

Alton High School HOF Class of 2017 inducted into shrine

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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ALTON – Wednesday night was a very special one for a group of Alton High School graduates.

Those graduates made up the newest class of inductees into the AHS Athletic Hall of Fame; they were inducted into the shrine during a ceremony at halftime of the Redbirds' Tipoff Classic win over Ritenour at the Redbird Nest.

The class included Leon Huff (a 1968 graduate) and Ron Caldwell (a 1971 graduate) of boys basketball; Terry Winston (1971) of boys track and field; Ashley Cox Purkey (2003) of girls bowling; Joe Hook (1973), a long-time coach of softball and football, a long-time assistant athletic director and the founder of the HOF; the 1968 IHSA champion 880-yard relay team of Ron Ayers, Marvin Bock, Mike Yavorski and B.B. Gater; the 1965 IHSA champion mile relay team of Percy Clark, Phil Dourson, Jeff Bernard and Maurice Pittman; and the 1970 IHSA champion mile relay team of Lester “Bo” Scott, Bobby Rogers, Roger Bower and Milton Johnson.

Hook expressed surprise after learning he was being named to the AHS shrine he created. “I was really surprised when this happened,” Hook said. “I didn't expect this; I thought about 10 years down the road when they were hurting to get people in, I might get in,” he said with a laugh, “but I was really surprised.

“I don't know if I'm really worthy of being in the hall of fame, but I'm sure am proud and feel honored to be a part of it. I came to work every day and did my job; the hall of fame was something I was trying to get put together for a long time and finally go the OK to do it. It kind of took off and it's going pretty well.”

Cox was inducted into the shrine for her accomplishments as a member of the girls bowling team, which included two Top-10 finishes at the IHSA state bowling tournament, including a sixth-place finish in 2002 and a fourth-place finish in 2003, a finish that helped the Redbirds to a 10th-place team finish at the state tournament in Rockford before going on to bowl at Western Illinois and at Wichita State.

“There's a lot of athletes that have come through Alton High since this started, so it's a huge honor to be selected – especially to be selected as an individual, that's pretty cool.”

Cox's sister Whitney, who also bowled for the Redbirds, was a part of the inaugural Class of 2011; to be enshrined with her sister is a great honor for her. “We're the only two for bowling,” Ashley Cox said with a laugh. “My dad (brought Ashley to bowling) started coaching me when I was five; I've been bowling ever since.”

Cox is now on the Professional Women's Bowling Association tour, which runs from April-August each year with finals televised on CBS Sports Network. “They have the

tournaments on the weekends so you can still work full-time and also bowl on the weekends,” Cox, who now works as a propulsion engineer for Boeing's plant in north St. Louis County, said.

Clark's did not know about the Hall of Fame and the mile relay team's selection for the honor until teammate Maurice Pittman told me about it. “It's still a great feeling,” Clark said. “I didn't know anything about this until Maurice Pittman contacted me about three months ago and told me about it.

“The memories (of the season) are still fresh; we were undefeated all year.”

Clark enjoyed being a part of that team. “It was fun,” he said. “We had good training; we just worked out all the time – the coaching was excellent and it helped us out tremendously.”

Clark went into the Army following his graduation and ran track at Texas Southern University (in Houston) with (1968 Mexico City Olympic gold medalist) Jim Hines (who broke the 10-second barrier for the 100 meters; he later briefly played for the Miami Dolphins and Kansas City Chiefs); he later moved to San Bernadino, Calif., where he still lives today.

The AHS hall already has many athletic greats inducted as members, and considering the tradition of the Redbird athletic program, there's still many more to be enshrined. “There's still a lot of great people out there still to get in,” Hook said. “I think the biggest thing is that we can tell people to get a nomination form and nominate some people so we can start doing some research and get them in there; there's still a lot of hidden talent out there we haven't gotten in yet.”

