ABAC Names Lee County Grad to Athletics Hall of Fame

TIFTON—In its 107-year history, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College has produced several baseball players of extraordinary quality. But as far as making a name for himself in the professional baseball league in Japan, there’s only one Ralph Bryant.
For his efforts on the diamond for the ABAC Golden Stallions and in his professional career, Bryant has been named to the 2015 class of the ABAC Athletics Hall of Fame.

Tickets are now available at a cost of $30 per person for the induction dinner in Gressette Gym at 6 p.m. on April 10. The dinner is a part of the ABAC Homecoming Week activities. Athletics Director Alan Kramer said that persons who wish to attend the dinner can contact the Office of College Advancement at (229) 391-4895 for tickets. Tickets will only be sold in advance.

The Hall of Fame event will be a part of the alumni awards ceremony. For more information on the 2015 Homecoming Week activities, interested persons can visit the ABAC web site at www.abac.edu/alumni.

A native of Fort Gaines, Bryant led Lee County High School to back-to-back Class AA state title game berths before joining Coach Tom Moody’s ABAC squad in 1979. At Lee County, Bryant hit .382 as a freshman, .426 as a sophomore, .375 as a junior, and .403 as a senior. He was an All-America selection and was named the most valuable player on the Lee County team.

As an ABAC freshman in the spring of 1980, Bryant blasted three home runs, six doubles and knocked in 17 runs. He hit .294 in his freshman year with the Stallions before a tremendous sophomore campaign when he hit .371 with 10 doubles, two home runs, 26 RBI, and 26 runs scored. Playing right field most of the time, Bryant led the Stallions to a 30-16-1 record and a berth in the 1981 state playoffs.
Drafted in the first round of the 1981 amateur draft by the Los Angeles Dodgers, Bryant’s first professional action was with the Dodgers’ Pioneer League team in Lethbridge, Canada in the summer of 1981.

Bryant made his major league debut with the Dodgers on Sept. 8, 1985 and spent the next three years traveling between the major and minor leagues. His last professional appearance with the Dodgers was on Oct.4, 1987. Bryant played in 79 major league games for the Dodgers, registering 150 at bats, 22 runs scored, 38 hits, six doubles, three triples, eight home runs, 24 RBI and a .253 average.

Beginning in 1988, Bryant embarked on a seven-year career with the Chunichi Dragons and Kentetsu Buffaloes in the Nippon Professional Baseball League in Japan. The 1989 Pacific League Most Valuable Player, Bryant hit 49 home runs that season to lead the Buffaloes to their third Pacific League championship.

For his career in Japan, Bryant hit .261 with 259 home runs and 641 RBI. He led the Pacific League in home runs in 1989, 1993, and 1994. Bryant was the RBI league leader in 1993 and topped the league in total bases in 1989 and 1993. In his MVP season, he tied Sadaharu Oh’s career record by hitting three home runs in a game on five different occasions.

Bryant retired in 1995 after battling injuries most of the season. He returned to Japan in 1995 as a hitting coach for the Orix Buffaloes. Still powerful at the plate, he hit three home runs in an inter-league home run contest during the year.

Other 2015 inductees include Monika Lalewicz, Tommy Dial, Dr. Larry and Debra Moorman, Sonny Skinner, and the 1999 ABAC women’s tennis team.