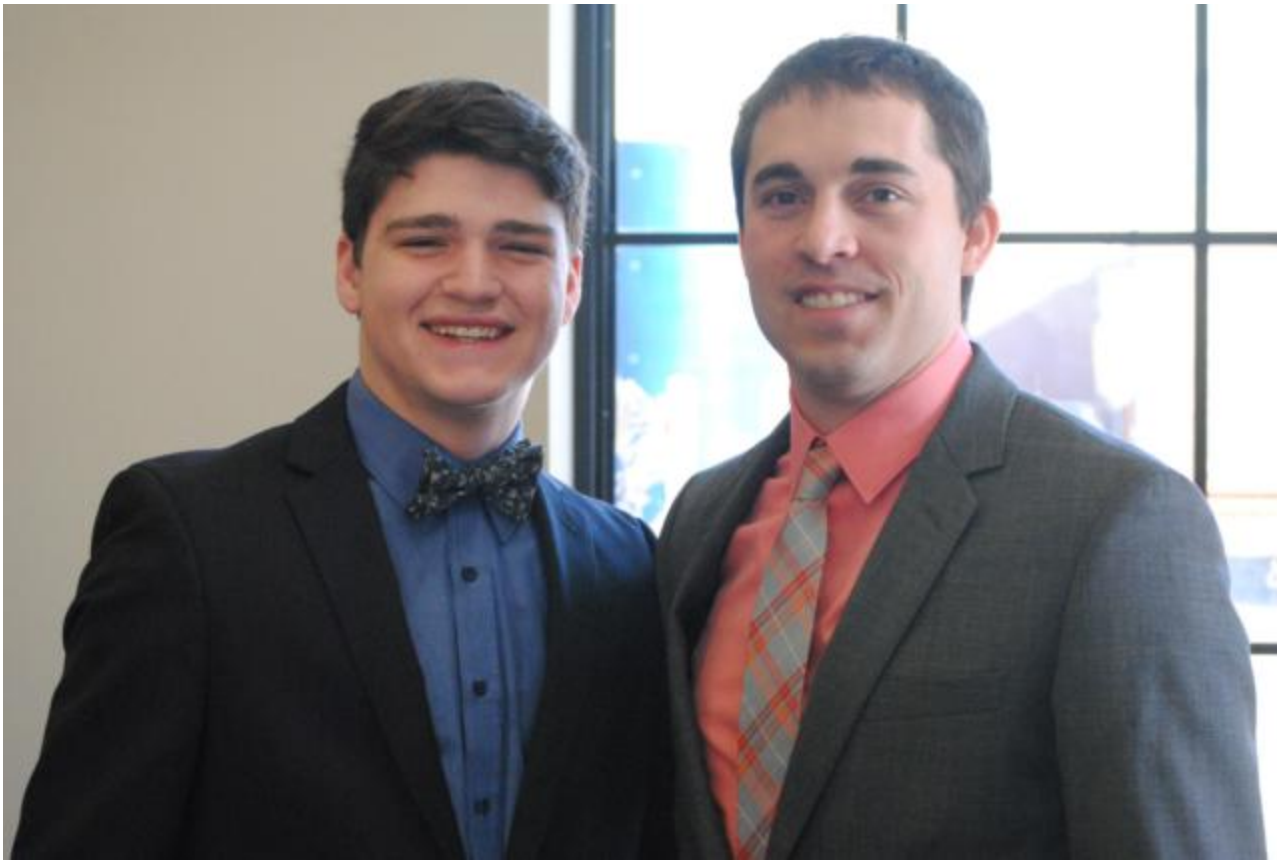


Granite City's long-standing athletic tradition, legendary coaches recognized with new video

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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GRANITE CITY – There is no doubt these days that the world of journalism has changed in ways no one could have foreseen. **Granite City High School's student newspaper, the Granite High World**, has gone from a printed newspaper distributed throughout the school most every week during the school year to an on-line outlet, complete with video and comments and examine the issues that face the student population at GCHS.

The High World is also aware of the role that GCHS has had in Granite City's 120-year history (since the city was incorporated in 1896) since it first opened as Granite City Community High School in the early 20th century.

Part of that history is the excellence of the athletic program at Granite City High School (including its' incarnations as Granite City High School South in the 1970s and early 1980s) and as GCCHS, a period that also included the now-legendary 1940 IHSA state basketball championship team.

Many great athletes have had the opportunity to be coached by many who themselves have become among the top coaches in the state of Illinois and the St. Louis region. As part of a High World project, a video was produced entitled “Legendary Coaches of Granite City,” which included interviews with long-time baseball coach **Babe Champion**, long-serving wrestling coach **Bill “Red” Schmitt** and **Gene Baker** who

came to Granite City in 1970s and coached 10 state championship soccer teams, including a still unequaled five-year run as state champions (in an one-class era) from 1976-80.

Schmitt coached the Warrior wrestlers from 1950-85, a period which included many state champion individual wrestlers and the 1965 IHSA co-championship in wrestling.

Thanks to a suggestion by **GCHS staff member Ginny Henson**, the media students put the video together. The approximately hour-long video was shown to a large group of people in Granite City at the Granite City Cinema building in downtown Granite Sunday morning. The showing attracted many athletes who had the opportunity to be coached by Champion, Baker and Schmitt, as well as many former staff members and a large contingent of alumni and current students, who gave the video a large ovation when it ended. Champion, Baker and Schmitt were also on hand for the premiere of the video.

“It was actually a staff member at Granite City High School named Ginny Henson, she is the one who approached us with the idea,” said **GCHS assistant boys soccer coach and High World adviser Andrew Crider**, who played soccer at GCHS during the Baker era.

The project itself was a demanding one, which led Crider to jokingly said “had we known then what we know now, I probably would have said no.”

However, the project became a very rewarding experience for the entire High World staff and students.

“It was such a daunting, difficult project, but I am so glad I said yes because it was fun and it was a really rewarding experience,” Crider said.

The timing of the video premiere became especially special thanks to the announcement the night before that Kevin Greene, who graduated from then-Granite City South in 1980 and played football, basketball and was on the track and field team, from 1976-80, had been named part of the eight-member Class of 2016 for the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.

“We're so happy to honor these men,” Crider said. “They've done so much for this community and this is a very small gesture that we could have done for them. They're humble men.”

“It was a little difficult coordinating it all,” said High World student Ben Klee, who did the research and composed the questions that were asked to the coaches as part of the project. “But I think it all turned out well.”

Considering the great athletic tradition of Granite City, Klee said “this is about as good as it gets. I mean, you've got Babe, Red and Gene all in the same movie, all in the same theater, that's crazy. I mean, Red Schmitt, one of the most winningest wrestling coaches in Illinois state history or with Gene, one of the greatest soccer coaches in Illinois state history, and Babe, he was a great coach but he was also known for what he did after he was done coaching, and they're all three great men.”

The story behind the project can be read at granitehighworld.com. The video accompanying the project will soon be posted on the site, and a DVD is available as well.