
'Jeep' Walker died; Kingsway connection to Olympics | Bob Shryock



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Joseph T. "Jeep" Walker, a Woodbury Heights native, long-time Pitman resident and member of Woodbury High School's legendary Class of 1953, died recently at his retirement home in Ocala, Fla.

Jeep, class president and dynamic athlete, is remembered as "one of my heroes" by classmate Fred Davis, who calls him "one of the hardest hitting defensive backs in WHS history."

Walker excelled in football and baseball for the Thundering Herd and also played one year of varsity basketball. The WHS Class of 1953 is renown for winning both boys' and girls' championships in every varsity Colonial Conference sport, an unprecedented achievement.

Jeep played with all-South Jersey and future National Football League star quarterback Milt Plum on the undefeated 1952 Herd squad.

Then, as seniors in the spring of 1953, they were battery-mates on the baseball team, Walker posting a perfect 9-and-0 pitching mark while Plum was his all-South Jersey catcher. Tony DeLucas also was a key member of the pitching staff with his 5-2 record. After high school, Jeep played minor league baseball.

Jeep was inducted into the WHS Sports Hall of Fame at its last (2014) induction ceremony.

He also was an expert skier and had a lengthy career at Huntsman in West Deptford.

"He was a very popular athlete to many of us who were around the Class of 1953," Davis says.

The WHS Sports Alumni Association will dedicate its September 19 luncheon meeting to Jeep at Charlie Brown's in Woodbury. Jeep was cremated in Florida.

There was a Kingsway connection to the Australian Olympic women's basketball team which finished 5-0 in its Rio bracket but lost in the playoffs and did not medal, the U.S. team winning the gold.

Kristi Bereznai, a 2008 Kingsway graduate, was a suitemate of Natalie Burton, from Perth, Australia, when the two enrolled at West Virginia University and were basketball teammates.

They shared an apartment their junior and senior years. A 6-foot-4 forward, Burton returned to Australia after graduation in 2012 and continued her basketball career with the Perth Lynx of the WNBL, Australian equivalent of the WNBA.

Natalie played for the Australian 2014 World Cup team and in July was named to her country's Olympic team.

Burton has visited the Bereznai home several times and Kristi has been to Australia.

Steve and his wife Jeannie view themselves as Burton's "surrogate American parents" and attended WVU Big East road games at Villanova and Rutgers. They also attended Natalie's West Virginia graduation.

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