

Good evening,

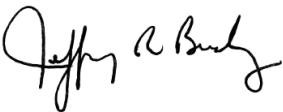
On behalf of the Joliet Catholic Academy administration, faculty, and staff, I would like to welcome everyone to our 9th Annual Hall of Champions celebration – an event that calls attention to the greatness of our past athletes. It doesn't get any better than this!

First, congratulations to our inductees: Cory McLaughlin, Leo Michalak, Lindsey Major, Maggie (Karges) Watson, Rick Thayer, Kathy (Mondrella) Major, James L. Randle II, and members of the 1975, 1976, 1977, and 1978 State Championship football teams. You represent the character, integrity, sportsmanship, passion, and purpose that make the JCA athletic program one of the finest in the entire country. We are proud, and humbled, to honor you.

As Athletics plays a significant role in the school, it has always been a part of our vision – to recognize the best of the best of our historic Angels and Hilltoppers. You are the foundation of the greatness that exists in our student-athletes ... you give them the inspiration, every practice and every game, to reach for the stars and walk away as Champions.

We hope that you are enjoying your celebration and we thank you for the traditions that you have set forth.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey R. Budz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Jeffrey R. Budz  
President/Principal



## *Samantha (Tortorello '02) Haas*

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Sam Tortorello graduated in 2002 from Joliet Catholic Academy. Tortorello, a three-year Varsity starter, led Angel Volleyball to a Regional Championship in 2001 and was named the *Chicago Sun Times* 2001 Player of the Year. Sam went on to play at Penn State University where she led the Nittany Lions to three Big Ten Championships. During her Big Ten career, she earned accolades of 2002 Big Ten Freshman of the Year, 2005 Big Ten Player of the Year, 3-Time AVCA All American and a 2-Time Honda Sports Award Finalist. Sam graduated from Penn State in 2006 with her Bachelor's Degree in Communications, Arts and Sciences, with a minor in Business. After Penn State, she continued her volleyball career as a member of the 2006 USA Volleyball National Team.

Sam is currently the Executive Director of the Team Ream Foundation, a non-profit entity, which provides funds to financially disadvantaged families battling cancer in Central Pennsylvania. Today, Sam resides in Wheaton, Illinois with her husband, Jason, two-year old son, Ford, and their daughter, Francesca Lo who just turned one year old.

- 2001 *Chicago Sun Times* Player of the Year
- 2002 Big Ten Freshman of the Year
- 2005 Big Ten Player of the Year
- 2003, 2004, 2005 AVCA All-American
- 2006 USA Volleyball National Team Member



## *Kathy (Mondrella '74) Major*

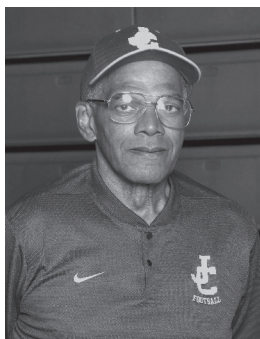
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Kathy is a 1974 SFA alum. After high school graduation, she played Volleyball at Creighton University. She coached High School and Junior Club Volleyball in Nebraska from 1978 through 1990. Kathy began her career in Education in 1982 at Millard South High School in Omaha, NE, as a teacher, school counselor, and coach.

Kathy then moved back to Lockport where she served as Varsity Volleyball Coach at JCA in the years 1996 through 1999. In her third year as Girls' Volleyball Coach, she took the team to a fourth-place finish in the 1998 IHSA State Volleyball Tournament. In 1997, she also took on the roles of Girls Athletic Coordinator/Dean of Students where she instituted the Angel Golf Program. In 2004 Kathy transitioned to JCA's Counseling Department into the role of school counselor and returned to the coaching ranks as the Angel Golf Coach from 2009 to 2013. In her third year as golf coach, the 2011 team was the first Angel Golf Team to advance to the Sectionals and the first to advance to the IHSA State Girls Golf Finals.

She was the first JCA coach to lead teams in two different sports to the IHSA State Tournaments. In 2014 Kathy became the Director of Counseling at JCA. Under her leadership the Counseling Department instituted a Homeroom Advisory Program and significantly expanded the use of Naviance to assist parents and students in post secondary planning.

Kathy and her husband, Gary, have three children Jeremy, Lindsey and Tyler. In 2022, they both retired to Loudon, Tennessee where they are enjoying their beautiful surroundings and the game of golf.



## *Cory McLaughlin*

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A teacher, coach, master motivator and great friend, Cory McLaughlin made a difference every single day at Joliet Catholic High School and Joliet Catholic Academy. And he did it with humility, without ego, for little fanfare.

Affectionately known as “Coach Mac,” McLaughlin was always the first to arrive for Saturday morning meetings after a Friday night football game. Coaching and teaching was more than his profession – it was his life. One that he lived fully.

McLaughlin, who taught for decades at Dirksen, started as a football coach on the lower levels in 1977 at Joliet Catholic High School during the heyday of Gordie Gillespie’s run of renowned state championship teams.

He moved up to the varsity as a defensive line coach in 1984. He became the defensive coordinator in 1986, wrapping up that job for Joliet Catholic Academy in 2012. He returned as the defensive line coach from 2013 to 2021.

McLaughlin also took over as an assistant wrestling coach in 1977, eventually moving up to be the head coach, and he continued his career as Ryan Cumbee’s associate coach in 2020 as the Hilltoppers emerged as a state powerhouse.

A lifelong bachelor, McLaughlin dedicated his days to helping kids. He bought players meals when they needed them. He saw the best in people, never the worst, striving to make moments and memories his players would remember.

In looking at how revered the JCA football and wrestling programs remain, one can point to McLaughlin as a pillar of that success. He loved the school, his fellow coaches, the student-athletes, and everything about being a Hilltopper.

And that is what he will always be.



## *Leo "Count" Michalak*

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Leo worked at Corn Products in Argo, Illinois as a welder and supervisor for 35 years. He attended Joliet Catholic High School in 1947-1948.

Leo could not play sports because he had a paper route in the mornings and evenings. He transferred to Lemont High School, graduating in 1951.

While at Lemont High School Leo played football, basketball, and baseball. The team went undefeated in football and earned Conference Champion Titles. Eight team members played all three sports while Leo played as an end, punter, and was on the kick-off team. His high school baseball team ended the season with a 13-1 record.

Leo coached Lemont Pop-Warner football teams from 1974 through 1989 when Jim Boyter asked him to help coach freshmen football at Joliet Catholic High School. He continued at the sophomore level, coaching football until 2015.

Leo began coaching youth baseball in 1968 continuing until 1989. Leo joined the JCHS baseball staff in 1989 and continued through 2015. During his tenure, the teams he assisted won State Championships in 1994, 2009, and 2013.

Currently, Leo is an assistant baseball coach at the University of St. Francis coaching with his son, Brian. Leo also gave pitching lessons to several area players. This list includes professional players Chris Michalak (his son) and current JCA assistant baseball coach Ryan Quigley.

In 2002, Leo was named JCA Assistant Coach of the Year and was recognized by the State of Illinois Senate as an Assistant Coach at JCA in 2009. Among his other accomplishments, Leo is a member of the Joliet Hall of Fame for Bowling. He twice bowled his highest game of 280.

Leo and his wife Janis (Grant) Michalak have been married for 65 years and reside in Lemont. They have four children: Lori, Greg, Brian, and Chris Michalak. Leo and Janis have nine grandchildren.



## *Lindsey Major '07*

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Lindsey Major was a three-sport athlete in her time at JCA, earning three Varsity letters in Volleyball, four Varsity letters in Basketball, and four Varsity letters in Softball. She was a four-time All-Area and All-Conference selection in Softball; All-State and Super 60 All-Tournament selection in Softball; numerous All-Area and All-Conference selections for Volleyball and Basketball; and a Wendy's High School Heisman Award finalist. Major was key in leading JCA to several Conference and Regional championships in all three sports as well as two State medals in Volleyball. She also led her travel softball team, Orland Park Sparks, to two Top 10 finishes in the ASA National Championships.

Major earned the University of Iowa John and Peg Slusher Catching Scholarship as an incoming Freshman. She was named the starting catcher and a Big 10 one-to-watch in her sophomore season but suffered a career-ending injury in that season. In her playing time at Iowa, Major was a key contributor in their Top 25 national rankings and Big 10 Conference Championship and Super Regional appearances. Major also threw out 96% of attempted steals. She earned four Academic All-Big 10 Awards.

Currently, Major is an executive in the music industry and resides in Nashville, Tennessee with her husband and two dogs. She was featured in Billboard Magazine's 2022 Women in Music Top Executives edition, named as a finalist for Music Biz's 2023 #NEXTGEN\_NOW One to Watch Award, and was named the 2023 Nashville Emerging Leader Award winner in the Entertainment & Music Business category.



## *James L. Randle II '97*

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James graduated from Joliet Catholic Academy in 1997 where he held the single season rushing record for some time until Ty Isaac broke this record in the State Football Championship game.

James' outstanding records also include being the first to rush for 300 yards in a playoff game along with rushing for 2,600 yards in a season. James was named All-Conference, All-Area and First Team Class 5A All-State along with MVP for Team Illinois.

While James does not like to speak about his sports accomplishments, he would like to mention that he has been in the locker room of every level of football, but his biggest accomplishments involve being the best dad to his three children, Christian (18), Journee (16) and Kayden (13). He also takes pride in being a devoted husband to his wife, Rhonda, and the best brother to his sister, LaTonya. James also wants to acknowledge his parents, James Sr. and Shirley Randle.

James and his family reside in Princeton, Texas where he is currently an Employee Relations Partner in the Legal Department at Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits. He is also active as a personal trainer and motivator. James is honored that JCA has considered him to be inducted in the Hall of Champions for Athletics and he professes to be a lifetime supporter of Joliet Catholic Academy.



## *Rick Thayer '77*

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Rick Thayer's career as a football player took him across the country, but Joliet has always been his home. And Joliet Catholic has always had his heart.

Thayer, who goes by Ricky, graduated from Joliet Catholic High School in 1977. He played running back and on the defensive line for back-to-back Class 4A state championship teams under the guidance of Gordie Gillespie. After continuing to play football at the University of Miami, Thayer transferred to Carroll College in Helena, Montana. As a sophomore, he played under coach Jerry Yost at Joliet Junior College, then played and graduated in 1982 from Hillsdale, where he was the team MVP.

Back home, in 1985, Thayer was the general manager/owner of T&T (Thayer & Tomczak) Restaurant and Pub in Joliet along with his brother, Tom, and friend Mike Tomczak, both standout players for the Chicago Bears at that time. Ricky then opened Thirty Buck Restaurant and Bar with former Hilltopper teammate Eric Beltzhoover. Rick's mom, Ann, was the cook, and you'll never eat a better meal in your life.

Ricky is married to Danna and they reside in Joliet. You can see him most hours of the day at Thirty Buck, named after one of the more famous plays in the Hilltopper football playbook.

Over the many years, Thayer also found time to help as an assistant coach in football for his alma mater.

He wants to thank all his coaches, but especially Gordie Gillespie, Tony Janc, Larry McKeon, Dale O'Connell, Pat Mudron, Jim Barello and Roger Gifford. His former teammates and coaches, however, were always thankful for him. Big and powerful with a heart of gold, Ricky Thayer will go down in Joliet Catholic history as a humble champion who never lost sight of where he's from – and the place he's always called home.





## *Maggie (Karges '04) Watson*

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Maggie was a three sport athlete for two years at JCA and then put her focus on volleyball. She was co-captain of the first Volleyball State Title Team at JCA and joined Sports Performance for Junior and Senior years. She is in the JCA record books for aces and serve receive percentage. All-time leader list at JCA; third in career service points, first in career serve receive, sixth in career kills and fifth in career blocks.

She was recruited by many Division 1 programs and continued on to play Division 1 volleyball at Bowling Green State University. Maggie graduated with a degree in Dietetics and Nutrition and has been health coaching for eight years and is in the process of starting a new health coaching business geared toward teen health - both in nutrition education and positive body image. Maggie has been married for 12 years, has seven-year-old twins, and resides in Oswego.

2001 honors: All-tournament at Munster, *Herald-News* Player of the Week, all-conference by the East Suburban Catholic, *Herald-News* second team all-area.

2002 honors: Team captain. *Herald-News* first team all-area, *Daily Southtown* all-area, all-tournament at Munster, all-conference in East Suburban Catholic, honorable mention all-state by *Champaign News-Gazette*.

2003 honors: Team captain. *Chicago Sun-Times* Preseason Top 50 player, all-tournament at Hinsdale Central, all-conference in East Suburban Catholic for third time, *Daily Southtown* all-area, *Chicago Sun-Times* all-area, *Chicago Tribune* special mention all-state, first team all-state by *Champaign News-Gazette*, *Herald-News* all-area, *Herald News* Co-Player of the Year, Class AA all-tournament by Illinois High School Association.



## *1975, 1976, 1977, 1978 JCHS Football State Champions*

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From the 1975 through 1978 seasons, coming out of place regarded as the “City of Champions,” Joliet Catholic High School produced the first noteworthy, bona fide football dynasty in Illinois High School Association history.

Much like the Dallas Cowboys under Tom Landry were known as America’s Team, the Hilltoppers under Gordie Gillespie were the pride of the Prairie State, creating an iconic run of four straight Class 4A state championships while finishing with an amazing 51-1 record.

The first state title came in 1975, with playoff wins over Bradley-Bourbonnais (20-7), Hillcrest (20-16), Naperville Central (20-8) and Springfield Griffin (34-14). The next year in 1976 saw the only regular-season loss, followed by the same result in the playoffs with wins over Hillcrest (28-14), Lake Park (34-14), Rockford Boylan (8-7) and Danville (16-8).

In 1977 and 1978, the Hilltoppers went undefeated in both seasons. The 1977 team swept the playoffs, beating Crete-Monee (42-8), Glenbard South (20-3), Woodstock (26-7) and LaSalle-Peru (30-6). The 1978 team ramped things up defensively, posting shutouts in the entire playoffs with wins over West Chicago (22-0), Rich Central (26-0), Lake Forest (33-0) and LaSalle-Peru (25-0).

That span was impressive, stunning, and historic, making Joliet Catholic the measuring stick for football programs across the state.

And about that only loss? As star running back Rick Thayer pointed out, the Hilltoppers lost to Marian Catholic, coached by Bob Voss. Later, Bob’s son Jared would take over the Joliet Catholic baseball program and win state championships there as well.

Proving once again, that even when it looks like Joliet Catholic has lost, the Hilltoppers end up winning in the end.

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**When school is in session**

SFA DLS JCHS JCA ALUMNI & FRIENDS

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AT  
9AM

**September 22nd**  
FRIDAY

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GO ANGELS!**

**GOOD LUCK  
ON YOUR SEASON!**

# *Special Thanks*

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Jim O'Brien, *Chair*

Sue Bebar, *Co-Chair*

Debbie Dispenza, *Secretary*

Jim Barello

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Tina Kinsella

Ryan Quigley

Chris Scheibe

## **EVENT CHAMPIONS**

Jose Lopez & Staff, *Set-Up Service*

Brian Jones, *Video Production*

Michelle Jankowski, *Bella Cucina Catering*

Suzi Arnett

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# *The Angel and Hilltopper Prayer*

Almighty God whose authority is over all and whose love never fails,  
make me aware of your presence and faithful to your will.

Keep me true to my best self, helping me to live with character and  
integrity so that I can face my family, my friends, my Angel sisters,  
and my Hilltopper brothers without shame or fear.

Grant me the loyalty to be proficient in my studies and in training  
as a student-athlete.

Give me the will to do the work of an Angel and Hilltopper and to accept  
my share of responsibilities with energy and enthusiasm.

Keep me loyal and faithful to my teachers and coaches and to the tasks they  
and my Angel sisters and Hilltopper brothers have entrusted to me.

Make me considerate of those who look to me for leadership.

Help me wear the emblem of Joliet Catholic Academy with dignity,  
and let it remind me daily of the tradition which I must uphold.

If I am inclined to doubt, steady my faith.

If I am tempted, make me strong to resist.

If I should miss the mark, give me courage to try again.

Through the intercession of Mary, the Queen of Carmel, and  
St. Francis of Assisi, give me wisdom by which I may understand your  
answer to my prayer.

Grant this prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen.