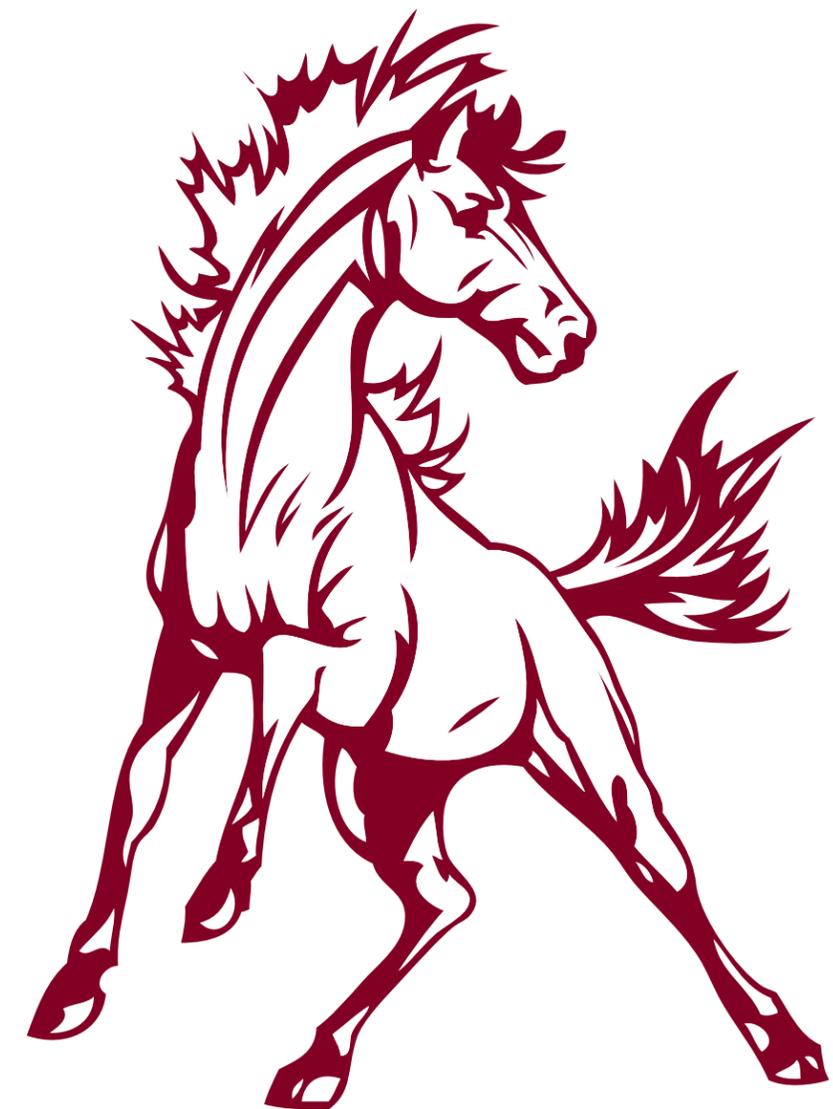


Sponsored by the Unity Sports Booster Club

Unity Athletic Hall of Fame

Class of 2014



• Letha (Janssen) Burrus • Merlin Jones • 1989 Football Team

Merlin Jones



Merlin Jones was a man for all seasons at Unity High School during the late 1950s and early 1960s. He spent time as the head coach of the baseball, boys basketball, football, and track and field teams.

Merlin attended Mendon High School where he played basketball during the 1943-44 season. However, his season and eventually his high school career was cut short when he was drafted to serve in the United States Army in January 1944. Merlin spent two years in the service, including one year in the Army of Occupation in Japan. Merlin did not finish high school but was awarded his high school diploma, earned his bachelor's degree at Quincy College and his masters at the University of Illinois and began his 12-year career coaching and teaching physical education at Unity in the fall of 1950.

Baseball was the first sport Merlin coached at Unity and he was involved in that sport from 1950 through 1959, including the final five seasons as the head coach. His final season in 1959 was his most successful with a record of 7-3.

Merlin was the freshman and varsity assistant coach for the boys basketball team from the 1950-51 through 1956-57 seasons before taking over as head coach prior to the 1957-58. He stayed in that position for the next four seasons.

Merlin was the assistant football coach in the 1951 through 1957 seasons and was the head coach for four years from 1956 through 1959. His best season was 1958 when the Mustangs finished 5-3. That season, Unity earned victories against Rushville, Hamilton, Sciota Northwestern, La Harpe, and McCooley.

Merlin was the track and field coach his final two years at Unity in 1960 and 1961.

After leaving Unity, Merlin worked as a teacher and coach at Niantic-Haristown in Niantic, Illinois for three years before moving back to the area to serve as the principal at Brown County High School for 13 years from 1965 through 1978. He left Mount Sterling to be the superintendent at Bethany, Illinois for four years from 1978 through 1982. Merlin wrapped up his long, 41-year career in education as the records officer at the University of Illinois from 1982 through 1991.

Merlin, now 88 years old, is retired but is employed part-time at a McDonalds in Normal, Illinois, where he has worked for more than 20 years. He and his wife, Elaina, have been married for 67 years and have four children, seven grandchildren, and 11 great-grandchildren.



Letha (Janssen) Burrus



Letha Janssen was one of the top hitters in area volleyball during the early 1980s and each year made a smooth transition to the basketball court. She also participated in track and field while earning a combined 12 varsity letters during her high school career.

Letha, a 1983 graduate of Unity High School, helped lead the Lady Mustangs' volleyball team as a senior to its first-ever Class A regional championship in 1982 and a final record of 22-5. That season, Unity won championships at the Liberty Tournament and the Central Tournament, while placing second in the Southeastern Tournament.

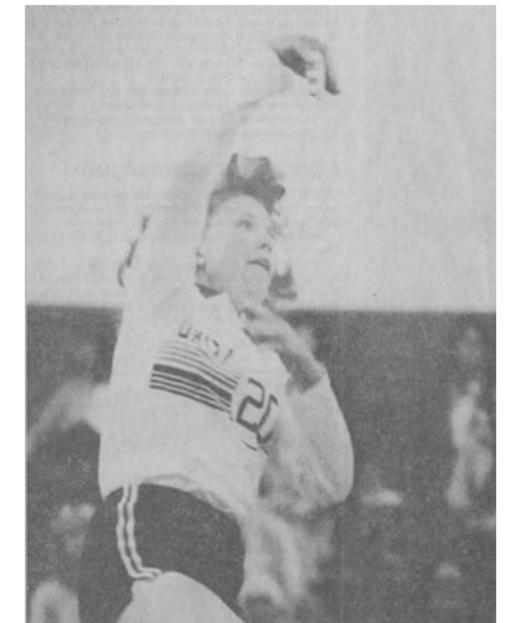
The Lady Mustangs also won the Western Central Conference.

Letha was a first-team all-conference performer and was selected as the team's most valuable player. She also was voted the most valuable player of the Liberty Tournament and made the all-tournament teams at Central and Southeastern. In 1981, Letha's junior season, she was the volleyball team's most improved player for a squad which finished 18-3.

Letha was also a first-team all-West Central Conference performer in basketball in 1981-82 and 1982-83, her junior and senior seasons. She was the team's most valuable player as a senior, while receiving awards for being the leading rebounder and best free-throw shooter at 72 percent. Letha was the MVP of the Unity Tournament and all-tournament at Central. She averaged 18 points per game and was a member of the Illinois Team at the inaugural McDonalds/Herald-Whig Classic, the all-star game matching Illinois and Missouri senior players.

Letha participated in track and was a state qualifier her sophomore, junior, and senior seasons. She placed 11th in the 800-meter run her senior year. Letha won dozens of medals in all of the area track meets for relays, the 400, the 800, the 1,600, and the shot put. She tried everything – high jump, long jump, shot put, hurdles – anything Coach Sue Woodworth asked her to do.

Letha finished sixth in her class while winning the business award and girls athletic award, while having perfect attendance all 4 years. She attended Quincy College, majoring in accounting. She was a member of the volleyball team for four years and played basketball one season. Letha earned an MBA and passed the CPA exam. She serves as controller for Heetco in Quincy. Letha and her husband Jeff live in St. Peters, Missouri. She has a son Joseph, daughter Maggie, and step son Matthew.



1989 Football Team

The 1989 Unity Mustangs experienced unprecedented success as they qualified for the IHSA playoffs for the first time in school history and set a school record with seven victories in a season. Head Coach Gary Brickman and Assistant Coaches Tim Kreinberg and Dean Woodruff led a veteran team that included 15 seniors, 13 juniors, and nine sophomores.

The Mustangs won the first two games of the season over North Greene and Monmouth Warren. After a Week 3 setback to Carthage, Unity won four consecutive games, including an exciting come-from-behind victory over Hamilton and a Homecoming win over Virginia in overtime. The Mustangs then defeated Brown County and Central to run their record to 6-1. Rushville narrowly downed Unity in Week 8, but the Mustangs made school history the next week when they beat Warsaw to finish the regular season with a 7-2 record. Unity hosted Astoria in the first round of the IHSA Class 1A playoffs. Although the Mustangs' season ended with a loss, the coaches, players, and community enjoyed a historic season that set the tone for more football success in the decade that followed.

Season Results

Unity 14, North Greene 8
 Unity 21, Monmouth Warren 8
 Carthage 52, Unity 0
 Unity 14, Hamilton 12
 Unity 7, Virginia 6
 Unity 41, Brown County 12
 Unity 42, Central 7
 Rushville 8, Unity 7
 Unity 31, Warsaw 0
 Astoria 26, Unity 6

Team Members

Head Coach: Gary Brickman
 Assistant Coaches: Tim Kreinberg & Dean Woodruff

Seniors

Ed Blanchett
 Trey Bryson
 Brad Clair
 Jeff Conover
 Matt Duppong
 Gary Ellerman
 Paul Fryrear
 Bob Howell
 Richard Klusmeyer
 Travis Knox
 Randy Lomax
 Brock Plumb
 Ross Schulte
 Shane Starman
 Ryan Woodruff

Juniors

Brad Birck
 Craig Burwinkel
 John Gaines
 Troy Goehl
 Kevin Hoing
 Louis Klement
 Sam Knox
 Allen Presser
 Jim Shupe
 Bill Treaster
 Rick Voss
 Dave Wietholder
 Rob Wietholder

Sophomores

Aaron Cornwell
 Daron Duke
 Phil Hildebrand
 Trevor Hull
 Heath Kendrick
 Chad LeGrand
 Jason Oenning
 Russ Shriver
 Jon Vrandenburg



1989 Unity Mustangs

Row 1: Brad Clair, Paul Fryrear, Bob Howell, Gary Ellerman, Richard Klusmeyer, Ed Blanchett, Ryan Woodruff, Brock Plumb

Row 2: John Gaines, Shane Starman, Trey Bryson, Matt Duppong, Travis Knox, Roy Ellis, Ross Schulte, Randy Lomax, Jeff Conover

Row 3: Troy Goehl, Louis Klement, Sam Knox, Jim Shupe, Allen Presser, Kevin Hoing, Craig Burwinkel, Rick Voss

Row 4: Russ Shriver, Phil Hildebrand, Bill Treaster, Heath Kendrick, Brad Birck, Dave Wietholder, Rob Wietholder

Row 5: Head Coach Gary Brickman, Jason Oenning, Trevor Hull, Daron Duke, Jon Vrandenburg, Chad LeGrand, Aaron Cornwell, Asst. Coach Dean Woodruff

Not Pictured: Asst Coach Tim Kreinberg