ABAC's Athletics Hall of Fame
2008 INAUGURAL CLASS OF INDUCTEES

Six Legends Inducted into ABAC Athletics Hall of Fame

Six legends from the athletics field at ABAC were the first inductees in the first ever ABAC Athletics Hall of Fame on Feb. 21, 2008 during the Centennial Celebration Week. The event took place between the ABAC-South Georgia Tech basketball games that evening in Gressette Gym.

The first members of the Hall of Fame included Orion Mitchell, Bruce Gressette, Thomas Cheney, Philip Simpson, Norman Hill, and Milena Stanoytcheva. Mitchell, Gressette, Cheney, and Stanoytcheva were honored posthumously. A reception and dinner involving family and friends of the recipients was held at 4 p.m. on Feb. 21 in the Donaldson Dining Hall. Alumni Director Nancy Coleman coordinated the reception and dinner. Athletics Director Alan Kramer addressed the group on the purpose of the Hall of Fame. Public Relations Director Mike Chason came up with the idea for the Hall of Fame. Chason and Public Relations Assistant Ashley Williamson coordinated the presentation.
ORION MITCHELL: The best coaches know how to be flexible and mold their athletes into successful teams. No one could do that better than Coach Orion Mitchell. Not only did he coach the Rams of the Georgia State College for Men when it was a four-year school, he coached the team when it became a two-year school called Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. Mitchell coached football, basketball, and baseball at the Georgia State College For Men and at ABAC from 1931-45. ABAC played intercollegiate football through 1937. Mitchell had many great wins but his 1931 team really attracted some attention by defeating the University of Miami 13-12. An Associated Press story about the game ran in the October 17 edition of the Tifton Gazette. According to that account, Miami went in front on a touchdown run in the second quarter. Down 6-0, the Rams took the lead when Mike Donehon intercepted a pass and ran 70 yards for a touchdown. Sherman England blocked a punt in the second quarter and recovered it in the end zone for another touchdown. Other teams on the schedule that year included Oglethorpe College and Fort Benning. Mitchell’s 1937 and 1943 basketball teams were the Georgia junior college state champions. Mitchell Hall, a former residence hall on the campus, was named for him.

BRUCE V. GRESSETTE: ABAC alumni still talk about the coaching exploits of Coach Bruce Gressette but many also rave about his ability as a mathematics faculty member on the campus. Whether a basketball team or standing in front of a math class, Gressette excelled in both venues. Gressette coached basketball, baseball, and football at ABAC from 1945-63. His teams won Georgia junior college basketball titles in 1946, 1947, and 1949. The 1949 and 1952 teams won National Junior College Athletic Association Region championships. Gressette’s track and field teams won state championships in 1961 and 1962. His cross country team won the state title in 1961. During his time on the ABAC campus, he also served as athletics director and was an NJCAA vice president in 1948-49. A former Tifton Kiwanis Club, Gressette was also selected as a Lieutenant Governor for the Georgia District of Kiwanis International. He was also a Sunday School teacher at Tifton’s First Baptist Church. Gressette received his undergraduate and master’s degrees from the University of South Carolina. Gressette Gym on the ABAC campus is named for him.
THOMAS E. CHENEY: From 1951-53 Thomas Cheney was a standout player for the ABAC baseball team. The 1952 team rolled up a 7-1 record in league play and won the 1952 state title. Major league baseball took note of the righthander from Morgan, Ga., and he was signed by the St. Louis Cardinals. In 1957 the Cardinals called him up to the big leagues where he made his debut on April 21, 1957. He pitched in four games during his first year and started three of them. He then served one year in the military in 1958. Cheney returned to the Cardinals in 1959 but was traded in the off season to the Pittsburgh Pirates. He had a 2-2 record with the Pirates in 1960, a year in which Pittsburgh advanced to the World Series against the New York Yankees. Cheney served as relief pitcher in the Series, giving up four hits and two earned runs while walking only one batter and striking out six. The Pirates beat the Yankees for the crown in dramatic fashion when Bill Mazeroski hit a walk off homer in the ninth inning of the seventh game. Cheney was traded to the Washington Senators on June 29, 1961. His day in history was just ahead. On Sept. 12, 1962, Cheney set the record for striking out the highest number of batters in a single game when he fanned 21 batters in a 16-inning 2-1 Washington Senators’ victory over the Baltimore Orioles. He had 13 strikeouts through nine innings and told Senators’ Manager Mickey Vernon he didn’t want to come out. Near the end of the game, Cheney threw eight straight hitless innings. On his 228th pitch, pinch hitter Dick Williams watched a called third strike, and Cheney’s marathon day was over. Cheney might have had his best year of his eight-year career in 1963 with a 2.71 ERA, seven complete games and four shutouts. He had an 8-9 record when he suffered an elbow injury that limited his ability for the rest of his career.

PHILLIP SIMPSON: From the tiny town of Dixie, Ga., Phillip Simpson took the college basketball world by storm both at the University of Georgia. A 1956 graduate of Dixie High School, he played at ABAC during the 1956-57 and 1957-58 seasons. Nicknamed “Goose,” Simpson averaged 26 points per game as a freshman at ABAC when he was named to the Georgia Junior College All-State team. During his sophomore season, he averaged 24 points a game for the Stallions and was recognized for being the ninth highest scoring player in the nation. Simpson was selected for All-America status and was chosen as the most valuable player in the state tournament where ABAC finished second. ABAC retired his jersey on the night of his last game as a Stallion. Simpson finished his college career as a two-year starter for the University of Georgia where legendary Kentucky Coach Adolph Rupp called him “the best rebounder in the SEC” in 1960. Simpson played for Georgia Coach Red Lawson and was named Player for Bulldogs during his junior season when he led the team in total field goals, total free throws, rebounds, total points and average. Simpson was named captain of the UGA team season. He was a second team All-SEC selection for the season. He received the Joe Jordan Memorial Trophy for outstanding play that year.

NORMAN “RED” HILL: Through the men’s tennis program at ABAC, the world came to Tifton, Ga. And Norman “Red” Hill opened the door. Starting from scratch and developing a list of contacts across the globe, Hill helped to put ABAC on the international map with a tennis program which recorded an incredible 34 consecutive national tournament appearances. His Stallions won two national championships, one in 1984 and the other on the final point of his seasons. Hill was a Dean’s List student with a cumulative grade point average of 3.48 on a 4.0 scale. Stanoytcheva graduated from ABAC with a degree in physical education.

MILENA STANOYTCHEVA: The terms scholar and athlete often times seem to have no connection. With Milena Stanoytcheva, they were a perfect fit. Stanoytcheva, a native of Sofia, Bulgaria, played at ABAC in both 1999 and 2000. She was a Dean’s List student with a cumulative grade point average of 3.48 on a 4.0 scale. Stanoytcheva graduated from ABAC with a degree in physical education.
last match at ABAC in 1999 before he retired. During his time at ABAC from 1965-99, Hill’s teams won 29 region titles, defeating many four-year colleges as tuneups along the way. On three different occasions, Hill was named the National Coach of the Year. At the time of his retirement, Hill had won more men’s college tennis matches than any other coach in America with an unbelievable record of 848-183. Hill coached many outstanding players including Jean Lagloire, who in 1989 and 1990 became the only player in National Junior College Athletic Association history to win back to back national titles at the number one singles slot. A native of Talbotton, Hill played basketball at Brewton Parker and Georgia Southwestern. He spent his final two years of eligibility on the court for the University of Georgia Bulldogs. He also ran track in Athens under the direction of legendary Coach Spec Towns. The Red Hill Athletic Center on the campus is named after him.

Bolstered by the outstanding play of this Bulgarian, the Fillies finished second in the national tournament in 1999. Stanoytcheva transferred her tennis and academic skills to Clemson University where she was a first team All-ACC selection and went undefeated in conference play. She was also named to the ACC Academic Honor Roll when she was at Clemson. She passed away in an airplane crash in 2004.