



## Woodstock Community Unit School District 200

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**For Immediate Release**

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**Contact:** Kevin Lyons

815.337.3071

### **Three athletes, coach named to Blue Streaks Hall of Fame**

Woodstock High School was pleased to induct three outstanding athletes and a coach into the Blue Streak Hall of Fame at the Blue Streaks vs. Marengo High School basketball game on Friday, Jan. 31.

The 2025 inductees include cross country and track and field standouts Luke Beattie, Grace Beattie and Lisa (Kucharski) Kunzie, legendary coach Kirk Benda and three-sport athlete Brett Saladin.

#### **Luke Beattie**

Luke Beattie was a four-year varsity runner for the cross country and track teams who competed at six IHSA State Cross Country and Track & Field meets, earning five All-State honors. As a senior, he was the State runner-up in the 3,200 meters and set the WHS record with a time of 9:10. He was named All-Fox Valley Conference and All-Area each year.

At Utah State University Beattie was named Mountain West Cross Country Freshman of the Year. He was Second-Team All-Mountain West in cross country in 2018 and First-Team All-Mountain West and All-Mountain Region in 2019. He competed at the NCAA Division I Cross Country Championship in 2017 and 2019, helping Utah State make history with its first-ever appearance.

On the indoor track, Luke ran Utah State's second-fastest 5,000 meters and fifth-fastest 3,000 meters of all-time. On the outdoor track, Luke was named First Team All-Mountain West in 2021. He was a three-time NCAA Division I Outdoor Track & Field Championships qualifier in the 10,000 meters. He is the school record holder in the 10,000 with a time of 28:33 and ranks second all-time in the 5,000 with a time of 13:44, making him one of the best runners in Utah State history.

#### **Grace Beattie**

A two-time IHSA All State athlete, Beattie was also a member of the first relay to medal at a State championship in school history, anchoring the 4x800 relay. Over the course of her time at WHS, she earned invitational, county, and conference medals in track and field. As a freshman, Grace placed 2nd in the 300-meter hurdles at the Fox Valley Conference Championships. Success continued for Beattie with a 5th-place finish in the 4x800 relay and 7th place in the 800 meters. By the conclusion of her high school career in 2016, Beattie had broken the school record in the 800.

At Illinois State University, Beattie won three Missouri Valley Conference track titles, one in the indoor 5,000 meters and back-to-back titles in the 3,000-meter steeplechase, along with five second-place finishes. She qualified for the NCAA Regionals three times in the 3,000 steeplechase and once in the 5,000 and 1,500.

Beattie was a key component to ISU's six consecutive MVC team championship titles, She was second all-time in the 3,000 steeplechase, 5,000, and 1,500. She broke conference records and three facility records on the track. Beattie was also named the Most Outstanding Track Athlete in 2021.

### **Kirk Benda**

Kirk Benda taught for 33 years in Woodstock Community Unit School District 200 as a physical education teacher and coach at Olson and Creekside Middle Schools. Kirk coached middle school football for 29 years. Alongside WHS Hall of Fame coach Greg Walkington, Kirk coached wrestling for 16 years at Olson. During his time in the wrestling room, the program always had high levels of participation and a culture of hard-working athletes. He also volunteered to coach for the Cardinal Wrestling Club, which allowed Olson and other wrestlers to participate in the IKWF state series. Benda also coached girls track for 20 years during his time at Olson and Creekside, laying the foundation for numerous athletes to excel.

At Woodstock High School, Benda coached in the baseball program under WHS Hall of Fame coaches Ed Brucker and John Theriault for seven years. His emphasis on fundamentals and conducting oneself with high character was vital in a program with consistently increasing numbers. Benda was also instrumental in establishing the Woodstock Lightning Travel Baseball program, which was the first travel baseball team in Woodstock. Benda served as Athletic Director at both Olson and Creekside and was an integral part of the creation of Creekside's athletic programs.

### **Lisa (Kucharski) Kunzie**

A four-year three-sport athlete, Lisa Kucharski broke three school records in two different sports, was a varsity member of the WHS Hall of Fame 2007 girls cross country team, and earned All-State honors in the 300-meter hurdles as a senior, finishing 7th in the IHSA 3A State Girls Track & Field Championship.

In her first two fall seasons, the 2009 graduate competed in swimming, where she broke the 100-yard breaststroke record as a sophomore. In her junior and senior years, she earned Fox Valley All-Conference recognition in cross country, helping her team to its first FVC Championship since 1989 and an 8th-place team finish at State in 2007.

Among her highlights:

- Three-time State qualifier & IHSA 3A All-State 7th place 300-meter hurdles in 2009
- Broke the WHS 300-meter hurdle record as a freshman; her 300-meter hurdle record still stands today at 44.73 seconds
- Broke the WHS pole vault record several times, reaching 10'6"
- Undefeated in pole vault senior year in the Fox Valley Conference; was Sectional champion and qualified for the 3A State meet

- Earned All-Conference and All-Academic Team recognition, and WHS's Outstanding Female Athlete of the Year Award in 2009

Kucharski competed collegiately for the next four years in Division II track & field at Truman State University in Missouri where she earned All-Conference and All-Academic honors.

"Coach Kunzie," as she is now known at WHS, is an English teacher and has been the Blue Streaks head boys track and field coach since 2021. During that time, the boys team has secured two Kishwaukee River Conference championships, and a Sectional championship in 2022, the first in program history.

### **Brett Saladin**

Brett Saladin is a 2004 Woodstock High School and 2008 Saint John's University graduate. He earned WHS varsity letters three times in football as a tight end/linebacker, three times in basketball as a forward, and three times in baseball as a pitcher/infielder.

Saladin was a two-time Northwest Herald All-Area First Team player and two-time All-Conference player in the Fox Valley Conference, as well as receiving the Most Valuable Player award his senior season at WHS. Saladin led the area in receptions his senior year with 60. In baseball, he was a three-time All-Conference player in the Fox Valley Conference.

Saladin was a tight end at Saint John's University for legendary coach John Gagliardi, who is the winningest football coach in NCAA history. He ranks top-10 in all categories (receptions, yards, receptions per game, and touchdowns) among all tight ends in program history.

Saladin earned All-Conference honors in the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC), as well as the Sportsmanship Award. Saladin contributed to an overall 40-8 career record during his time at SJU and to the 2005, 2006, 2008, and 2009 MIAC championship titles and NCAA playoff wins throughout his career. He was inducted into the National Football Foundation Hampshire Honor Society for his GPA at SJU in 2009.