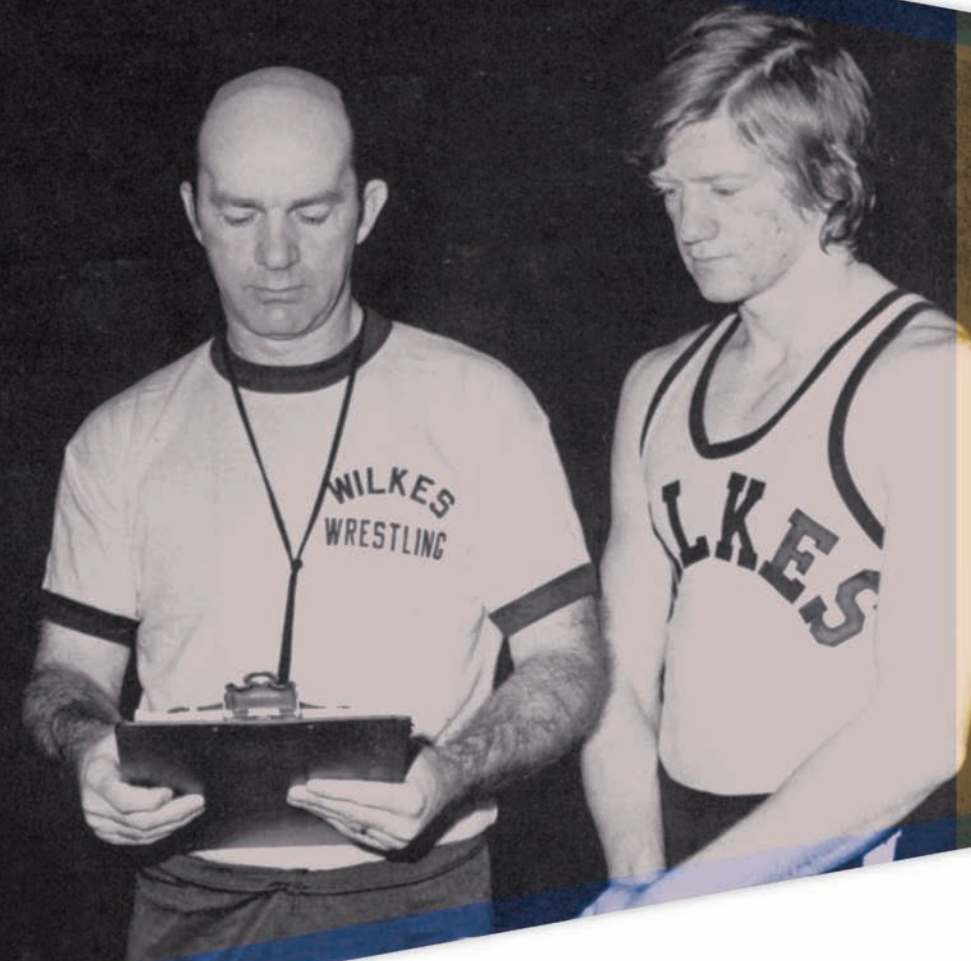


Wilkes Legends

THREE HALL OF FAMERS LEAVE AN INDELIBLE MARK ON ATHLETICS

By Reid R. Frazier



Left to right: John Reese, Doris Saracino and Rollie Schmidt influenced students well beyond the bounds of sport.

ONE WAS A LEGENDARY wrestling coach. Another made sure that women, too, could have their turn on the field or court. And another went four years without losing a single game.

For decades, John Reese, wrestling coach and athletic director, Doris “Dorie” Saracino, women’s coach and athletic administrator, and Rollie Schmidt, football coach, were Wilkes athletics. Those who played for them say the lessons they learned extended far beyond the bounds of sport.

Wrestling Preparedness

John Reese was the wrestling coach at Wilkes for 42 years, the longest tenure of any coach at any school in the country, and if you were to ask him how he managed to win 500 matches, two national titles, and go undefeated five times, his answer would be pretty simple. “I prepared,” says Reese, of Kingston, Pa. “Every night after I ate, I’d go upstairs and take my cue cards and get ready for the next practice. Every practice I ran was organized, and I think the kids knew that.”

After taking over the program in 1953, Reese built a wrestling powerhouse that tangled with, and often beat, much bigger schools. His most memorable win? At Navy, 1973. Wilkes’ 150-pounder clinched the match by pinning his opponent “on the anchor” — the iconic Navy emblem in the center of the home team’s mat. “It was unbelievable,” remembers Reese, who became a member of eight

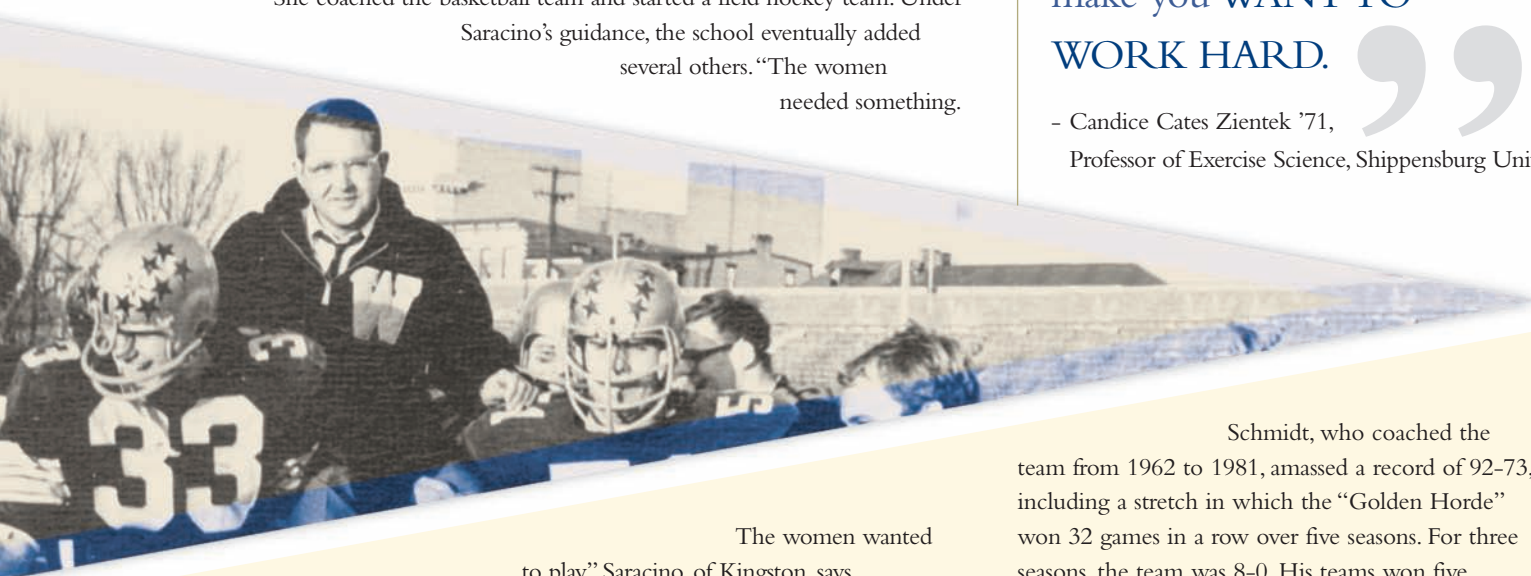
halls of fame, including the National Wrestling Hall of Fame in 1999. Reese also brought home Wilkes' first national championship in school history, in 1974.

"He taught us perseverance," says Ron Miller '93, an instructional designer from Woodbridge, Va., who wrestled and coached for Reese. "It wasn't necessarily about the winning, it was about the effort we put into it."

Blazing Trails for Women

When Dorie Saracino came to Wilkes as a physical education instructor in 1960, women's athletics consisted of a basketball team that practiced two days a week, and not much else. That soon changed.

She coached the basketball team and started a field hockey team. Under Saracino's guidance, the school eventually added several others. "The women needed something.



The women wanted to play," Saracino, of Kingston, says.

Saracino was active on women's intercollegiate athletics committees with the Mid-Atlantic Conference and NCAA. Representing Wilkes, she voted to include women's athletics under the NCAA umbrella, granting equal footing for female athletics at small schools like Wilkes. She also coached volleyball from 1975 to 1989.

At 4 feet 10 inches, she is "a giant in women's athletics," remembers Dotty Martin '77, a newspaper editor with the *Times-Leader* in Wilkes-Barre who played basketball.

"In my opinion, she is Wilkes women's athletics," says Candice Cates Zientek '71, a professor of exercise science at Shippensburg University. Zientek, of Fayetteville, Pa., adds, "She had a tireless enthusiasm for women's athletics. She'd work so hard, it would make you want to work hard."

A Golden Career

Rollie Schmidt was not one to give rousing halftime lectures to his football teams. "He didn't have to say a lot," remembers former Wilkes guard Bill Hanbury '72, now chief executive officer of the convention bureau of Washington, D.C., where he lives. "We were so well-prepared that by the time the game started, everybody knew what they had to do."

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Schmidt, who coached the team from 1962 to 1981, amassed a record of 92-73, including a stretch in which the "Golden Horde" won 32 games in a row over five seasons. For three seasons, the team was 8-0. His teams won five conference championships and two Lambert Bowls. Schmidt also coached baseball and golf.

"The two catch phrases he had all over the locker room were 'pride' and 'poise,'" says Garfield Jones '72, a regional vice president for InTouch Health, a medical robotics company. "If you're prepared, you're never out of it," says the Shavertown, Pa., resident. He adds that many games were won in the last quarter or last few plays.

A case in point stands out as Schmidt's most memorable game. In 1966, Lebanon Valley and Wilkes were tied 7-7. LV scored and then missed the extra point, and Wilkes recovered the ball on the 20-yard line. Just one second remained, with 80 yards to go. Quarterback Joe Zakowski '70 threw a Hail Mary pass. The intended receiver fumbled, but the ball bounced off the shoulder of Paul Purta '67, who caught it and made the touchdown.