

WHERE ARE THEY NOW? AN UPDATE ON OUR NEENAH BASKETBALL ALUMNI

RON EINERSON – VARSITY HEAD COACH 1968–1993

When we first came here in 1968 as the new basketball coach, if you talk about pressure for a first game we played Menasha which was a big rival and the same night they dedicated the old Shattuck gym to Ole Jorgensen, former long-time coach in Neenah. The Shattuck gym was jammed to the rafters and of all the games I ever coached at Neenah this was the one I felt the most pressure. We only had two players back from the previous year – no starters – Tom Kopitzke the 6th man and Pat Hawley a sophomore guard. Any of those people who remember the old Shattuck gym will remember how loud it was. You could not hear the starting line ups being announced so we just sent out one player at a time not knowing if it was the right player. To make a long story short, we went on to tie for the league championship and eventually went to the state tournament. Nobody expected a lot of things from that team so we became the Cinderella of the state. We lost to Beloit by one point in a double overtime. The game became known as if not the greatest, certainly the most memorable state tournament final thanks in a large part to Lamont Weaver's 'shot heard round the world.' When we returned from Madison, cars were parked on the road almost to Oshkosh to welcome back the team. There were people lining the street all the way back to the High School and the gym was completely filled with people at the Welcome Back ceremony. From that point on we went to the state tournament 9 times in the next 10 years, losing another heart-breaking game in 1970 in a last seconds shot by Appleton West – finally going on to win two state championships in 1975 and 1978. These created great memories. And what do I miss the most? It was the thrill of the competition and I loved walking on the floor with the band playing the school song and the fieldhouse filled to the rafters for our games. So I'd like to say thank you fans, students, parents, all the great players we had and the coaches who made it special and a privilege and honor to coach the Neenah Rockets for 25 years. So to the future teams, play with determination and heart and be proud of the fact that you will always be a Neenah Rocket -- just as I am.



I feel very blessed to have coached with very talented basketball coaches in Neenah as well as in Kenosha. At Neenah High School: Head Coach Doug Martin and Head Coach Ron Einerson; assistants Rich Paske, Tom Berven, and Ron Fedenko. By working together and learning from all of these coaches, my teams were able to grow, achieve, and enjoy the efforts of their work. Over all my years coaching, I was very blessed to have talented young players on my teams who worked very hard developing their basketball skills. Every team was fun and a pleasure to coach.

Summary of Don Flunker's Neenah teams:

Conant Frosh: 6 years....39-33 record...Two losing seasons (1965/66 – 70/71)

Shattuck Frosh: 7 years....61-23 record...One losing season (1973/74 – 80/81)

Neenah Jr Varsity: 9 years...134-37 record...One losing season... 4 JV Champs (1981 – 1990)

Neenah Totals: 22 years...234-93 record

After 34 years of teaching, 5 years of teaching mathematics in the Kenosha Public Schools, and another 29 years teaching mathematics in the Neenah Joint School District, Coach Flunker retired in 1993. He was twice named the Neenah Jr High School Teacher of the year in 1980 and 1988. He received a Wisconsin Basketball Coaches Award in 1985 and 1987 and was also awarded the Red Smith Banquet Recognition Award in 1991.



CLASS OF 1922 – OLE JORGENSEN

In his senior yearbook, class of 1922 graduate Ole Jorgensen wrote, "I am a scrapper through and through, Good in sports and studies too."

Those words accurately self-describe a man who dedicated his life to Neenah and made an immeasurable impact on the School District and countless Neenah students. Jorgensen taught physical education and coached football, basketball and track and field in Neenah for 43 years until his retirement in 1969. Incredibly, in those 43 years, Jorgensen never missed a game or one of his over 3,000 practices. He was the supervisor of the physical education department for 25 years. Born in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1904, his family moved to Neenah in 1908.



DON FLUNKER – FRESHMAN AND JV NEENAH BASKETBALL COACH 1965 – 1990

My coaching career began in 1959 as a boys Frosh coach in Kenosha, Wisconsin. I started coaching in Neenah in 1965 at Conant Jr High as the 9th grade boys' BB coach and later as the Neenah White Frosh BB coach at Shattuck. When Tom Berven retired from coaching JV basketball in 1981, I became the JV Boys Basketball coach and retired from coaching in the spring of 1990.

Jorgensen was an outstanding athlete himself, winning the state high jump title and also competing in football and basketball in high school. He attended the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and won a conference title in the

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high jump while serving as captain of the basketball team. Jorgensen was inducted into the UW-La Crosse Wall of Fame in 1982.

After one year of teaching in Appleton, Jorgensen returned to Neenah in 1926 and assumed duties as basketball coach. He guided the Rockets to 10 state tournament appearances, including the 1930 WIAA state championship, and 12 conference titles. The team also finished as state runner-up in 1939.

Jorgensen totaled a 509-258 basketball coaching record and was a charter member of the Wisconsin Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Fame. His 509 wins were among the most in state history when he retired and still ranks 24th all time. He served as president of the state coaches association and was a member of the WIAA rules advisory board. As director of athletics, Jorgensen started the golf and cross country programs in Neenah.

The gymnasium at Shattuck Middle School was named in his honor on Nov. 19, 1968. Jorgensen lived on Reed Street directly across from Shattuck and remained a fixture at Neenah events until his death in 1988 at age 84. His wife, Edith, taught physical education part time in Neenah.

CLASS OF 1942 – VERN WOLLERMAN

1942 Neenah graduate Vern Wollerman made it his mission to keep the people of Neenah safe and make sure the kids in Neenah had plenty of opportunities.

A 40-year veteran of the Neenah Police department, Wollerman was very active in the community as the founder of several youth organizations and a director of many others.

Wollerman was a 1942 graduate of Neenah High School and, as a senior, led the Rockets in scoring at the WIAA state basketball tournament where they lost to eventual state champion Shorewood in the semifinals, finishing with a 17-3 record. He also participated in football, track and field and student council in high school.

Wollerman served as a corporal in the U.S. Marine Corps in the South Pacific during World War II. He returned home and began studying to become a pipefitter. While playing recreational basketball on a Neenah Police team in 1946, the assistant police chief urged him to become an officer himself and he decided to give it a try. He gradually rose through the ranks of the police department, becoming chief in 1973 until his retirement in 1986.

"Bunda," as he was well-known, started Neenah Little League baseball and was the founder and director of YouthGo. He was a high school official for 37 years and officiated several Catholic state basketball tournaments. Wollerman was the president of the Catholic Boys Conference for 20 years and commissioner of the Fox Valley Catholic Conference for 15 years. He also coached all levels of youth sports, including baseball, basketball, football and softball.



He was on the Board of Directors for the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association, Appleton Foxes, St. Mary Central High School, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and the Neenah-Menasha YWCA. He also was elected to three terms on the Winnebago County Board and served on the Neenah Park and Recreation Commission. He was a member of the Knights of Columbus, Elks Lodge and St. Margaret Mary church and received many awards for his community service activities.

Wollerman and his wife, Rose Marie, were married 45 years before his passing in 1992 at age 68. Rose Marie, who was also active in many community organizations, died in 2018. They had four sons: David, Jim, Tom and Dan; and two daughters: Kathy and Patty.

CLASS OF 1952 – DICK JORGENSEN

Beginning with his days at Neenah High School, it was clear that class of 1952 graduate Dick Jorgensen was destined to be a great leader.

Jorgensen was heavily involved in high school activities, participating in four sports and serving as senior class president, a student council member and Badger Boys' State delegate.

The son of legendary Neenah coach Ole Jorgensen, he was a WIAA state champion in doubles tennis with Dick Rine during his senior season and also placed runner-up at state track and field in the pole vault. Jorgensen quarterbacked the football team and helped the basketball team to a state tournament appearance, earning a spot on the all-state tournament team as the Rockets lost in the consolation finals. He earned a basketball scholarship to the University of Wisconsin-Madison and captained the Badgers' 1956 squad. Following college, Jorgensen served two years in the United States Navy. He then became involved in officiating and quickly emerged as a leader in that field as well. Jorgensen moved up the ranks quickly. He officiated five years of high school and small college football and was named a National Football League line judge in 1968. After three seasons, he was promoted to referee for his crew.

Jorgensen officiated 12 NFL playoff games, including four conference championship games. His highlight was serving as the referee for Super Bowl XXIV in 1990 between the San Francisco 49ers and Denver Broncos in New Orleans.

Jorgensen met his wife, Adlon, while serving in the Navy in Hawaii. Adlon was taking a class in Hawaii at the time and the two relocated to her hometown of Champaign, Ill. where both were active community members. Jorgensen served as president of Marine Bank for 13 years, while Adlon worked as a longtime administrator at the University of Illinois. Both were regular community volunteers.

Following the 1990 Super Bowl, Jorgensen contracted a rare blood disorder and died on October 10, 1990 at the age of 56. For the 1990 season, all NFL officials wore black armbands with Jorgensen's number 60 on them in his memory.



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CLASS OF 1972 – DENE STORCH

Class of 1972 graduate Dene Storch was a successful three-sport athlete during his days at Neenah, representing the Rockets in football, basketball, and baseball. During the 1972 basketball campaign, the 5'11" senior guard averaged 13.2 points per game, while shooting 54% from the field, 81.3% from the foul line, and averaging 5.6 assists per game. These numbers earned Dene 1st team all FVA recognition. The Rockets finished 10-2 (2nd place) in the FVA that season while advancing all the way to the WIAA state finals before falling short to Milwaukee Hamilton 58-52.



The Rockets were unable to sustain a 39-28 lead late in the third quarter during the championship bout. Neenah would finish the 1971-72 campaign with an overall record of 23-3.

Dene's lasting memory of Neenah basketball was the 1969 WIAA state title game against Beloit. The Rockets battled for four quarters and two overtimes before falling to Beloit 80-79. Even though he was only a freshman in high school at the time, he remembered watching Lamont Weaver's famous half court 'shot heard 'round the world' at the end of regulation which put the game into overtime. Still today, Dene is very appreciative of the opportunity to play basketball for Coach Einerson in the early 1970's. The Rockets played in three state title games during Dene's four years in high school, and he remembers a true "Neenah with Pride" feeling in representing the Rockets. Dene knew that other schools were envious of the Neenah basketball program.

The 1972 state final in basketball wasn't Dene's only experience in WIAA tournament competition. Dene was the starting pitcher in the 1972 WIAA baseball state title game. The Rockets defeated Madison West 10-0 for their only state baseball title in school history. Dene's dominance on the mound was vital for the Rockets, as he was also the starting pitcher in the state quarterfinal victory over Antigo. Amazingly, Neenah only allowed one run (unearned) in three state tournament games in 1972. Only Eau Claire in 1958 has ever allowed less than one run in a three-game state baseball tournament.

After high school graduation, Dene played one year of college basketball at UW-Oshkosh where he roomed with former Milwaukee Brewer Jim Gantner. Dene still resides in Neenah today and works for Green Bay Packaging in Green Bay. He has been married to his wife Jeanne for 36 years. Together, they have three children and seven grandchildren. Dene encourages today's student athletes to "relish the moment, because 50 years goes by so fast." He emphasized that playing sports in Neenah is a privilege, so enjoy the opportunity you have to represent Neenah!

CLASS OF 1982 – DR. OMAR ATASSI

Class of 1982 graduate Dr. Omar Atassi is the perfect example of a true student-athlete.

An all-around three-sport athlete in high school, Atassi also excelled in the classroom and has gone on to become a well-respected local physician and community member.

Atassi participated in soccer, basketball and tennis in high school under three Neenah Joint School District Hall of Fame coaches in Harry Kelderman, Ron Einerson and Tom Berven, respectively. He was a two-time captain in soccer and earned Most Valuable Player honors in 1981. He was a starting guard in basketball and earned academic all-state honors as a senior. In tennis, Atassi was a conference champion and teamed with Toby Fuller as a state runner-up in doubles in 1981.

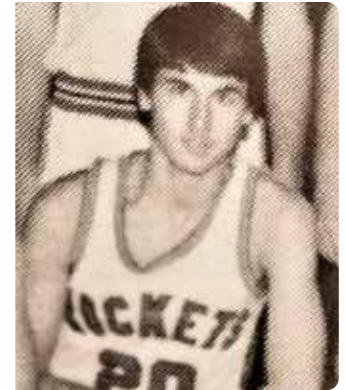
Atassi was a Badger Boys State delegate and graduated from Neenah High School in 1982. He attended Duke University and earned his medical doctorate from Loyola University in Chicago in 1990. He served as a general surgery intern and urology resident at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Mich. until 1996.

Atassi then returned to the Fox Valley Area and has remained in his hometown ever since, working with several different hospitals and clinics. He currently is a urologist with the Wisconsin Institute of Urology.

Atassi has served on numerous community boards, including the Theda Clark Center Foundation, Appleton Medical Center, First National Bank-Fox Valley and First Menasha Bancshares. He was director of the Community Foundation of the Fox Valley in 2014 and served as President of Urology Associates of Wisconsin.

In 2001, Fox Valley Magazine named him the best urologist in the Fox Valley. He specializes in treatment of urinary cancers, diseases of the prostate and kidney stones.

Atassi and his wife, Leah, reside in Neenah. Their son, Jackson, attends Purdue University.



CLASS OF 1992 – DENNIS RUEDINGER

Neenah class of 1992 graduate Dennis Ruedinger was a dominant basketball player in his high school and college career. He was an all-conference FVA selection both as a junior (honorable mention) and senior (first team) and was also all-state (honorable mention) his senior year while averaging 21.8 points per game for the Rockets. Dennis went on to have a stellar collegiate career at UW-Oshkosh where



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he played on a Titans team that qualified for the NCAA tournament during his junior and senior seasons. Dennis was a first team All-American at UW-Oshkosh in 1996 and finished his career among their top five all-time scoring leaders with 1595 career points. In 2009, Dennis was inducted into the UW-Oshkosh Hall of Fame.

Dennis currently resides in Oshkosh. He has a son Preston who is a freshman at Valparaiso University and a member of their basketball team, and a daughter Delaney who is a freshman at Oshkosh Lourdes Academy. Dennis has been a successful high school basketball coach at Oshkosh Lourdes Academy. In 2021 he led the school to a WIAA state championship joining Ole Jorgensen as the only Neenah alums to coach teams to a WIAA state basketball title. This meant a lot to Dennis since his son (Preston) was a senior on the team and former Neenah boys' basketball head coach Tim Hopfensperger was an assistant on his staff at Lourdes. Dennis said "being able to reconnect with Tim was so important to me since Tim was a great mentor to me as a student athlete."

Dennis has a few lasting memories of playing for the Rockets. He remembers defeating Fond du Lac in February of 1992 in Fond du Lac by a score of 62-61. Dennis stated, "that victory brought great joy to Coach Einerson." Dennis also recalled a season opening overtime victory over eventual state champion Madison West 76-75. Dennis, being the humble person he is, didn't mention that he tied the school's single game scoring mark that night with 38 points (Max Klesmit since eclipsed this mark in 2019). Dennis remembers what he enjoyed was wanting to win badly for someone else. "Neenah basketball is much bigger than just you, it represents the entire community." Dennis had a unique perspective on that subject since he moved to Neenah in 8th grade leaving one basketball crazy community (Janesville Craig) for another.

Dennis stated that "Coach Einerson thought that the basketball court was an extension of the classroom." Among the many things Dennis learned playing in Neenah was the importance of teamwork and motivation, and representing something much bigger than yourself. "How fun it is to enjoy something bigger than you?" Dennis learned playing for Coach Einerson that making those around you better is the most important part of being successful. "What can you do to improve your teammates?"

Dennis encourages today's student athletes to understand that what you are a part of is something really special. It becomes your identity, and you are an extension of

everyone who has come before you to play at Neenah. Dennis understands that Neenah basketball means a lot to many people. "When you leave, you leave a small part of you with that program." Lastly, for as much as basketball plays a role in our lives, Dennis also wanted to remind today's athletes that basketball is only a small piece of your life.

CLASS OF 2002 – PAT MCCARTHY

A message from class of 2002 graduate, Pat McCarthy:

Hello, person reading this – I'm Pat McCarthy. If I know you – it's probably been too long, I hope you're doing well! If I don't know you – thanks for reading and I hope you're doing well, too!

I grew up in Neenah and played basketball, among other things (football, wrestling, and baseball), quite a while ago. Growing up I just wanted to be a Neenah Rocket. My dad was the wrestling coach, so we spent a lot of time around the high school – there's not too many specific memories, the immense caring and kindness we were afforded running around.

I wish I had something enlightening to share, but I'm not sure I do. So I'll just write and let you decide. Be really lucky? Or how about this: 'Luck plays an inordinate role in all of our lives.' I don't know if I was aware how fortunate I was growing up. If you can, thank your parents – I'm partial, but I think my parents are the best (Thanks Mom & Dad!) – they didn't particularly care what I did growing up as long as it was something that wouldn't lead to trouble. My brother and sister are wonderful humans, and while I'm sure we made it difficult for my folks at times, overall I think we're doing alright. I miss living in the same house as all of them. So it goes.

Other family members, friends, teammates, coaches, teachers – thank you – I wish I could list everyone's name, but that would get lengthy, and I'd probably forget someone – and then I'd feel bad. Thank you all for your kindness and friendship. I've been luckier than anyone has any right to be.

Anyway, I played forward on the freshman basketball team (I think I stopped growing up in about 7th grade) – and after the freshman season ended, I practiced with the JV team as a back-up point guard. One practice we scrimmaged the Varsity team, and Sam Oatman didn't let me cross half court. It was not fun! I'm not sure there is a through line, but I knew I had to get better. I lived pretty close to Aaron Shaw – he was a couple years older and could drive and was willing to bring me with him to a lot of lifting, running, and football/basketball stuff during the summer. During my sophomore year Pete Rickman tore up his knee and I got moved up from JV to Varsity and was the 6th man and played power forward. We beat Fondy, and went to State. And then I rolled my ankle the day before we went to Madison, and I didn't play very much. Is there a lesson? I don't know. Life is weird and luck makes up a lot, both good and bad. But if you're prepared and show up sometimes good things happen. (Sometimes you lose to Fondy in the sectional finals, which is how my high



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school basketball career ended.)

After I graduated from NHS, I went to the University of Minnesota, graduated in Sport Management, and played football. Then I played and coached football in France and Sweden, and coached at Neenah, UW-Oshkosh, Southwest Minnesota State - a graduate degree in Educational Leadership here too (Minn.), Culver-Stockton (Mo.), Kuwait (yep, the country - for 3 months), and Presentation College (S.D.). Whenever anyone asks me where I'm from the answer is always the same, "Neenah, Wisconsin." Coaching probably instilled the biggest awareness of luck. When you think you're better than the other team, you want to minimize luck. When you think you're not, you want to maximize luck. Things don't always turn out like you think. And luck is difficult to control. Now I live in Minneapolis with my wife, Lisa Trachsel, and our pandemic baby, Kian. We like to travel, experiment in the kitchen, watch/follow sports, read, and enjoy the outdoors with family and friends. I also recently took up the Irish sport of hurling! And for my day job, I work with Kim Williams (played basketball with him at Neenah) at UnitedHealthcare, he told me to apply for the job - so like I said before, I've been pretty lucky.

I'd like to leave you with some words from Kurt Vonnegut: "I urge you to please notice when you are happy, and exclaim or murmur or think at some point, 'If this isn't nice, I don't know what is.'"

Hope to see you soon. Take care of yourself and others. Neenah With Pride.

CLASS OF 2012 – JORDAN ENTWISLE

"Growing up as a Neenah Rocket basketball player, I quickly learned and experienced what it meant to be part of something bigger than yourself," said Neenah class of 2012 graduate, Jordan Entwisle. "It started with countless hours in the gym for summer camps, Hoops Club tournaments, and games at Ron Einerson Fieldhouse. I'll never forget when I was in grade school, and my family stayed hours after Friday night basketball games for me and my friends to imagine we were Neenah Rockets in Ron Einerson Fieldhouse. I am especially fortunate to have my family, teammates and coaches that helped me along the way to fulfill that dream of a young 3rd grader."



After high school, Entwisle attended the University of Wisconsin and continued to follow the program closely as his younger brother, Trevor, forged his own path as part of the Rocket family. During college, Entwisle carried on playing competitive basketball with the club basketball team at Madison. "Club basketball brought me back to the simple love of the game. A love I learned playing in the Neenah Hoops Club program." Jordan also met his fiancé, Sloan, as he was finishing his undergraduate degree and she was in law school. Following college, where he earned his degree in Engineering Mechanics and Astronautics, Entwisle accepted

a job as a Sales Engineer with Trane, a sustainable leader in air conditioning solutions. Jordan and Sloan now live in Minneapolis, MN, with their two golden retrievers, Fitz and Willa.

Said Entwisle, "You'll typically find us taking the dogs for a walk sporting our Badger and Rocket Red. I am forever grateful to be part of the Neenah Basketball community. Go Rockets!"

CLASS OF 2012 – LOGAN HOVIE

A middle-school B-teamer and freshmen team reserve, class of 2012 graduate Logan Hovie never expected that he'd end up playing varsity basketball for the Rockets. "I loved going to Neenah basketball camps and games—and I even kept my own stats on the game-day program—but I was a 5'7", 125-pound freshman with a turnover problem and range out to 15-feet." But he kept working, and in his words,



"thanks to a 10-inch growth spurt my sophomore year, I became a 6'5", 165-pounder with a turnover problem and a penchant for back-ironing dunks. Thankfully, Coach Kellett, Bork, Pronschinske, and Shaw could work with that"

"There are few things I remember more fondly than open gyms" said Hovie. "I loved playing hoops with the guys. I was always excited when I got a text from Coach Kellett saying that he needed some guys to scrimmage against his AAU team, or from Coach Bork saying that he'd be opening up Conant if I wanted to get some shots up, or from Coach Pronschinske saying that the old guys would be playing at 6 a.m., or from a friend, who heard from a friend, that there'd be pick-up at a church at 10 p.m. on a Saturday."

After high school, Hovie attended Macalester College, where he was a member of the Track & Field team. Competing in the high jump, Hovie tallied three Division III All-American honors and was awarded the NCAA Postgraduate Scholarship.

After spending a year working in Minneapolis Public Schools, Hovie attended Boston College Law School, where he graduated magna cum laude and served on the executive board of the Law Review. He is currently a law clerk for United States District Court Judge Matthew Brann. After the completion of his one-year term working for the Judge next September, he will return to the litigation and enforcement practice group of the law firm, Ropes & Gray.

Hovie currently resides in State College, Pennsylvania with his fiancé. A loyal Post-Crescent subscriber and—all these years later—still an occasional wissports.net visitor, Hovie continues to keep tabs on the Rockets' success.