

Jeanne Vallerie DeRosa



It was 40 years ago this year that **JEANNE VALLERIE DEROSA** concluded one of the most decorated careers by a Central Catholic High School athlete.

That goes for male or female athlete. After all, in the 30-year history of the small private school on West Rocks Road, there were a total of eight Cavaliers who were named first-team all-state in their respective sport. Seven of them were male athletes and only one a female athlete. Her name was Jeanne Vallerie.

In fact, the 1982 CCHS graduate accomplished that feat in two sports, basketball and softball. And she joined another very select group when she was named an All-City MVP in two sports.

Guess you could say Jeanne Vallerie really was in a league of her own.

Vallerie capped off her outstanding scholastic basketball career by being voted to the Class S all-state team, becoming only the fourth player from the city of Norwalk to be named all-state in girls basketball with the other three all from Norwalk High.

Being named all-state was just one of several highlights during Vallerie's high school basketball career. The senior co-captain and four-year starting point guard also became the first girl from Central Catholic to be named first-team All-Western Connecticut Conference in basketball. And in yet another first for the Cavaliers' girls basketball program, Vallerie was selected as the MVP of *The Norwalk Hour's* 1982 All-City Girls Basketball Team.

"Jeanne was the type of player you hope had the ball in her hands in a crucial situation," said then-CCHS head coach Tom Kriz. "She was the perfect example of a team player."

Kriz had good reason to feel that way. Vallerie led the team in scoring as a senior with 14.3 points a game, as well as in assists (5.0) and steals (2.6) as the Lady Cavaliers went 15-8 and won its first-ever WCC Wild Division championship while reaching the Class S West Region semifinals.

She scored double figures in 20 of Central's 23 games, including a career-high 24 points against defending Class LL state champion Norwalk High, which would win a second straight FCIAC title that season.

And it was no surprise that Vallerie's four-year career coincided with Central Catholic's rise in girls basketball. Prior to the 15 wins in 1981-82, the program's previous best season was Vallerie's junior year when Central finished 12-7 and made the state tournament for the first time.

But basketball wasn't the only sport Jeanne Vallerie left her mark in. When the scholastic spring season rolled around, she traded her sneakers in for cleats and took to the softball field where she also excelled. As a junior, the Cavaliers' third baseman batted .326 and was voted the CCHS team MVP while earning All-WCC second-team honors.

Vallerie elevated her game to an even higher level her senior year, batting a team-high .410 with a city-leading 29 hits and .530 on-base percentage as she sparked Central Catholic to a 10-7 record and a berth in the state tournament. And like basketball, she was a first-team All-WCC and Class S all-state selection while becoming just the second high school athlete citywide to be named an All-City MVP in two sports. The other was 2019 Norwalk Old Timers honoree Missy Oman.

“Anyone would want a player of Jeanne’s caliber on their team,” Vallerie’s coach, Tony DiTommaso, said 40 years ago. “She’s not only a real good athlete, but the perfect person to lead the team on and off the field. She set the example and everyone else followed.”

It’s difficult to say which was Vallerie’s best sport in high school, but she was recruited by some Division II and III schools to play softball. Instead, she enrolled at Seton Hall University, a Big East Division I school, from where two of her older siblings had graduated.

Vallerie played fall softball for the Pirates as a freshman, but decided to try out for the basketball team and made the squad as a walk-on. She saw limited action off the bench her freshman season, but impressed the coaching staff enough to receive a partial scholarship her second

season. She saw more court time as a junior and by her senior year the SHU coaching staff gave Vallerie a full scholarship. She even played against the UConn women in Geno Auriemma’s first season as coach of the Huskies.

After her playing career, Vallerie remained close to basketball as a coach, working as an assistant at Central Catholic, Brien McMahon, and Weston high schools as well as a stint at the University of New Haven. She also remained active in softball playing in local recreational leagues. Vallerie also picked up the game of golf thanks to fellow Norwalk Old Timers honoree Janine DeLise Deering, her longtime good friend and neighbor growing up who she played against in high school. And like DeLise, Vallerie also worked in media for a spell as a producer and later in production at News-12, where she met her husband Jeff DeRosa.