

## Mary Kehoe



Being the only woman honoree tonight is nothing new for **Mary Kehoe**. After all, she has been fighting for girls' rightful place in sports for over four decades.

Kehoe was one of the true pioneers of female athletics, blazing a trail not only in Norwalk but in the state of Connecticut. A native of West Pawlet, VT, she grew up in an era when girls were not afforded the opportunity to compete in organized sports or interscholastic athletics. She was, however, instrumental in changing that way of thinking in this area, particularly at Brien McMahon High School.

A physical education teacher for 42 years, Kehoe taught two years at Lakeland High School in Mohegan Lake, NY, and two more years at Glens Falls Jr. High, NY, before coming to Brien McMahon when the school opened in 1960.

Overcoming many obstacles in those pre-Title IX days, Kehoe started the first interscholastic sports team in the city of Norwalk when she introduced students to basketball. Soon after, she started teams in volleyball, field hockey, and softball as well.

As a result, Kehoe was the first girls basketball coach at McMahon in 1965 and led the Lady Senators to a perfect 10-0 record in that inaugural season. In fact, McMahon won its first 18 games in Kehoe's first two seasons, and she would coach a total of four undefeated teams during her 12-year career while losing another unbeaten season at the buzzer.

Even though the Senators were a perennial power back then, there was no FCIAC or state tournament for girls during those early years. Kehoe helped change that too, when she and a few other pioneer coaches formed the first Fairfield County Conference for girls basketball in 1972.

That first year, McMahon and New Canaan were both 9-0 heading into the final game of the season against one another. McMahon won and the league presented Kehoe and her team a trophy recognizing them as the first "unofficial" FCIAC champion. A few years later, again thanks to the tireless efforts of people like Kehoe, girls sports officially became a part of the FCIAC.

"Mary Kehoe has not changed one bit in the last 30 years," Mary-Ann Wehrheim, Kehoe's first captain and now a secretary at McMahon, said in 1996 when her former coach was inducted into the Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame. "She still has that pizzazz very few coaches today have. She turned our team into a team and made it like a family. We went undefeated, but we worked hard."

"She was of the era when coaches were mentors, counselors, and clinicians," added Lynn Spagnesi, who captained the unbeaten '72 team. "She was one of the foremothers of girls athletics, a true pioneer. There was such a closeness on our teams and it was because of her leadership."

But basketball wasn't the only sport Kehoe left her mark in. She would also enjoy a successful career as girls volleyball coach at McMahon for which she was recognized as the Connecticut High School Coaches Association Outstanding Volleyball Coach in 1990. Two years later, she was named by the National High School Coaches Association as the Region I Outstanding Volleyball Coach.

In addition to those two awards and her Hall of Fame induction, Kehoe received the Connecticut Pathfinders Award in 1997 for her work as a ground breaker who opened pathways and made inroads in athletics and physical education. She also received an Excellence in Teaching Award from the University of Connecticut in 1988.

But of all the awards bestowed upon her over the years, perhaps the biggest came in 1996 when the Brien McMahon gymnasium was dedicated and named after her and Ralph King, the school's longtime boys athletic director.

Mary Kehoe, teacher, pioneer, coach, and a friend to many, is currently in her 38<sup>th</sup> year at McMahon where she continues to oversee all BMHS girls teams in her role as girls athletic director.