

# ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME

“I am a huge advocate for female sports. Developing women as leaders is going to be more important than ever in the success of our country, our families, and the entire world. Sports can be a great foundation for that. I love seeing so many female sports flourish now. I think the sky is the limit – it is only just beginning.”

– 2025 Hall of Fame honoree  
Brie Brown Buchanan '99

Since 2013, the Ward-Belmont/Harper Hall Athletic Hall of Fame has honored and celebrated remarkable athletes, coaches, and leaders whose dedication and accomplishments have elevated girls' and women's sports in Tennessee, nationally, and internationally. Harpeth Hall recognizes a new class of honorees at select moments across the decades, presenting them with an award and adding their names to the permanent display in the Athletic and Wellness Center – a tribute to the excellence and enduring impact of sports.

With a nomination process guided by tradition, the Hall of Fame honors alumnae who have not only excelled in their athletic endeavors but who have also carried the values of sportsmanship and integrity into every arena of life. Coaches and administrators, too, are recognized as mentors who have inspired generations of female athletes to push boundaries, reach milestones, and discover their strengths.

The nine inductees of the Class of 2025 have demonstrated unwavering respect for and loyalty to Harpeth Hall. They have exhibited extraordinary courage, good character, and perseverance in pursuit of a sport, while leaving a lasting impression of achievement and excellence on the school's community and athletic program.





## Melissa Hayes Baker '80

A highly versatile 5-foot-9 forward, Melissa Hayes Baker '80 showed what was possible on the court for Harpeth Hall athletics. Her skilled shot and relentless rebounding earned her multiple all-district honors and advanced the Honeybears to their first-ever regional basketball tournament in 1978-1979.

Melissa went on to play for Rhodes College, where she led the Lynx in scoring and rebounding all four years. She shattered the school's career scoring record with 1,294 points, breaking the previous mark by more than 200 points—and she achieved the milestone even before the three-point shot was introduced in women's college basketball.

Her college coach, Sarah Hatgas, once said Melissa "almost single-handedly brought Rhodes women's basketball to the forefront of Division III basketball in the South."

During her playing career, she was named a South Region Kodak All-American. For her accomplishments in the classroom as well as on the court, she also received the Seidman Award



### RHODES FOUN. 1848 ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME

#### MELISSA HAYES BAKER '84

Simply put, Melissa ranks as the most prolific women's basketball player ever to dress out for the Lynx. A highly versatile 5'9" forward, Melissa was the leading scorer and rebounder for the Lynx all four years of her career. She ranks third in school history in both of those categories. She was the first player scoring record by more than 200 points and did it before the advent of the three-point shot in college basketball.

In her senior year, she ranked 5th in NCAA Division III for her junior year at Rhodes, with a field goal percentage record holder with an impressive 49.7% career mark.

Melissa was recognized as a South Region Kodak All-American, for her accomplishments in the classroom as well as on the court, she received the Seidman Award for excellence in academics and athletics.

Today, Melissa coaches for St. Paul's Episcopal School in Mobile, and is one of the most successful basketball coaches in the state. She has compiled an impressive 210-78 record and saw one team capture the State Championship. As much a teacher as a coach, she is a singular role model for many.

In recognition of the young women who in Coach Sara Hatgas' words, "almost single-handedly brought Rhodes Women's Basketball to the forefront of Division III basketball in the South," we are proud to induct MELISSA HAYES BAKER into the Rhodes Athletic Hall of Fame this 39th Day of October, 1999.

for excellence in academics and athletics. In 1999, Ms. Baker became the first female athlete inducted into the Rhodes Athletic Hall of Fame.

"Simply put, Melissa ranks as the most prolific women's basketball player ever to dress out for Rhodes College," her Rhodes Hall of Fame induction reads.

In 2024, she was recognized by the Rhodes Hall of Fame again, this time as a member of the 1983-1984 women's basketball team, which was the first women's team in Rhodes history to win a conference championship. That team, which included two other Harpeth Hall alumnae — Ann Webb Betty '81 and Tracey Hill Woodward '81 — went on to earn the Women's Intercollegiate Athletic Conference title. Today, Ms. Baker remains third in all-time scoring for Rhodes.

After her playing days, Melissa led successful high school tennis and basketball programs in Alabama, earning coach of the year honors and guiding her teams to five state basketball tournament appearances.

## History

### 1897

The Vanderbilt co-eds played their first recorded basketball game in March against Ward Seminary's team. Vanderbilt won 5-0. Newspaper reports indicated players wore "bloomers, tie-down shoes, and voluminous blouses." Male spectators were barred from the game.

### 1929

Horse stables constructed at the back of the athletic fields at Ward-Belmont.

### 1930

Tennis offered as part of the fall curriculum at Ward-Belmont.

### 1951

Harpeth Hall opened on the 26-acre Estes Estate. Classes began on September 17, 1951. Funds were raised in the first few months to build classrooms, tennis courts, and a leveled, grassy athletic field.

Miss Patty Chadwell became Harpeth Hall's first physical education teacher and coach at Harpeth Hall.

### 1953

Bullard Gymnasium was built and named for George Bullard, treasurer of the Harpeth Hall Board of Trustees who led the efforts to build a gymnasium/auditorium building. Varsity sports expanded from four to six.

### 1970

In the 1970s: volleyball replaced field hockey as a varsity sport.

### 1973

Harpeth Hall fielded one of the strongest tennis teams in the city, winning the Nashville Interscholastic League four years in a row, 1973-1976.

## Alison Brooks '91

**V**aledictorian, state champion, and a standout three-sport athlete at Harpeth Hall, Dr. Alison Brooks '91 graduated from Harpeth Hall with more than accolades — she carried forward lessons of leadership, perseverance, and purpose.



A high school state champion in discus (1991), shot put (1990), and the 3200-meter relay (1990) in track and field, Alison was also a 1,000-point scorer in basketball and named region MVP and first-team all-state in soccer.

"My sports participation at Harpeth Hall was a truly life-altering experience," she said. "I had such amazing female coaches, such as Pat Moran and Susan Russ, who were pioneers, mentors, and role models. I always sought to follow in their footsteps by being a leader, mentor, and role model for others, but especially young student-athletes."

After graduation, Alison earned a Morehead Scholarship to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she played four years for the NCAA championship-winning soccer team alongside future Olympians Mia Hamm and Kristine Lilly. Equally dedicated to academics, Alison was a member of the Dean's List every semester for academic achievement as well as the ACC Conference Academic Honor Roll.

"My Harpeth Hall days greatly prepared me for this challenge of balancing all that was required to perform my best as both a student and an athlete," she said.

Driven to serve, Alison pursued a medical career, earning her M.D. and M.P.H. and specializing in pediatric sports medicine. As a physician and professor, she has spent decades caring for athletes, from elementary and secondary school students to NCAA and Olympic champions. She provides team coverage for Division I and professional athletes in her community, leads award-winning research in youth sports injury prevention, and is nationally recognized for her advocacy and leadership in pediatric sports medicine.

"I aim to provide support and mentorship to all learners, but especially women, and even more so women in the field of orthopedics and sports medicine, which are still male-dominated," she said. "... Really, everything I do in sports medicine is a team-based approach. I work with so many talented and dedicated individuals. We succeed together and by working together — lessons I absolutely learned from my team sports experience at Harpeth Hall."

Off the field, Alison is an outdoors person who believes in the importance of time in nature. She is an avid mountain biker, skier, backpacker, and youth hockey and mountain bike coach, continuing to inspire young athletes with the same spirit that defined her years at Harpeth Hall.



## Brie Brown Buchanan '99



**B**rie Brown Buchanan's senior superlative was "Most likely to do it all." And she has.

A three-sport athlete at Harpeth Hall, she competed in soccer, basketball, and softball in addition to serving as student council president her senior year. Through athletics, she developed the discipline, resilience, and leadership that would carry her to the Division I collegiate level and beyond.

Brie earned a full scholarship to Northwestern University, where she played softball for four years. A standout pitcher, Brie kept hitters off balance, hurling scoreless innings and racking up strikeouts for the Wildcats. She also earned Academic All-Big Ten honors all three years she was eligible.

After college, she returned to Harpeth Hall as an assistant softball coach while attending Vanderbilt University Law School. She also gave pitching lessons at ClubK, the training facility started by Cheri Kempf (former Commissioner of the Pro Softball League and now VP at Athletes Unlimited), where Brie developed her own skills.

Brie continues to advocate for girls in sports, while also working as an attorney and serving as a Girl Scout leader, volunteer sports coach, and mother of two daughters who are competitive athletes themselves.

"I enjoy teaching young girls how to be leaders, for which I truly believe the foundation can be sports," she said. "... Sports teach a kid how to be a team player, how to support others, and how to be a strong and confident person. They teach how not to give up, but also how to lose graciously and be inspired to succeed the next time. Sports teach work ethic and time management. And I truly believe sports set the foundation for how I operate as an adult."

Through every chapter of Brie's life, she has taken advantage of what sports have given her—to do it all.



## History

### 1975

Harpeth Hall joined the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA).

Harpeth Hall won its first state track and field title. Today, Harpeth Hall has more track and field state championships than any other school in Tennessee.

### 1977

The Idanelle McMurry Center for Arts and Athletics was built and included Morrison Gymnasium.

### 1984

Harpeth Hall swimming standout Tracy Caulkins '81, won three gold medals at the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.

### 1988

Harpeth Hall running ace Margaret Groos '77, competed in the marathon at the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, Korea.

### 2000

Harpeth Hall equestrian standout Linden Wiesman '93, won a bronze medal for the United States Eventing team at the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, Australia.

### 2001

From 2001 to 2007, Harpeth Hall swimming and diving team won seven straight state championships.

## Gabby Gioia Leonard '07



**A** record-breaking track and field athlete, Gabby Gioia Leonard '07 earned national recognition during her time at Harpeth Hall.

She was a two-time national champion in the heptathlon (2005 and 2007), a national champion in the triple jump (2007), and a six-time state champion. In 2007, she claimed three individual titles at the TSSAA state championships (pentathlon, triple jump, and 300-meter hurdles) on her way to being named an All-American by Track and Field News magazine.

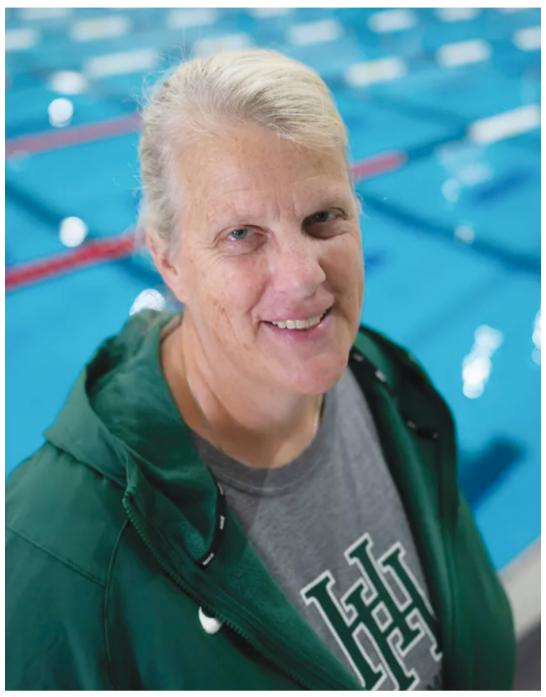
Gabby still holds the Harpeth Hall record in all three of those events. She was also a member of Harpeth Hall's state championship-winning basketball team in 2005.

"Our basketball coaches (Coach Karen Sutton) always told us, 'If you aren't 15 minutes early, you're late.' To this day, I have never once been late to work," Gabby said. "Coach (Susan) Russ taught us to push our limits and to celebrate the wins and learn from the challenges. I am forever grateful to the track and field program for teaching me commitment, persistence, and determination."

At The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Gabby competed in multiple events, earning All-ACC Academic Team from 2008-2011, the Gene Anderson Award for highest GPA and athletic performance (2010), and the Dale Ranson Coaches' Award (2010). She was an ACC champion and NCAA competitor in the heptathlon in 2009 and also served as team captain her senior year.

After earning her M.D. from Oregon Health & Science University in 2020, Gabby returned to Nashville to practice and teach emergency medicine at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine.

"High school athletics at Harpeth Hall paved the way to my journey of being an emergency medicine physician," Gabby said. "The dedication and passion towards something so early in my life translated to hard work and resilience. It imprinted upon me the importance of teamwork and collaboration."



## Polly Linden

**A**s a nationally recognized swim coach, master teacher, and unwavering leader, Polly Linden spent more than three decades inspiring hard work, high standards, and the belief that every girl could achieve more than she thought possible.

In her tenure as varsity swim coach, Polly led Harpeth Hall to 12 state championships, 25 consecutive region titles, and two national high school championships. She coached Olympic athletes, NCAA record-setters, and hundreds of Harpeth Hall swimmers who simply loved being

a part of the Bearacudas and the “Cuda fam.” For her achievements, she earned multiple coach of the year honors, but it is her unwavering commitment to her athletes and students that sets her apart.

“I think the most rewarding part of being a coach would have to be seeing and helping the girls become the best version of themselves, whether as an athlete or teammate or leader, one does not have to be the best to be their best,” she said.

Beyond the pool, Polly also coached softball, chaired the math department, and is a force in the classroom. A Smith College and Columbia University graduate with a talent for numbers, she inspired confidence in even the most challenging STEM courses, including the highest-level calculus offered. With a heart for helping others, Polly served as a faculty sponsor for multiple student groups, including the ACT Now service club, Harpeth Hall’s largest club.

In 2024, two alumnae sisters established The Polly Linden Scholarship Fund to honor her legacy. A coach, teacher, mentor, and role model, Polly’s impact reaches far beyond swim lanes and classroom lessons to the enduring support of each student and athlete.



# History

## 2002

Dugan Davis Track and Soccer Complex was dedicated on Dec. 5, 2002.

## 2007

Harpeth Hall was the state's first girls' school to install a synthetic playing surface. Additionally, it was the first school — girls, boys, or coed — in Tennessee to install a synthetic field specifically for soccer and lacrosse.

## 2008

Legendary Harpeth Hall Coach Susan Russ was inducted in the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association Hall of Fame in the spring of 2008. Coach Susan Russ is the winningest high school coach in Tennessee and the driving force behind Harpeth Hall's 20-plus state championships in cross country and track and field.

## 2009

Harpeth Hall fielded 45 upper school and middle school teams in 11 varsity sports and 10 middle school sports. Harpeth Hall's teams have won 49 state championships in eight varsity sports.

## 2011

Harpeth Hall middle school athletic program received the Robert Inman Award for Girls All-Sports Harpeth Valley Athletic Conference (HVAC) Champion for the fourth consecutive year. Named after HVAC founder Robert Inman, this award was given to the girls and boys athletic program that accumulated the most points for the school year.

## 2012

On Oct. 8, 2012, Harpeth Hall broke ground for a 60,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art Athletic and Wellness Center.



## Mary Price Russell Maddox '91

In the spring of 1991, Mary Price Russell Maddox '91 competed for Harpeth Hall one final time — her name already etched in state record books and school history.

A Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) track and field team and high jump state champion, District Basketball Player of the Year, and co-recipient of Harpeth Hall's Outstanding Athlete Award, she left campus with medals around her neck and a deep appreciation for the coaches and friendships that shaped her.

"I was fortunate to make lifelong friends at Harpeth Hall," Mary Price said. "Not everyone is going to be able to compete in college or beyond, but everyone can cultivate teammates who will be there for you for the rest of your life."

When she went on to compete for The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Mary Price's success soared. She became an NCAA All-American, two-time individual ACC Champion, and a seven-time ACC team champion. She earned All-ACC honors every season from 1992–1995, both athletically and academically. In 1994, she was selected to compete in the U.S. Olympic Festival, a multi-sport event organized by the United States Olympic Committee in the years between the Olympic Games. In her senior year, she was named UNC's women's track scholar-athlete and team captain.

More than three decades later, Mary Price still leads by example. She has been a history teacher and coach in Massachusetts for more than 20 years, and she continues to invest in the lives of young athletes — just as her Harpeth Hall mentors once invested in her.

"We were so fortunate to have incredible role models like Coach (Susan) Russ, Mrs. (Pat) Moran, and Miss Patty (Chadwell) who allowed us to be throw-down competitive and choose to be a lady in the same breath," Mary Price said. "They were never mutually exclusive. ... What a gift."





## Legare Vest

In 1998, when Harpeth Hall's then-head of school Ann Teaff asked science teacher Legare Vest if she could build a girls lacrosse program from scratch, Legare's answer was simple: "Yes."

With a vision, a playing stick, and a can of spray paint, she did just that — laying the foundation for what would become one of Tennessee's most successful high school lacrosse programs.

"People couldn't even spell the word lacrosse when we first started playing," Legare said.

She carried spray paint in her coaching bag so she could make sure the goal circle was visible. The girls would show up with football mouthguards, so she often threw extra suitable guards in her bag, as well. The team's first game uniform consisted of retired softball jerseys and the Harpeth Hall uniform skirt. And, "We had to train referees and coaches for other schools so we had teams to play," Legare said.

And train people she did. Legare helped write the bylaws for the Tennessee Girls Lacrosse Association and prepared the first wave of coaches and referees. Then, she became a trailblazer for the sport. Under her leadership, Harpeth Hall won four TGLA state titles with five state runner-up finishes.

Beyond Tennessee, Legare played a key role in the national growth of girls lacrosse, serving as a U.S. Lacrosse regional representative, coaching at national showcase events, and holding leadership positions on the U.S. Lacrosse women's game committee and board of directors. Her work on best practices in the sport helped shape the game nationwide for girls and young women.

Though Legare is now retired as a coach, the program she built continues to thrive. In 2023, Legare became the only woman inducted into the inaugural class of the Tennessee chapter of the USA Lacrosse Hall of Fame. In 2025, lacrosse became an official Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association sport — a huge step forward in the recognition of the game.

Which Division II girls team won the inaugural TSSAA state title? Harpeth Hall, of course.



**“A rising tide lifts all boats,” Legare told the audience as she delivered a speech at the USA Lacrosse Hall of Fame dinner. “. . . When one of us succeeds, we all reap the benefit of that success. This is only a legacy if it provides a foundation for growth.”**

That has certainly been the case for Legare. A science teacher and coach at Harpeth Hall since 1992, her greatest impact is not measured in championships, but in opportunity. She built a program where girls could test their limits, learn to lead, and fall in love with a game Tennesseans now know well — thanks to Legare's leadership.





“My teachers at Harpeth Hall always told me that I could succeed in school, swimming, and other extracurriculars without sacrificing one or another—as long as I worked for it. This kind of mindset taught me how to manage my goals in all aspects of my life, which is a big reason why I am able to thrive as an elite athlete.”

— 2025 Hall of Fame honoree Alex Walsh '20



## Alex Walsh '20

When Alex Walsh '20 dove into a pool wearing a Harpeth Hall swim cap for the first time, she was a rising talent. Today, she is a two-time Olympian, an Olympic silver medalist, and collegiate and world record holder.

Her ascent is one of steady excellence. At Harpeth Hall, Alex was a two-time state champion, named Tennessee high school swimming MVP every year from 2016 through 2019, and a key member of Harpeth Hall's back-to-back Swimming World National Championship teams in 2018 and 2019.

Alex took her talents to the University of Virginia, where she rewrote the record books. She became a 23-time NCAA champion and claimed 32 ACC titles, including 12 individual—the most in conference history—while earning All-ACC and All-American honors each year. In 2024, she capped her college career with three individual golds at the NCAA Championships, and, as a graduate student, she became the only swimmer in history to be a part of five NCAA championship-winning teams.

On the international stage, Alex earned a silver medal in the 200 IM at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. She became a world champion in the 200 IM at the 2022 FINA World Championships—swimming one of the fastest times of all time—and helped lead multiple relay teams to gold.

“Being able to compete for Harpeth Hall showed me the true meaning of leadership and camaraderie,” Alex said in a video shown during The Tennessean’s Middle Tennessee Sports Awards in June, “and I have taken these values with me to the University of Virginia and Team USA following my graduation.”

A computer science graduate, Alex also became, along with her sister Gretchen, one of the first NCAA athletes to represent and help design an apparel line under NIL rules. The sister duo also hosts their own podcast. And, Alex continues to compete on the world stage. “I’m ready to be faster,” Alex said after the 2025 U.S. National Championships in June.

With her blend of athletic dominance, academic achievement, and pioneering spirit, Alex embodies the values of Harpeth Hall in the pool and beyond the lane lines—and her story is not done yet.



## Gretchen Walsh '21

**I**t is almost impossible to keep up with Gretchen Walsh's swimming achievements. As soon as a story is written and published, it is out of date as Gretchen wins another medal, breaks another record, or marks another historic milestone in her swimming career.

As a swimmer at Harpeth Hall, the Class of 2021 alumna set national high school records in the 50-yard and 100-yard freestyle, helped the Bearacudas win back-to-back Swimming World National Championships, and five straight MTHSSA Middle Region Championships—and that was only the beginning.

From Harpeth Hall standout to world-record setter, Gretchen has raced her way to the top of the sport. At the 2024 Paris Olympics, she won two gold medals—anchoring world-record-

setting 4x100 medley relays—and took two silver medals, one in the individual 100-meter butterfly and one with her Team USA swimmers in the 4x100 freestyle relay.

At the University of Virginia, Gretchen also redefined excellence. She won seven golds at this year's NCAA championships, three individual and four relay, finishing her career as a 25-time NCAA champion. At the same meet, she became the first woman to break 47 seconds in the 100-yard butterfly (46.97), smashing her own NCAA, American, and U.S. Open records. During her collegiate career, she also earned 28 All-American honors and 23 ACC titles.

"I love this event," she said after her swift-swimming 100-yard fly achievement in March. "I feel like I have worked really hard on it day in and day out. After the Olympics, I realized it was my thing, and I made some lofty goals. I am really happy with that time. All of

my wildest dreams have come true in this sport because of this team."

On the international stage, Gretchen's world record total reached 17 by May 2025—covering short-course meters (50-fly, 100-fly, 100-IM, relays) and long-course meters (100-fly, Olympic relays). And she has much more history to make.

"The process of setting goals and getting creative is fun," Gretchen said after this year's NCAA championships. "I try to see myself and our team as limitless. These goals don't need to have any kind of ceiling. If I can keep shooting to be my best and aim for best times, something cool is going to come out of that, and that is where the goals all stem. But when you have lofty goals, you have to be careful about not being too disappointed. It is definitely a privilege to be able to even speak these goals into existence, whether I achieve them or not."



# History

## 2014

Harpeth Hall celebrated the opening of the Athletic and Wellness Center, which features two NCAA regulation-size gyms, a 3,500-square-foot strength and conditioning space, a yoga studio, and more.

## 2021

Swimmer Alex Walsh '20 won a silver medal in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, becoming Harpeth Hall's fourth Olympian.

## 2022

Harpeth Hall achieved a school record by winning five state championships in a school year with titles in soccer, cross country, riflery, lacrosse, and track and field.

## 2023

Harpeth Hall repeated its five-state championship record for a second consecutive year, claiming titles in cross country, rowing, riflery, lacrosse, and track and field.

## 2024

Alex Walsh returned to the Olympics, this time with her sister Gretchen Walsh '21. Gretchen became Harpeth Hall's fifth Olympian and won four Olympic medals—gold in the 4x100 relay and the mixed 4x100 medley relay and silver in the 100 fly and 4x100 free relay.



## 2025

Harpeth Hall's Class of 2025 made history with 16 athletes committing to continue their careers in college: 10 Division I signees, five Division III commits, and one NAIA athlete.