she encountered at Nottingham inspired her to become an educator. She hopes she can do the same at Lenape Valley and at Nottingham.

"I really felt like Nottingham was home," Lubieski said. "It's nice to come back home."

Charlie Iacono feels the same way. But he's enjoying Hamilton again for an entirely different reason.

For the past three months, the 2002 Nottingham graduate has been playing professional baseball in Arizona with the Arizona League affiliate of the Milwaukee Brewers. While Iacono felt disappointed he didn't advance beyond the Rookie league, he said he's happy to be back in Hamilton and will enjoy using the Hall of Fame ceremony as a means to catch up with people he hasn't seen in a while.

Iacono will be the youngest person ever inducted into the Hall of Fame, as potential honorees must be at least five years removed from graduation to be inducted.

"Obviously, it's fairly new," Iacono said. "There's quite a bit of people that deserve to be in there so it's quite the honor to get in the second time, in my first year of eligibility."

Jessica Pandolfini may be the inductee most affected by the induction, as the only inductee from this year currently working at Nottingham. The former Jessica Gonzalez coaches boys' soccer and teaches health and physical education.

She earned first team all-conference honors for soccer each of her four years at Nottingham and, in her senior year, became a first team All-American. She earned college All-American honors in 1996, her sophomore year at the College of New Jersey.

In 1996, she sustained head injuries in a car accident that limited her soccer career. She continued to play for a bit, including a stint with the semi-professional New Jersey Wildcats, but health concerns eventually pushed her to the sideline. She started a soccer clinic in 2004 and has coached since 2002. While the athletes she coaches see her talent every day, she feels now, by seeing her name in the Hall of the Fame, they can understand how much soccer meant and still means to her.

"I just have so much love for the game," Pandolfini said. "I want the kids to see that."

Pandolfini said her induction is an emotional honor. While all the other honors in her career certainly recognized her talents and accomplishments, Pandolfini said this means the most because it comes from her community and the people she cares about.

And now generations of Nottingham students — maybe even Pandolfini's child (she's three-months pregnant) — can see her name and the name of the other inductees in the Hall of Fame.

"It was such a great honor," she said. "It was great to be first team All-American and a high school All-American. It was cool to meet Mia Hamm. But this is the coolest thing. I'm in the Hall of Fame. No one will forget my name."