

Sutton, Terlecki highlight NHS Hall of Fame class

By Rich Fisher

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When Nottingham High School's varsity athletic program came into existence in 1982, those early Northstar teams were everyone's doormat in the Colonial Valley Conference.

There were some exceptions, as the softball teams held their own early on and the wrestling teams had their share of highlights. After a few years, other squads began to win, or at least hold their own.

But the first truly magical year for Nottingham came in 1986-87.

That autumn, Jack Bell's boys' soccer team became the first squad in school history to win a sectional title when it captured the NJSIAA Central Jersey Group III title. In the spring, Elaine Pittaro's softball team achieved the ultimate by becoming the first Northstar unit to win an NJSIAA Group III state championship.

Members of each of those teams highlighted the third Nottingham Athletic High School Athletic Hall of Fame Class on Sept. 12, as softball pitcher Trisha Sutton (now Meyer) and wrestler/soccer player Russ Terlecki were two of the 10 inductees.

The two were on hand for the HOF dinner at Angeloni's in Hamilton, where 150 people turned out to honor the exploits of Sutton, Terlecki, David Thames, David Dumpel, Tara Pointon (now Wojciechowski), Darnill Brown, Melissa Foley, the 1990 softball team and coaches Peg Howell and Pete Leonard.

In a first-class event from start to finish, Terlecki and Sutton were the 'old timers' but both looked as if they could go out on the field today and perform at a top level.

"This is a huge honor," said Sutton, a teacher and soccer mom now living in Chesterfield. "To think of the thousands of people who have gone through the halls of Nottingham High School, and to be selected to this, it just blows me away."

"It's a wonderful honor," said Terlecki, now a successful movie producer based in New York City. "Anytime you get honored for anything, it's just nice. It's a good feeling. "Ron (Nicklow, former NHS wrestling coach) and I were just talking. We worked hard to be good and it's nice to get some recognition for it, even if it is 22 years later."

Sutton was not a major part of the 1987 softball team, as she did most of her pitching on the

freshman team that year. But she did go 2-1 on the senior-dominated varsity and was good enough to be added to the varsity roster for the state tournament. The hurler became an outright superstar over the next three years, winning 59 games and pitching Nottingham to the 1990 state championship. She still holds the school record for career wins (61) and strikeouts (490).

“When we went to the football game (prior to the banquet), I looked at the plaques and banners in the gym and two-thirds are softball,” she said. “Us old-timers must have done something right, because we’re still up on the wall. We’re just so proud we helped to build that foundation. “I didn’t think about it for a while, but when I got the call I was being inducted, I pulled out my scrapbook. Looking back and seeing everything and how much a part of your life it is, it blows me away at how lucky am I to have been a state champion my freshman year and my senior year.” Sutton has two boys – Shane and Brett – who play sports, and it’s a small wonder. Her husband Paul Meyer was a former standout for Steinert High’s soccer team and played on the Spartans last state champion in 1988. “It was neat to explain to our kids what kind of honor this is,” Sutton said. “And having them play sports, I appreciate even more what my parents did for me. All the driving around they had to do to get me to games.”

Terlecki and his wife Joanna are also parents of two – Emmi and Aiden – and split time between New York City and the Atlantic Highlands. The Terleckis’ kids have not reached sports age just yet, but Russ has been running around nonetheless. His production company, Wideye Films (www.wideyecreative.com), produced the entertaining thriller *The Alphabet Killert* last year, starring Eliza Dushku and Timothy Hutton. Terlecki’s latest project, *The Third Wave*, is a documentary on the volunteers who went to Thailand to aid the Tsunami victims. The film was presented by Sean Penn and Bono at the Cannes Film Festival last year and was the Festival’s Presidential Selection winner. Penn is still busy promoting the film and the two walked together down the red carpet at Cannes. As if that doesn’t keep him busy enough, Terlecki launched his own Tequila brand over the summer – Tequila Alma de Agave (www.almadeagave.com). Despite running in the fast lane with entertainment’s hot set, Terlecki was plain old Russ at the HOF dinner. “I’m always the same,” he said. “That stuff doesn’t affect me. I’ll always remember home. “Coming back here tonight is great. It brings back a lot of memories. I played for the West End Green Lighting and we won a couple of state championships. I played soccer since I was six years old.” He became more renowned as a wrestler but was a standout midfielder on that 1986 soccer team and was the Northstars leading scorer in 1987. “It was a great feeling winning that (sectional) championship,” he said. “It’s not a good feeling to lose (in the state semifinals), but it’s an amazing thing to go through that feeling with your teammates.” In wrestling, Terlecki won a national team title with Trenton State College. While in high school, his 84 career wins was a school record until last year. He won three district titles and was a three-time All-County pick.

When asked if he helped Nottingham turn the corner in athletics, Terlecki said he was just part of it all. “Everybody on all the teams helped,” he said. “Maybe with wrestling I was a little more

influential because I had a little more experience than some of the other guys. But Mercer was always a hotbed for soccer. All those guys had a part in it.”

As did all the girls on that 1987 softball team.

And for one glorious night, their efforts were celebrated with true class.