

🏀 Chapter 15 - Red Cedar Rebounds 🏀

You cannot step twice into the same river.

Heraclitus (circa 535 BC – 475 BC)

While Heraclitus posited that “you cannot step twice into the same river,” the question is whether one tries a first time step into life’s river of challenges. For centuries the **Red Cedar River** has flowed from points east of Okemos, through Okemos and the campus of Michigan State University, and onward to points west. But, over the past half-century, only a select group of **Okemos High Chieftain** basketball players realized their dream of grabbing a rebound on the **Chieftains** home court and moving the basketball from the **Chieftains O-ZONE** to the **Spartans IZZONE** to become a **Michigan State Spartan**. Yet one **Chieftain-cum-Spartan** – **Kristen Rasmussen** – did step twice into the **Red Cedar** to return to the basketball court on which she once played **Chieftain** basketball and serve as head coach of the Okemos High girls’ basketball program.

Over the past 60 seasons of **Spartans** basketball (‘60-61 to ‘19-‘20), only 14 **Chieftain** basketball players traveled down the Red Cedar to change their uniforms from **Maroon and White** of the Chieftains to the **Green and White** of the Spartans, this happening when they stepped onto the court of Jenison Field House or the Breslin Center. The “Time Line” graphics on the next two pages show the seasons in which **Okemos High Chieftains** were members of a **Michigan State University Spartans** basketball squad, with the second graphic showing the seasons (**maroon**) in which a Spartans basketball squad had no Chieftain. During that time span, there has been at least one **Chieftain** on a Spartans basketball squad in 37 (62%) of those 60 seasons. Those 14 **Chieftain** players and the seasons they played for the Spartans are:

John Shick (four seasons - 1961-1965)
Brian Breslin (four seasons - 1969-1972 & 1973-1974)
Joe Shackleton (three seasons - 1971-1974)
Greg Lott (one season - 1974-1975)
Bob Fossum (one season - 1980-1981)
Greg Vanek (one season - 1984-1985)
Sue Tucker (four seasons - 1983-1987)
Kris Weshinskey (four seasons - 1990-1994)
Kristen Rasmussen (four seasons - 1996-2000)
Mike Kebler (four seasons - 2007-2011)
Anthony Ianni (three seasons - 2009-2012)
Tracy Nogle (four seasons - 2009-2013)
Dan Chapman (four seasons - 2010-2014)
Conner George (four seasons - 2016-2020)

Summary of Years **Chieftains** Played as **Spartans**

(Listed Chronologically by **GY** = Graduation Year from Okemos High)

Chieftain	OHS Coach	GY	Years Played As Spartan	MSU Head Coach
John Shick	Doug Richey (JV) Bob Baker (V)	1961	1961-1965	Forddy Anderson
Brian Breslin*	Bob Porritt (F)	1969	'69-'72 & '73-'74	Gus Ganakas
Joe Shackleton	Stan Stolz	1971	1971-1974	Gus Ganakas
Greg Lott	Stan Stolz	1974	1974-1975	Gus Ganakas
Bob Fossum	Stan Stolz	1980	1980-1981	Jud Heathcote
Greg Vanek	Stan Stolz	1981	1984-1985	Jud Heathcote
Sue Tucker	Ron Mott	1983	1983-1987	Karen Langeland
Kris Weshinskey**	Dan Stolz (JV) Stan Stolz (V)	1990	1990-1994	Jud Heathcote
Kristen Rasmussen	Ron Mott	1996	1996-2000	Karen Langeland
Mike Kebler	Dan Stolz	2007	2007-2011	Tom Izzo
Anthony Ianni	Dan Stolz	2007	2009* -2012	Tom Izzo
Tracy Nogle	Tom Schaberg	2019	2009-2013	Suzy Merchant
Dan Chapman	Dan Stolz	2010	2010-2014	Tom Izzo
Conner George	Jeff Wonch	2015	2015* -2020	Tom Izzo
Fifteenth Chieftain	?	?	?	?

GY = Graduation Year from Okemos High except **Brian Breslin*** and **Kris Weshinskey****

***Brian Breslin** (on OHS freshman team but transferred to East Lansing High School for his sophomore through senior years)

****Kris Weshinskey** (on OHS JV team freshman year and OHS varsity team sophomore year, and then transferred to Loudoun Valley High School, Purcellville, Virginia for his junior through senior years)

2009* – **Anthony Ianni** (transferred to MSU and on the team 2009-2010 but ineligible to play for one season because he had transferred from a Division I school)

2016* – **Conner George** (on team as Redshirt in 2015-2016 but ineligible to play)



Factors Shaping Chieftain Paths to Becoming Spartans

As the preceding chapters chronicled, each **Chieftain** followed a different path down the **Red Cedar** to become a **Spartan**. This section reviews three factors (the family factor, the scholarship factor, and the skills factor) that shaped the varied paths each **Chieftain** followed toward becoming a **Spartan** basketball player.

The Family Factor

Given that each of **The Chieftain Fourteen** grew up in or not far from Okemos, just up the **Red Cedar River** from **Michigan State**, Sparty's shadow not surprisingly had some influence on where a talented **Chieftain** basketball player would elect to go to college, especially if one's parents only had to pay in-state tuition compared with higher out-of-state tuition were a son or daughter to enroll at an out-of-state college or university, especially if he or she did not have the support of a scholarship.

Another factor a student may take into account in deciding which college to attend is whether he/she is looking to get away from the family or prefers attending a school close to home, even a school attended by his or her parent or at which a parent had played on one or another sports team. At the same time, two **Chieftains** (**Greg Vanek** and **Anthony Ianni**) decided not to enroll at Michigan State and instead attend another university, schools that offered scholarship and the prospect of more playing time or being a starter than likely would have been the case had either chosen to attend Michigan State and tried out for the team as a walk-on.

However, in the case of **The Chieftain Fourteen**, nine of these **Chieftains** had a parent or other family member who had attended Michigan State, played one or more sports as a **Spartan**, and/or had been or at the time was an employee of MSU. Indeed, in some cases, a parent was still closely involved in a **Spartans** sports at the time his or her son or daughter enrolled at Michigan State. These nine **Chieftains** are:

- **Charles and Margaret Shick**, the parents of **John Shick**, both worked on the MSU campus, Margaret is a medical technologist in MSU's Olin Health Center, while Charles was employed by the State of Michigan Department of Wildlife with his office located in Justin S. Morrill Hall of Agriculture.
- **Jack Breslin**, father of **Brian Breslin**, attended college at MSU, was a standout athlete, and the university's Executive Vice President at the time Brian enrolled at MSU. The Breslin Center, where the Spartans play their home games, is named in honor of Jack Breslin.

- **Bob Shackleton**, the father of **Joe Shackleton**, had for many years been “the voice of the Spartans” – announcing baseball, basketball, and football games.
- **Bruce Fossum**, the father of **Bob Fossum**, was an assistant basketball coach on the Spartans men’s basketball team, after which he became the Spartans men’s golf coach.
- **Gaylan Rasmussen**, the father of **Kristen Rasmussen**, was a professor of parks and recreation at Michigan State.
- **Stephanie Kebler**, the sister of **Mike Kebler**, played tennis at Michigan State.
- **Greg Ianni**, the father of **Anthony Ianni**, played baseball at Michigan State and served as the university’s Deputy Athletic Director for 26 years until retiring effective January 31, 2019.
- **Sally Nogle**, the mother of **Tracy Nogle**, was an athletic trainer at Michigan State and as of 2020 in her 30th year serving in that capacity.
- **Cathy George**, the mother of **Conner George**, has been the head coach of the Michigan State women’s volleyball team for a number of years.

But family connections didn’t automatically translate into a guarantee that a **Chieftain** would become a member of the **Spartans** basketball squad. Three of the **Chieftains** – **John Shick**, **Mike Kebler**, and **Dan Chapman** – were walk-ons and, if at all, didn’t receive scholarship support until some point beyond their freshman year.

The Scholarship Factor

Generally, the path that **Chieftains** followed to becoming a Spartan basketball player was not the one experienced by heavily recruited **Spartan** basketball players such as Magic Johnson or Mateen Cleaves. None of **The Chieftain Fourteen**, coming out of high school, was a nationally-rated 5 Star player. Indeed, most of the **Chieftains** who played basketball as a **Spartan** were not actively recruited by **Michigan State**. Only three **Chieftains** – **Kristen Rasmussen**, **Kris Weshinskey**, and **Sue Tucker** – were offered a full-ride scholarship to play basketball as a **Spartan**. While **Greg Vanek** and **Anthony Ianni** received full-ride scholarships to play basketball at other universities (Ferris State and Grand Valley State, respectively), each played at those universities only two seasons before making a decision to transfer to MSU to play basketball as a **Spartan**. But several Chieftains, notably **Mike Kebler**, **Dan Chapman**, and **Conner George**, at some point during their careers at **Michigan State**, were given a scholarship after initially choosing to attend Michigan State as a walk-on or preferred walk-on.

Thus, beyond **Sue Tucker**, **Kris Weshinskey**, and **Kristen Rasmussen** who received scholarship offer, **Michigan State** didn’t actively recruit the other eleven **Chieftains**, though, as noted above, some were put on scholarship at some point after becoming a

Spartan. Rather, varying by player, the other eleven **Chieftains** “recruited” Michigan State, deciding in high school or later enrolled at another university that they wanted to enroll at and play basketball for **Michigan State** as a freshman walk-on or transfer from another university. As previously above, the latter was the case with **Greg Vanek** and **Anthony Ianni**, who played basketball for two years on scholarship at other universities before transferring to **Michigan State** and becoming a member of the **Spartans** men’s basketball squad.

As this book’s chapters also document, **The Chieftain Fourteen** also varied in how long each pursued the dream of playing basketball as a **Spartan**. Some played as a **Spartan** four years, others only two or three seasons, and two only one season. While freshman (**Greg Lott**) never made the varsity squad, he yet started in one **Spartans** varsity game against No. 1 **Indiana**. While **Bob Fossum** declined a basketball scholarship at another university in favor of accepting a Michigan State golf scholarship, he played basketball as a **Spartan** during his freshman year—on both the freshmen and varsity squads—before deciding to not play basketball and focus on playing golf. The most recent **Chieftain-cum-Spartan**, **Conner George**, was a preferred walk-on to the **Spartans** squad, opting his first year as a **Spartan** to “redshirt” (not play in any games) before later earning a scholarship and being on the varsity squad a total of five seasons. One Chieftain (**Brian Breslin**), after playing on the **Spartans** freshman team and the varsity squad the next two seasons, left the team for a year before returning the following season to the varsity squad during his senior year.

Three **Chieftains** (**John Shick**, **Joe Shackleton**, and **Mike Kebler**), who enrolled at **Michigan State**, tried out and made the **Spartans** basketball squad as a walk-on and played several seasons or more. For different reasons, both **Joe Shackleton** and **Greg Vanek** decided during their senior year to leave the **Spartans** varsity squad in favor of other priorities. On the other hand, three walk-on **Chieftains** – **Kebler**, **Dan Chapman**, and **George**, played four years as a full member of the Spartan men’s basketball squad, and George even a fifth year if one includes his first season as a Redshirt where he only practiced with the squad but did not play in any games. While **Greg Lott** never became a regular member of the **Spartans** varsity squad, he holds a singular distinction in MSU basketball history as the only **Chieftain** to play on the **Spartans** freshman squad and be called up to play on the varsity squad for one varsity game against No. 1 **Indiana**.

Tracy Nogle and **Conner George** were invited by MSU to join the Spartan squad as a preferred walk-on. While Nogle played on the varsity squad her first year, George spent his freshman year as a Redshirt on the scouting squad and did not play in any games. The next season George became a regular member of the **Spartans** squad; and the following year was granted a scholarship. Having loaded up on coursework during his first three years at MSU, George graduated in 2018, then re-enrolled in graduate school

during his third year of NCAA eligibility (2018-19) and played on the **Spartans** squad during his Redshirt Senior season (2019-20). On the other hand, after his freshman season on the varsity squad, **Mike Kebler** earned a basketball scholarship and played three additional seasons on that squad, eventually becoming a starter.

As one reflects on and looks across the vignettes of **The Chieftain Fourteen** who went on to play basketball as a **Spartan**, one sees the varying factors shaping each player's transition from **Chieftain** to **Spartan**. Each **Chieftain** varied in how quickly he or she transitioned from a **Chieftain** squad to the **Spartans** varsity squad to achieve a long-held or later formed dream to play basketball as a **Spartan**. While that dream was held early by some, it was eventually realized by all 14 **Chieftains** who comprise a special group of **Chieftains** who played basketball as a **Spartan**, albeit for four seasons, only two or three seasons, only one season, or even just as a freshman who was called up to play in a single varsity game without ever being a member of the varsity squad.

The Skills Factor

Aside from family and/or scholarship influences on becoming a **Spartan**, a third factor influenced how quickly a **Chieftain** followed a path to becoming a **Spartan**, the skills factor or what one might call the “ready for prime time player” or its opposite (“not ready for prime time player”) factor. At the university level of basketball, a basketball game is played in two 20-minute halves for a total of 40 minutes per game. However, at any one time, each team can only have five players on the court. Thus, each game affords only 200 minutes per team (40 minutes per game times 5 spots on the court) of playing time or a maximum of 40 minutes per spot which would be the case if only five members of a team start the game and each plays the full 40 minutes of the game. Guess what? The coach knows there are only 200 minutes to a game! Every player knows there's only a maximum of 40 minutes available for him or her to carve out some time playing at one or another spot (position) on the court! So working hard to earn—and maintain—minutes of play time becomes a continuing objective for each player, perhaps more so for those players on the scout team as compared with the starters and the next five off the bench (the so-called regular rotation).

Given that a team's objective is to win the game, it is not an unreasonable strategy for a coach to want his or her best five players on the court for the full 40 minutes of a game. But this isn't a winning strategy, given any one or more of the five starters may get into foul trouble, get fatigued, or become injured. Or a coach may want to substitute one of the bench players into a game to counter a player substitution made by the other team's coach. Thus, from the individual player's point of view, as much as that player wants to achieve the collective goal of winning the game, the player also wants to maximize his or her playing time on the court.

Thus, each player works as hard as possible in practices and scrimmages to improve his/her game in hopes of earning more playing time, whether that player is a starter, on the “regular rotation,” or one of scout team players. In short, the number of minutes of playing time a player will get depends not only on that player’s basketball skills but also on how well those skills combine with the skills of a team’s other four players who are on the court, with the objective of defeating the opponent team. So, whether a player is a starter, on the regular rotation off the bench, or on the scout team, players strive to get more “playing time” (minutes played per game), recognizing that no matter how much any one player improves his/her game, there still may be other players on the team who can readily outperform that player.

Thus, how many playing minutes a given **Chieftain** earned as a member of a **Spartans** basketball team would be influenced by (1) his/her basketball skills at the time he/she arrived on the **Michigan State** campus; and (2) how much that player improved those skills while a member of a **Spartans** squad. Here we can observe several patterns if we look across **The Chieftain Fourteen** in terms of their careers playing basketball for the **Michigan State Spartans**.

While the following analysis is not based on an analysis of the minutes that a **Chieftain** played as a **Spartan** nor empirical measures of a player’s basketball skills, the analysis does provide a rough assessment of what those skills likely were in terms of how ready each **Chieftain** was to be a “prime time player” in transitioning from **Okemos High** to **Michigan State**. Thus, this summary will not directly compare **Chieftains** on the basis of player stats at **Okemos High** or **Michigan State** but rather indirectly by considering the number of seasons each player was a **Spartan**, whether the player received any scholarship support while a **Spartan**, and a subjective sense whether the player over the course of his/her career as a **Spartan** moved toward getting more playing time, though this subjective qualitative “measure” could be checked by carrying out a more objective/quantitative statistical analysis of the total number of minutes each **Chieftain** played over the course of each season he/she played as a Spartan.

Mike Kebler and **Dan Chapman** comprise the first group of **Chieftains**-cum-**Spartans** to be reviewed. Both were **Spartans** walk-ons during the current era of NCAA Division I basketball, when universities no longer had freshmen basketball squads, only men’s and women’s basketball squads, with a freshman eligible to make the team if he/she has the skills deemed requisite by a team’s coach. Kebler and Chapman both played four seasons as a **Spartan**, beginning their **Spartan** careers as freshmen walk-ons competing against more skilled/experience teammates, this providing opportunity for those freshmen to improve their game.

- In four seasons as a **Spartan**, **Chapman**'s role largely was to play on the scout team though Dan did earn minutes of playing time in regular season games as well as post-season games, including scoring the **Spartans'** last basket (a three-pointer) in a narrow loss to **Connecticut** in a NCAA Tournament regional game.
- By comparison, by his fourth season as a **Spartan**, **Mike Kebler** was part of the regular rotation with increasing minutes as a substitute. Then late in Kebler's last season as a **Spartan**, when one starter (a guard) had a season-ending injury, Mike was ready to step up to being a "prime time player" when he became one of the starting guards for the season's remaining games.

The next group of **Chieftain**-cum-**Spartans**, comprised of four **Chieftains**, takes us back to the earlier era of NCAA Division I basketball when universities had a freshmen basketball squad that provided players opportunity to prepare themselves for the varsity squad. None of these four players were on scholarship and each would vary in how many seasons he played as a **Spartan**. In any case, with such basketball skills as each had, some of these **Chieftains** played more seasons as a **Spartan** than others.

- **Greg Lott** played on the **Spartans** freshman squad one season ('74-'75), during which he was called up to start and play in one varsity game against #2 **Indiana** who soundly defeated the Spartans on a Saturday; by Monday **Indiana** was the #1 team in the country and Greg was back on the freshmen squad . At the end of that season, Lott decided not to continue to play basketball at MSU and to focus on his studies.
- **Joe Shackleton** played one season ('71-72) on the **Spartans** freshman squad and two seasons ('72-'74) on the varsity squad, after which he decided to leave the team in the midst of the '74-'75 pre-season practices to focus more time on his studies.
- **Brian Breslin** played one season ('70-'71) on the **Spartans** freshmen squad and the next two seasons on the varsity squad. For various reasons he didn't play on the '72-'73 varsity squad but returned to that squad for his fourth season ('73-'74) as a **Spartan**. Over the years Breslin played as a starter and as a substitute.
- **John Shick**, during the '61-'62 season, played for the **Spartan** on both freshmen and varsity squads before joining the varsity squad for his last three seasons ('62-'65), playing as a starter or substitute depending on the opponent.

Overall, **John Shick** and **Brian Breslin** had sufficient basketball skills to play **Spartans** basketball for four seasons, Shick nearly four seasons on the varsity squad and Breslin, after one season on the freshmen squad, three seasons on the varsity squad.

On the other hand, **Joe Shackleton** played on the varsity squad only two seasons (after one season on the freshman squad), while **Greg Lott** played only one season on the freshman squad and in only one varsity game when called up to start in that game after which he returned to the freshmen squad and did not return his sophomore season to play on the varsity squad.

The next **Chieftain**-cum-**Spartans** group, in terms of basketball-related skills, includes two players who didn't attract a scholarship offer from **Michigan State** but had received scholarship offers to play for other schools.

- **Greg Vanek** was on a basketball scholarship at **Ferris State College** for two years before transferring to MSU. During his time playing for FSC, Vanek improved his game sufficiently that he decided to transfer to MSU and, with the blessing of Coach Jud Heathcote, joined the **Spartans** squad. But Vanek played only one season (his junior year) before leaving the team his senior year to focus his time on his studies rather than trying to improve his basketball skills and earn more minutes of playing time.
- **Anthony Ianni** was on scholarship at **Grand Valley State University** for two years before transferring to **Michigan State** and playing basketball as a **Spartan**. While Coach Tom Izzo afforded Anthony this transfer, Ianni had to sit out one year as a Redshirt (practice only) since he had transferred to MSU from a NCAA Division I school (**Grand Valley**). After that Redshirt season Ianni became eligible to play in games as a **Spartan** for two seasons at MSU.
- **Bob Fossum** might also be placed in this group. Coming out of **Okemos High**, Fossum had a basketball scholarship offer from **Central Michigan** as well as a golf scholarship offer from **Michigan State**. Ultimately, Fossum decided to enroll at MSU and play golf; however, that first quarter at MSU, Bob decided to try out for the **Spartans** freshmen basketball team. When two varsity team players on scholarship transferred to other universities, MSU offered Bob the opportunity to become a member of the **Spartans** freshmen team under his golf scholarship. While his basketball skills were "good enough" to make the freshmen team, with Coach Gus Ganakas' blessing Bob shuttled back and forth during his freshmen season between playing in freshmen games as well as in some varsity games.

But as good as Fossum's basketball skills were, his first love was golf and he decided after his freshmen basketball season to stop playing basketball and focus his time and efforts on improving his golf game under his golf scholarship, in part, feeling he had greater potential for a career in golf than in basketball.

The next group of **Chieftain**-cum-**Spartans**, perhaps the group of players with the best basketball skills coming out of **Okemos High** or another high school, and ready when they arrived on the **Michigan State** campus to be a "prime time player," was comprised of **Sue Tucker**, **Kris Weshinskey**, and **Kristen Rasmussen**. Each arrived on Sparty's campus with a full-ride basketball scholarship. While each played four years of varsity basketball for the **Spartans**, each wasn't necessarily ready their first day on campus to be a starter in games. But, within each season and from one season the next, each of these three players worked to improve his or her game to a degree that each eventually became a starter.

In contrast to the aforementioned players, another group of two **Chieftains** followed a different path to becoming a **Spartan**, the path of the "preferred walk-on." This category refers to a high school player having basketball skills sufficiently good that the player is told by the **Spartans** head coach that he/she is already guaranteed a spot on the team if he/she wants to be a "walk-on"— and does not need to compete in a tryout session to become a "walk-on" member of the team. The two **Chieftains** who joined the **Spartan** basketball squad as a preferred walk-on were **Conner George** and **Tracy Nogle**. On their respective squad, each's primary role was to play on the scout team, helping to prepare the starters and regular rotation players to compete against the next team the **Spartans** were scheduled to play. While Nogle played four seasons, George delayed the start of his four years of NCAA eligibility for a year by being a Redshirt during his first season as a **Spartan**, only practicing with the team but not playing in any games.

George used that first season to improve his basketball skills to be better prepared to compete for playing time once he became a full-fledged member of the **Spartans** squad during his Redshirt Freshmen season (the season following his Redshirt season). While George then played as a **Spartan** for the next four seasons, he continued in his primary role as a member (and eventually leader) of the scout team in helping the **Spartans** to become a better team and win more games. This is not to say he didn't get key minutes as a substitute or that he didn't have highlight contributions that helped the **Spartans** to win several games.

But the **Spartans** 2019-20 season was ended early when the Coronavirus outbreak led to cancellation of the post-season Big Ten and NCAA tournaments, thus also ending the chance for George to get additional playing minutes as a **Spartan**!

Further, in the regular season's final game (and final home game) against **Ohio State**, the **Spartans** needed a victory to secure a tri-share of the Big Ten Championship. That last home game was also the Senior Day game honoring the team's senior players. One of those honors has been giving a senior who had never started a game the opportunity to be a starter for that Senior Day game. Albeit it was crucial for the **Spartans** to win this game, it was surprising that Conner was not tapped to start and play a few minutes before being subbed out for whoever would have been the regular starter.

This section has reviewed how varying factors – the family factor, the scholarship factor, and the skills factor – shaped the path traversed by each **Chieftain** as he/she made the transition to becoming a **Spartan** basketball player.



Chieftain Contributions to Spartans Basketball

While none of **The Chieftain Fourteen** was a Magic Johnson, Mateen Cleaves, or Miles Bridges, each achieved his or her dream of playing college-level basketball, becoming a **Michigan State Spartan**, and even for some being a starter for one or more games. Yet each in major or minor ways contributed to the legacy of **Spartans** basketball.

It is hard to measure the extent to which each **Chieftain** contributed to his/her **Spartans** squad. While there were three seasons that the **Spartans** men's squad included two **Chieftains** and one season during which the squad included three **Chieftains**, each of **The Chieftain Fourteen** was always just one member of a **Spartans** squad having a dozen or so other members, and for some **Chieftains** their role was to serve not as a starter but rather on the scout squad or one of the regular rotation even as they worked to improve their game and earn more minutes of playing time while the starters racked up the statistics in the box score and shone in the limelight.

Yet the commitment that each **Chieftain** eventually made to becoming a **Spartan** and contributing to the **Michigan State** basketball program becomes clear if one looks back over the 60-year time span from 1961-2020, during which 14 **Chieftains** contributed in various ways to the successes of their respective **Spartans** teams, serving on the scout team during practices; cheering the team on from the bench during games; playing a few quality minutes when subbed into a game (e.g., when a starter was in foul trouble, injured, or needed a breather); playing cleanup when the Spartans had a commanding lead; or even becoming a starter in one or more games. Thus, in a variety of ways, each of **The Chieftain Fourteen** was an integral element of MSU's basketball program during the seasons he/she played for the **Spartans**.



The following *sub-sections*, drawing on the player-specific chapters, highlight a variety of contributions that **Chieftains** made to the **Spartans** men's and women's basketball programs over the past 60 basketball seasons (1960-2020):

- **Men's & Women's Squads**
- **Women's Squads**
- **Men's Squads**
- **Men's National Invitation Tournament**
- **Men's Big Ten Tournament; Men's NCAA Tournament**

Men's and Women's Squads

- Over the past 60 years, from 1961 to 2020, fourteen **Chieftains** were members of and played on a **Michigan State Spartans** basketball squad. These players, from the first **Chieftain**-cum-**Spartan** to the most recent, are: **John Shick, Brian Breslin, Joe Shackleton, Greg Lott, Bob Fossum, Greg Vanek, Sue Tucker, Kris Weshinskey, Kristen Rasmussen, Mike Kebler, Anthony Ianni, Tracy Nogle, Dan Chapman, and Conner George.**
- At least one **Chieftain** was on a **Spartans** squad in 37 (62%) of the past 60 seasons. Further, this percentage would be higher given the two seasons in which two Chieftains were on the men's squad and the one season when there were three Chieftains on the men's squad.
- Nine **Chieftains** (six men and three women) played as a **Spartan** four years: **John Shick, Brian Breslin, Susan Tucker, Kris Weshinskey, Kristen Rasmussen, Mike Kebler, Tracy Nogle, Dan Chapman, and Conner George.** Further, if one counts George's redshirt season during his freshman year, he was on the **Spartan** basketball squad for five years, including his redshirt freshman to redshirt senior seasons when he played, this making Conner the **Chieftain** with the longest tenure as a **Spartan.**
- The 1984-85 season was the first season that the **Spartans** men's and women's squads each included a former **Chieftain** – **Greg Vanek** on the men's squad and **Sue Tucker** on the women's squad. This happened again when **Tracy Nogle** played on the women's squad from 2009-13, during which period the men's

squad had one or more former **Chieftains** (**Mike Kebler**, **Anthony Ianni**, and **Dan Chapman**) on the men's squad for one or more seasons.

- Three **Chieftains** – **Sue Tucker**, **Kris Weshinskey**, and **Kristen Rasmussen** – played basketball for **Michigan State** on a full-ride scholarship for four years
- The Seven “Droughts” - There were seven “drought” periods during which there were no **Chieftains** on either the **Spartans** men's or women's basketball squads (see earlier chart). The first of these “droughts” lasted four seasons ('65 to '69). The second “drought” lasted five seasons ('75 to '80), followed by a two-season “drought” ('81 to '83). The fourth “drought” lasted three seasons ('87 to '90). The fifth “drought” lasted one season ('95 to '96), with the sixth “drought” lasting seven seasons ('2000 to '07).
- The seventh, most recent, “drought” lasted one season (2014-15). On average these “droughts” lasted 3.67 seasons, the longest “drought” lasting seven seasons and the shortest only one season (twice).
- During eleven seasons (from 2007-08 to 2018-19), excepting 2014-15, at least one **Chieftain** was a member of a **Spartans** basketball squad, suggesting that Okemos High School has in the past decade and a half become a more frequent contributor of basketball talent to Michigan State's basketball program.
- All fourteen **Chieftains** graduated from Michigan State; after graduating in 2018, **Conner George** re-enrolled in a Master's program which allowed him to continue playing for the **Spartans** with his two remaining years of eligibility (2018-20). The other 13 **Chieftains** currently work in one professional field or another, except **John Shick** who is retired but is active in real estate and travels the world.
- Only two **Chieftains** didn't graduate from **Okemos High**. After his freshman year at OHS, **Brian Breslin** transferred to, played basketball for, and graduated from East Lansing High School. **Kris Weshinskey**, after his sophomore year at OHS, moved to Purcellville, Virginia, where he graduated from Loudoun Valley High School after playing varsity basketball during his junior and senior seasons.
- Only two **Spartan** basketball players were as **Chieftains** members of an OHS basketball squad that won a state championship. The first was **Greg Vanek** who played on the Okemos 1981 boys' squad that won the Michigan Class B State Championship for boys. The second was **Sue Tucker** who played on the 1981 girls' squad that won the Michigan Class B State Championship for girls.



Women's Squad

- Two OHS females played basketball as a **Spartan**, **Sue Tucker** (1983-87) and **Kristen Rasmussen** (1995-2000), both playing for the same Spartans women's head coach, Karen Langeland (1976-2000). A third OHS female, **Tracy Nogle**, played as a **Spartan** under MSU's current women's head coach Suzy Merchant.
- While a four-year (1984-87) basketball letter winner on the Spartans women's varsity squad, **Sue Tucker**'s ankle injuries kept her from playing in about 15% of the games. Yet, after the 1986-87 season, the Big Ten coaches selected her as a member of the All-Big Ten team.
- As of 2015 **Sue Tucker** still held seven Top 25 MSU Women's Basketball Individual Records – 23rd in scoring; 25th in scoring average; 23rd in field goals made; 15th in field goal percentage; 23rd in free throws attempted, made, and percentage; 19th in career rebounds; and 19th in rebound average.
- As a freshman (1996-97), **Kristen Rasmussen** was the first female **Chieftain** to score a 3-pointer for the **Spartans** women's team.
- In 1997, **Rasmussen** was the first female **Chieftain** to play on a **Spartans** squad qualifying for the NCAA Women's Tournament. With a No. 8 seed in the East Region, the **Spartans** defeated No. 9 **Portland** (75-70 in OT) but lost to No. 1 **North Carolina** (81-71 in OT). In the **Portland** win, Kristen scored a season-high 23 points (11-of-14 shooting) and tallied 11 rebounds for a third double-double that season. The **Spartans** final national ranking was #24 by the AP and #21 by USA Today.
- In 1999, **Rasmussen** was the first **Chieftain** to play on a **Spartans** women's squad qualifying for the WNIT, where the **Spartans** beat **Akron** 76-65 in the 1st Round and **Michigan** 69-58 in the 2nd Round, before a Quarterfinals loss to **Wisconsin** (69-70 in OT).
- In 2000, **Rasmussen** returned to the WNIT, with MSU defeating **Villanova** (74-62) and **Cincinnati** (88-83) before a Quarterfinals loss to **Wisconsin** (45-77).

- **Rasmussen** was the first female **Chieftain** to qualify for the **Spartans** 1,000 Point Club (1,493 points), placing her as 8th highest scorer in the history of women's basketball at MSU.
- **Rasmussen**, as a 6'4" center, was a four-year starter, three-year captain, and averaged 12.7 points and 8.2 rebounds per game, and set the school record for blocked shots with 194, earned a Varsity Letter four years in a row, and led her teams to several NCAA and NIT Championship appearances.
- **Rasmussen** is the only former **Chieftain** (male or female) who, after playing for **Michigan State**, went on to play U.S.-based professional basketball, first in the WNBA for nine years and then with professional teams overseas.
- **Rasmussen** is the only female **Chieftain** to coach basketball, initially as an assistant coach at NCCA Division II **Western State Colorado University** and five years as head coach at Division III **Simmons Collage**. In 2016 she returned to **Okemos High** where she was the **Chieftains** girls head coach for three seasons.
- **Tracy Nogle**, played four years on the **Spartans** women's Varsity squad, shot 50.0% (9-for-18) from the field during her career, appeared in 25 games, and totaled 22 points in only 70 career minutes. She was three-time Academic All-Big Ten and two-time recipient of the Pat Canning Coaches Award.
- During **Nogle's** four years as a **Spartan**, MSU finished no lower than 3rd place in the **Big Ten Conference's** regular season, finishing 2nd in 2010, **1st in 2011**, tied for 2nd in 2012, and tied for 3rd in 2013
- During **Nogle's** four years as a **Spartan**, MSU made it to the Semifinals of the **Big Ten Tournament** in 2010 and 2011, Quarterfinals in 2012, and the Final in 2014.
- **Nogle** was the first female **Chieftain** to help her team play in four consecutive **Women's NCAA Tournaments** (2010-2013), with the **Spartans** winning their First Round game in 2010, 2011, and 2013, before losing the First Round game in 2012.
- Both **Sue Tucker** and **Kristen Rasmussen** are inductees into the Okemos High School Athletic Hall of Fame.



Men's Squads

- Over the past 60 years, the Okemos High boys' varsity basketball have been coached by four coaches; each coach mentored at least one **Chieftain** player who went on to play basketball as a **Michigan State Spartan**:
 - ✓ **Bob Baker** - **John Shick**; **Bob Porritt** coached **Brian Breslin** as a freshman
 - ✓ **Stan Stolz** - **Joe Shackleton**, **Bob Fossum**, **Greg Vanek**, **Kris Wishenskey**
 - ✓ **Dan Stolz** - **Mike Kebler**, **Anthony Ianni**, **Dan Chapman**
 - ✓ **Jeff Wonch** - **Conner George**
- On the men's side, every **Spartans** head coach since Forddy Anderson, except Jon Bennington ('65-'69) who died of a heart attack in 1969, coached at least one former **Chieftain**. Which **Chieftains** played for which **Spartans** head coach?
 - ✓ **Forddy Anderson** ('54-'65) - **John Shick**
 - ✓ **Gus Ganakas** ('69-'76) - **Brian Breslin**, **Joe Shackleton**, **Greg Lott**
 - ✓ **Jud Heathcote** ('76-'95) - **Bob Fossum**, **Greg Vanek**, **Kris Wishenskey**
 - ✓ **Tom Izzo** ('95-'2019) - **Mike Kebler**, **Anthony Ianni**, **Dan Chapman**, **Conner George**
- The first **Chieftain** to play on a **Spartans** squad was **John Shick** (1961-65). Ten years passed before the second **Chieftain**, **Brian Breslin**, made the **Spartans** freshmen team during the 1968-'69 season. Interestingly, 50 years later, Breslin completed his term as Chair of the Michigan State University Board of Trustees.
- Of the **Chieftains** who played for the **Spartans**, only two played just a single season – **Bob Fossum** (1980-81) and **Greg Vanek** (1984-85). After Fossum's freshmen year, he turned his attention to the **Spartans** golf team, while Vanek decided to focus on his studies during his senior year.
- Of the **Chieftains** on Okemos' 1981 Class B State Champion team, only one became a **Spartan**: **Greg Vanek** who played only one season (1984-85).
- The first time that a **Spartans** squad included at least two **Chieftains** was the 1973-74 squad that included **Brian Breslin** as a senior and **Joe Shackleton** as

a junior. During Shackleton's sophomore season (1972-73), Breslin was not on the team though he returned to the Spartans squad the following season.

- Over two seasons the **Spartans** men's squad included two **Chieftains**: the first being the 2009-11 season (**Mike Kebler** and **Anthony Ianni**), and the second the 2010-12 season (**Anthony Ianni** and **Dan Chapman**).
- In one season (2010-11) the **Spartans** men's squad included three **Chieftains**: senior **Mike Kebler**, junior **Anthony Ianni**, and freshman **Dan Chapman** (who played in four varsity games).
- In twelve of the past thirteen seasons, excepting '14-'15, the **Spartans** men's squad included at least one **Chieftain**: **Mike Kebler** ('07-'11), **Anthony Ianni** ('09-'12), **Dan Chapman** ('10-'14), and **Conner George** ('15-'20).
- Chieftain **Greg Vanek**, while playing only one season on the **Spartans** men's squad, holds the "record" as the only Spartan to shoot 1000% on both field goals and free throws during his **Spartan** career.
- **Greg Lott** holds what is perhaps a record (at least as a former **Chieftain**) of being the only **Spartan** who, while on the freshman squad, was pressed into service as a starter to play in a varsity game against #1 **Indiana**. While he was 2-2 on FGAs, he was 0-2 on free throw attempts, thus missing his chance to be the first **Spartan** to shoot 1000%, a "record" **Greg Vanek** later set 1984-85 season).
- **Greg Lott** also holds a record as a former **Chieftain** that started and played in only one **Spartans** varsity game (against **Indiana**), since he returned to the JV squad when Coach Ganakas reinstated to temporarily suspend Varsity players to play the next varsity game. Lott was on the JV team for the remainder of the season, his last playing for the **Spartans**, after which he turned his attention to focus on his courses to prepare for a career as a veterinarian.
- **Kris Weshinskey** was the first **Chieftain** to score a 3-pointer for the **Spartans**, this happening December 1, 1990, in a home game at the Breslin Center against **Bowling Green State**. That same season Kris was the first **Chieftain** to score a 3-pointer in a Big 10 away game against **Iowa** on January 5, 1991.
- **Greg Lott**, **Kris Weshinskey**, and **Anthony Ianni** are the only male **Chieftains** who coached basketball. **Lott** coached AAU Girls for three years, assisting a friend in coaching a high school girls team, and coaching his daughter's AAU teams from age 10-14 for four years. He also coached YMCA teams and CYO

teams when his daughters played, and was an assistant girls' varsity coach at Gibraltar High School for two years. **Weshinskey** is currently coaching two AAU teams of eighth-grade boys, one team including Kris' son. **Ianni** is currently an assistant coach on a girls basketball team.

- **Bob Fossum** was the first **Chieftain** basketball player inducted to the Okemos High School Athletic Hall of Fame (inducted in the Hall's 2015 inaugural year).
- During the 2017-18 season, the **Spartans** (w/ **Conner George**) moved up to #1 in the AP Top 25 poll, this marking the fifth time in the poll's nearly seven-decade history that the **Spartans** held a No. 1 ranking. How many former **Chieftains** were on a **Spartans** basketball squad when that team was AP-ranked #1?
 - ✓ Over that seven-decade history of AP ranking of the Top 25 men's basketball teams, the **Spartans** men's squad has been ranked #1 six times. The first two of those times the Spartans went on to win the NCAA National Championship: 1978-79 (when Magic Johnson led the team) and 1999-2000 (when Mateen Cleaves led the team). Neither of those squads included a former **Chieftain**.
 - ✓ The other four times the **Spartans** men's squad was AP-ranked #1 were squads that included a former **Chieftain**. The 2013-14 **Spartans** squad was the first AP-ranked #1 squad to include a former **Chieftain** (**Dan Chapman**).
 - ✓ The next two times the AP ranked the **Spartans** men's squad #1 was during the 2015-16 season (first week of 2016) and 2017-18 season. In the first of those two seasons **Conner George** was a Redshirt (practiced with the team but didn't play in games). Then, his second season (2017-18) as an active player George was the second **Chieftain** to play on **Spartan** squad ranked #1
 - ✓ On January 1, 2018, the [AP poll](#) moved the **Spartans** from #2 to #1, and the next day the [USA Today coaches poll](#) ranked the **Spartans** #1, with **George** the first **Chieftain** on a **Spartans** basketball squad twice ranked #1 by the AP. The most recent of the four times the **Spartans** were AP-ranked #1 with a **Chieftain** (**George**) on the team was the first week of the 2019-20 season.



Men's National Invitation Tournament (NIT)

- **Kris Weshinskey** is the only **Chieftain** to play for the **Spartans** men's team in the National Invitation Tournament (NIT). At the end of the 1992-93 season, he

played in the **Spartans** 88-86 loss to **Oklahoma**. While scoring 12 points, he was 0-5 on his 3-point attempts, thus missing out on being the first **Chieftain**-cum-**Spartan** to score a 3-pointer in an NIT game.



Men's Big Ten Conference

- In 2018, during **Conner George's** redshirt sophomore season, the men's squad won the Big Ten Conference's regular season championship.
- In 2019, during **Conner George's** redshirt junior season, the men's squad shared the Big Ten Conference's regular season championship with **Purdue**.
- In 2020, during **Conner George's** redshirt senior season, the men's squad shared the Big Ten Conference regular season championship with **Wisconsin** and **Maryland**.
- Thus, **Conner George** became the first former **Chieftain** to play on a **Spartans** squad winning three consecutive Big Ten Conference championships, a feat the **Spartans** previously achieved only once during the 1997-2000 seasons.



Men's Big Ten Tournament

- From the 2007-08 season through the 2018-19 season, four former **Chieftains** (**Mike Kebler**, **Anthony Ianni**, **Dan Chapman**, and **Conner George**) helped the **Spartans** to make it to at least the Big Ten Tournament's quarterfinals.
- In 2012, the men's squad won the Big Ten Tournament with the team including two **Chieftains** (**Anthony Ianni** and **Dan Chapman**).
- In 2014, the men's squad again won the Big Ten Tournament with one **Chieftain** (**Dan Chapman**) on the squad.
- In 2016, the men's squad won the Big Ten Tournament. **Conner George** was on the squad as a Redshirt but didn't play in any games that season.

- In the 2017 Big Ten Tournament, the **Spartans** held a 20+ point lead over **Penn State**. With two minutes remaining, Coach Izzo put **Conner George** into the game. With 17 seconds to go, George drove to the basket and was fouled while attempting a shot. The ball didn't go in the hoop, so George was awarded two free throws. As Conner headed to the free throw line, the referee called a technical foul on each of two disgruntled **Penn State** players, so four more free throws (two per technical) to be shot. Coach Izzo instructed George to shoot those four free throws after his first two free throw attempts. Thus, George shot six straight free throws, making 4-6, upping the game's final score to 78-51.
- In 2019, with **Conner George**, the Spartans won the Big Ten Tournament.
- In 2020, the Spartans secured the No. 2 seed in the Big Ten Tournament and were poised to make a deep run in both the Big Ten and NCAA Tournaments. Sadly, both tournaments were cancelled due to the Coronavirus outbreak, thus ending the **Spartans** 2019-2020 season.



Men's NCAA Tournament

- In 1985, **Greg Vanek** was the first **Chieftain** to be a member of a MSU men's basketball squad that qualified for the NCAA Tournament but the **Spartans** lost their first tournament game, 70-68, to the **University of Alabama-Birmingham**.
- **Kris Weshinskey** played in and scored in six NCAA Tournament games: two in 1991 against **Wisconsin-Green Bay** and **Utah**; two in 1993 against **Missouri State** and **Cincinnati**; and two in 1994 against **Seton Hall** and **Duke**, with the **Spartans** losing to the latter school during the tournament's second round.
- **Weshinskey** was the first **Chieftain** to score a 3-pointer in a NCAA Tournament game, this happening on March 22, 1992, against **Cincinnati**.
- During a fourteen-season span (2006-20), ten **Spartans** men's squads having one or more **Chieftains** qualified for the NCAA Tournament: with **Mike Kebler**, **Dan Chapman**, and **Conner George** (four times each) and **Anthony Ianni** (two times).
- During nine seasons, before being eliminated, the **Spartans** reached the Sweet Sixteen twice—2012 with **Anthony Ianni** and **Dan Chapman** and 2013 with **Dan Chapman**; the Elite Eight once with **Dan Chapman** in 2014; and the Final Four

three times: twice with **Mike Kebler** in 2009 and 2010, and once with **Conner George** in 2019.

- **Mike Kebler** was the first **Chieftain** to be on a **Spartans** squad (2008-09) that played in the NCAA Final Four, with the **Spartans** losing to **North Carolina** in the 2009 Championship game.
- In the 2011 NCAA Tournament, the **Spartans** narrowly lost to **UCLA** (78-76) in the first round, this during the only season the **Spartans** squad included three Chieftains: **Mike Kebler**, **Anthony Ianni**, and **Dan Chapman**.
- In 2014 NCAA Tournament, the **Spartans** (with **Dan Chapman**) defeated **Delaware**, **Harvard**, and **Virginia**, before losing to **Connecticut** (60-54) in the East Regional Final.
- On a brighter note, **Dan Chapman**'s 3-pointer in the 2014 East Regional Final game against **Connecticut** marked the first 3-pointer of his **Spartan** career and the final points of MSU's 2013-14 season.
- In the 2016 NCAA Tournament, the **Spartans** were seeded No. 2 in the Midwest Region; however, MSU was upset in their first game by **Middle Tennessee State** (seeded No. 15) in one of the biggest upsets in NCAA tournament history though **Conner George**, a freshman redshirt was not eligible to play. The sting of this loss was softened a year later in the 2017 NCAA Tournament when **Middle Tennessee State** beat **Minnesota**, a team the **Spartans** defeated twice during the regular season but then lost to in the 2017 Big Ten Tournament.
- In 2017, the **Spartans**, with **Conner George**, were the No. 9 seed in the East Region of the NCAA Tournament, marking the 20th straight year the **Spartans** qualified for the tournament.
- In the first round of the 2017 NCAA Tournament, the **Spartans** soundly beat **Miami**. With only 42 seconds remaining, and holding a commanding 78-58 lead over the Hurricanes, **Conner George** entered the game. While George did not touch the ball, his four freshman teammates (Miles Bridges, Josh Langford, Nick Ward, and Cassius Winston) set a scoring record of 57 points, the highest total points scored by a team's freshmen in the history of the NCAA Tournament.

- In 2018, with **Conner George** on the roster, the **Spartans** again qualified for the NCAA Tournament for the 21st consecutive time as the No. 3 seed in the Midwest region, defeating No. 14 **Bucknell** before losing to No. 11-seeded **Syracuse**.
- In 2019, with **Conner George** on the roster, the **Spartans** (seeded #2 in the East Region behind No. 1 seed **Duke** in the East Region and No. 1 seed overall) beat **Bradley** (First Round), **Minnesota** (Second Round), **LSU** (Sweet Sixteen), and **Duke** (in the Elite Eight) before losing in a Final Four semifinal to **Texas Tech**.
- In 2020, with **Conner George** on the roster, the **Spartans**, having won the Big Ten Championship (tri-share), were seeded No. 2 in the Big Ten Tournament and poised to make a run in both the Big Ten and NCAA Tournaments. While the Coronavirus outbreak led to the 2020 Big Ten and NCAA tournaments being shut down, four different simulations predicted which Division I team amidst a field of 63 others teams would have won the 2020 NCAA Tournament.
 - ✓ One [simulation](#) resulted in Michigan State winning the national championship by defeating **Oklahoma**, 85-60.
 - ✓ A second [simulation](#), run by [@CBBSim2020](#) as [MarchMadness2020](#) resulted in MSU defeating **Arizona State**, 81-60 for the national championship.



- ✓ A third [simulation](#), run by ESPN bracketologist Joe Lunardi, crowned Michigan State as national champion by defeating **Florida State**, 68-63.



- ✓ A fourth [simulation](#), run by FiveThirtyEight.com, also crowned the Spartans as national champion, beating **Kansas** by 1 point.

NCAA Tournament simulations back up what we know: MSU had what it took to be champions

- ✓ With the consistent result that **Michigan State** was the ultimate victor in all four simulations the **Spartans** ended their season as the virtual 2020 NCAA national champion.
- ✓ While it wasn't possible for the 2020 Men's Basketball National Championship to be won by players competing on a real basketball court, all **Chieftains** can be proud that **Conner George**, most recent of **The Chieftain Fourteen**, was the first **Chieftain** to help the **Michigan State Spartans** win a virtual national championship, a consensus result across four different simulations.
- ✓ And what would a national championship be without "One Shining Moment"?



Michigan State basketball coach Tom Izzo presented with 2020 national championship trophy during virtual visit with Sparrow Hospital

Some trophies mean more than others.

Michigan State basketball coach Tom Izzo was presented with a 2020 national championship award by Lansing Sparrow Hospital President Alan Vierling during a virtual visit with the coach. According to an employee at the hospital, Sparrow Health System has a daily virtual call to talk about the latest developments in the COVID-19 pandemic and on Friday they were joined by a special guest: Tom Izzo.

The calls are open to the entire health system, so Izzo was able to give some words of encouragement to a number of the workers battling COVID-19 on the front lines. An employee estimates a few hundred workers were on the call and said it was typical Izzo, gushing about how proud he is to be a member of the community.

Izzo was also presented a mock-up 2020 national championship trophy by Vierling, who is also Lansing Sparrow Hospital's Chief Nursing Officer.



Michigan State's 2020 basketball team has been awarded virtual national titles by ESPN's Joe Lunardi and 538.com, but I'm betting the one from Sparrow is extra special compared to the others.

Additional information and statistics on individual player and team performance for **The Chieftain Fourteen** who played for **Michigan State** can be found in the **Spartans** 2016-17 [men's](#) and [women's](#) media guides, in prior year or more recent year media guides, and in the player vignettes presented in prior chapters.



Video Highlights of Chieftains and Spartans

One Chieftain Basketball trivia factoid: the first YouTube video of a **Chieftain** as a **Spartan** (that this writer could locate) was of **Kris Weshinskey (#3)** playing on 1/29/92 in the [#15 Michigan at #13 Michigan State](#) game. Click video link below to watch game highlights, a game in which Kris played eleven minutes, had two assists, and scored seven points on 3-4 shooting from the field and 1-2 from the foul line. Unfortunately, the Wolverines defeated the **Spartans**, 89-79, in overtime.



Highlights Including Kris Weshinskey in Spartans Overtime Loss to Michigan

The second YouTube video of a **Chieftain** playing as a **Spartan** shows **Mike Kebler** in a 2011 game against **Purdue** (see the **Mike Kebler** chapter). The first **Chieftain** to appear in YouTube videos was **Conner George** playing as a **Chieftain** (see **Conner George** chapter).

Only three **Chieftains** appear in YouTube videos as adults – **Bob Fossum** discussing golf; **Kristen Rasmussen** as the head coach for Okemos High's girls' basketball team; and **Anthony Ianni** as an anti-bullying speaker for Michigan's Department of Civil Rights and the Relentless Tour.

Sadly, for the first nine **Chieftain** players (**John Shick** through **Kristen Rasmussen**), YouTube apparently has no videos of them playing basketball at the high school or university level, probably because they played basketball before their parents owned video cameras to record their child playing basketball at the high school level or before the Internet and YouTube came into existence as a way to post and share such videos.

ESPN's *Beyond the Paint* has featured a [segment](#) on the life of **Anthony Ianni** who has battled Autism through the game of basketball. More recently, a segment of a *Spartans All-Access* episode featured **Conner George** (see George's chapter). Further, over the past five years, photos and/or videos of **Conner George** frequently appeared in posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, many of which are shared in Conner's chapter.

On the other hand, absent a "way back" machine to make it possible to go back in time to watch any of these players "back in the day," Newspapers.com proved a "time travel" search engine that allowed this chronicle to find game-specific statistics/photos for many of the **Chieftains** from their years playing for **Okemos High** and **Michigan State**, with many player statistics and photos shared in this chronicle.



MSU's All-Time Top 50 Male Basketball Players & Chieftain Teammates

On July 11, 2014, *Lansing State Journal* sports columnist Graham Couch published his list of [MSU's all-time top 50 male basketball players](#). Nearly 50% (n=23) of the list's Top 50 were on a squad having one or more **Chieftains** playing as a **Spartan**.

I have annotated Couch's list (see below) to show which of the **Top 50 Spartans** were on a squad that included one or more **Chieftains**.

- [No. 1: Earvin "Magic" Johnson](#)
- [No. 2: Mateen Cleaves](#)
- [No. 3: Scott Skiles](#) – **Greg Vanek**
- [No. 4: Steve Smith](#) – **Kris Weshinskey**
- [No. 5: Shawn Respert](#) – **Kris Weshinskey**
- [No. 6: Greg Kelser](#)
- [No. 7: Johnny Green](#)
- [No. 8: Mike Robinson](#) – **Joe Shackleton**
- [No. 9: Jay Vincent](#) – **Bob Fossum**
- [No. 10: Morris Peterson](#)
- [No. 11: Draymond Green](#) – **Mike Kebler**, **Anthony Ianni**, and **Dan Chapman**
- [No. 12: Terry Furlow](#) – **Brian Breslin** and **Joe Shackleton**
- [No. 13: Ralph Simpson](#)
- [No. 14: Julius McCoy](#)

[No. 15: Sam Vincent](#) – **Greg Vanek**
[No. 16: Charlie Bell](#)
[No. 17: Horace Walker](#)
[No. 18: Kalin Lucas](#) – **Mike Kebler**
[No. 19: Adreian Payne](#) – **Mike Kebler**, **Anthony Ianni**, and **Dan Chapman**
[No. 20: Drew Neitzel](#) – **Mike Kebler**
[No. 21: Lindsay Hairston](#) – **Joe Shackleton**
[No. 22: Maurice Ager](#)
[No. 23: Paul Davis](#)
[No. 24: Andre Hutson](#)
[No. 25: Lee Lafayette](#)
[No. 26: Gary Harris](#) - **Dan Chapman**
[No. 27: Darryl Johnson](#)
[No. 28: Jack Quiggle](#)
[No. 29: Jason Richardson](#)
[No. 30: Stan Washington](#) – **John Shick**
[No. 31: Antonio Smith](#)
[No. 32: Eric Snow](#) – **Kris Weshinskey**
[No. 33: Chet Aubuchon](#)
[No. 34: Mike Peplowski](#) – **Kris Weshinskey**
[No. 35: Keith Appling](#) – **Mike Kebler**, **Anthony Ianni**, and **Dan Chapman**
[No. 36: Shannon Brown](#)
[No. 37: Kirk Manns](#)
[No. 38: Goran Sutton](#) – **Mike Kebler**
[No. 39: Alan Anderson](#)
[No. 40: Branden Dawson](#) – **Dan Chapman**
[No. 41: Bill Kilgore](#) – **Joe Shackleton**
[No. 42: Pete Gent](#) – **John Shick**
[No. 43: Al Ferrari](#)
[No. 44: Ken Redfield](#)
[No. 45: Chris Hill](#)
[No. 46: Raymar Morgan](#) – **Mike Kebler**
[No. 47: Kevin Smith](#)
[No. 48: Kevin Willis](#)
[No. 49: Matt Steigenga](#) – **Kris Weshinskey**
[No. 50: Marcus Taylor](#)

The following summarizes the above information:

- **John Shick** – played at least one season with two **Top 50 Spartans**: Pete Gent (No. 42) and Stan Washington (No. 30)
- **Brian Breslin** – played at least one season with one Top 50: Terry Furlow (No. 12)

- **Joe Shackleton** – played at least one season with four Top 50: Bill Kilgore (No. 41), Lindsay Hairston (No. 21), Terry Furlow (No. 12), and Mike Robison (No. 8)
- **Greg Lott** – might have played with Lindsay Hairston (No. 21) had Hairston not been one of the ten Spartans that Coach Ganakas suspended for the game against **Indiana**. As a result, Lott was called up from the JV team, started the Varsity game, and played against two players (Quinn Buckner and Kent Benson) who probably would be included on a list of Indiana's All-Time Top 50 players.
- **Bob Fossum** – played at least one season with one Top 50: Jay Vincent (No. 9)
- **Greg Vanek** – played at least one season with one Top 50: Scott Skiles (No. 3)
- **Kris Weshinskey** – played at least one season each with five Top 50: Matt Steigenga (No. 49), Mike Peplowski (No. 34), Eric Snow (No. 32), Shawn Respert (No. 5), and Steve Smith (No. 4)
- **Mike Kebler** – played at least one season each with seven Top 50: Raymar Morgan (No. 46), Goran Suton (No. 38), Keith Appling (No. 35), Drew Neitzel (No. 20), Adreian Payne (No. 19), Kalin Lucas (No. 18), and Draymond Green (No. 11)
- **Anthony Ianni** – played at least one season each with three Top 50: Keith Appling (No. 35), Adreian Payne (No. 19), and Draymond Green (No. 11)
- **Dan Chapman** – played at least one season each with five Top 50: Branden Dawson (No. 40), Keith Appling (No. 35), Gary Harris (No. 26), Adreian Payne (No. 19), and Draymond Green (No. 11)

Couch's listing was published in mid-2014, a year ahead of the 2015-16 season when **Conner George** became the most recent **Chieftain** member of a **Spartans** basketball squad (although a redshirt that season). Over that season and the next four seasons (2016-2020), George played with and competed against teammates (e.g., Cassius Winston) who eventually might be included in an updated listing of MSU's all-time top 50 basketball players.

Given that each of the 11 **Chieftain** boys played one or more seasons on a **Spartans** squad that included at least one **Spartan** on the Top 50 list, the following highlights some Chieftain experiences playing on Spartan squad having a Top 50 Spartan.

- The male **Chieftain** who played most frequently on **Spartan** teams having one or more of the **Top 50 Spartans** was **Mike Kebler** (seven), followed by **Kris Weshinskey** and **Dan Chapman** (five each); **Joe Shackleton** (four); **Anthony Ianni** (three); **John Shick** and **Greg Vanek** (two); and **Brian Breslin** and **Bob Fossum** (one each).

- The earliest **Chieftain** to play on a MSU squad with one or more all-time Top 50 players was **John Shick** (No. 30-Stan Washington & No. 42-Pete Gent).
- One might ask which male **Chieftain**, on average, competed on a **Spartans** squad with the highest ranked **Top 50 Spartan(s)**. One answer to this question would be to average the ranks of the Top 50 Spartan teammates on the same squad having a **Chieftain** for at least one season (without factoring in how many seasons that **Chieftain** was on a **Spartans** squad with one or more teammates ranked in the Top 50). That non-weighted analysis is provided below.
 - ✓ **Avg. 36.0 - John Shick** [based on Shick being on a Spartans squad at least one season each with Pete Gent (No. 42) and Stan Washington (No. 30). Thus, $42 + 30 = 72 \div \text{by the two Top 50 teammates} = \text{Avg. 36.0}$. This same basic formula was applied to the following Chieftains.]
 - ✓ **Avg. 27.7 - Anthony Ianni** – Keith Appling (No. 35), Adreian Payne (No. 19), and Draymond Green (No. 11)
 - ✓ **Avg. 26.2 - Dan Chapman** – Branden Dawson (No. 40), Keith Appling (No. 35), Gary Harris (No. 26), Adreian Payne (No. 19), and Draymond Green (No. 11)
 - ✓ **Avg. 26.7 - Mike Kebler** – Raymar Morgan (No. 46), Goran Sutton (No. 38), Keith Appling (No. 35), Drew Neitzel (No. 20), Adreian Payne (No. 19), Kalin Lucas (No. 18), and Draymond Green (No. 11)
 - ✓ **Avg. 24.8 - Kris Weshinskey** – Matt Steigenga (No. 49), Mike Peplowski (No. 34), Eric Snow (No. 32), Shawn Respert (No. 5), and Steve Smith (No. 4)
 - ✓ **Avg. 21.0 - Greg Lott** – One might say that Lott played in place of Lindsay Hairston (No. 21) who was one of the ten Spartans that Coach Ganakas suspended for the **Indiana** game; as a result, Lott was called up from the JV team, started the Varsity game against **Indiana**, and competed against two players (Quinn Buckner and Kent Benson) who probably would be ranked among **Indiana's** all-time Top 50 players.
 - ✓ **Avg. 20.5 - Joe Shackleton** – Bill Kilgore (No. 41), Lindsay Hairston (No. 21), Terry Furlow (No 12), and Mike Robinson (No. 8)
 - ✓ **Avg. 12.0 - Brian Breslin** – Terry Furlow (No. 12)
 - ✓ **Avg. 09.0 - Bob Fossum** – Jay Vincent (No. 9)
 - ✓ **Avg. 03.0 - Greg Vanek** – Scott Skiles (No. 3)

- Based on this non-weighted analysis, the **Spartans** squad having a **Chieftain** (**Greg Vanek**) and also the highest ranked **Top 50 Spartan** (Scott Skiles No. 3) was the 1984-1985 **Spartans** squad. Note, however, that one might obtain a different ranking by factoring into the formula the total number of seasons that a **Chieftain** and a Top 50 player were on the same squad.
- But wait! In mid-March 2020, Graham Couch [updated his Top 50 list](#), notably inserting Cassius Winston at No. 3 (bumping Scott Skiles to No. 4) and placing Xavier Tillman at No. 16.
- With Winston replacing Skiles for the No. 3 spot on the list of Top 50 **Spartans**, and **Conner George** and Cassius Winston on the same Spartans squad for four seasons (2016-2020), **Conner George** becomes the **Chieftain** who was on the **Spartans** squad having the highest ranked **Top 50 Spartan** (Cassius Winston at No. 3)—and George and Winston were on the same squad for four consecutive years.



Conner George & Cassius Winston (#3 of Top 50 Spartans)



Red Cedar Reflections

In this section **Chieftain** and **Spartan** basketball coaches share memories of one or more of **The Chieftain Fourteen** that he or she coached at Okemos High or Michigan State.

Chieftain Coaches Reflections

Over the past 60 seasons of Okemos High basketball, eight coaches mentored one or more of **The Chieftain Fourteen** as follows:

Doug Richey and **Bob Baker**: **John Shick**

Bob Porritt: **Brian Breslin**

Stan Stolz:

Joe Shackleton, **Gregg Lott**, **Bob Fossum**, **Greg Vanek**, and **Kris Weshinskey**

Dan Stolz: **Kris Weshinskey**, **Mike Kebler**, **Anthony Ianni**, and **Dan Chapman**

Jeff Wonch: **Conner George**

Ron Mott: **Sue Tucker** and **Kristen Rasmussen**

Tom Schaberg: **Tracy Nogle**

Three of these coaches are inductees of the [Greater Lansing Area Sports Hall of Fame](#): [Stan Stolz](#) (1999); [Ron Mott](#) (2002); and [Dan Stolz](#) (2017).



I reached out to seven of these coaches, except **Bob Baker** who died in 2011 and had coached **John Shick** on the Varsity team for two years. Fortunately, I was able to reach **Doug Richey** who coached Shick on the freshman team and junior varsity (Reserve) team his sophomore year and was Baker's assistant varsity coach for John's junior and senior years.



Robert E. “Bob” Baker (Varsity Coach) & Doug Earl Richey (Junior Varsity Coach)

Coached: *John Shick*

John Shick: *“In 1958 I coached the Junior Varsity basketball team at Okemos High School. John Shick was a player on that team. He was a good team player. John’s enthusiasm and basketball skills added to the team’s success. Although not a tall player, he had good dribbling, shooting, and passing skills. In addition he was always aware of all the players on the court. In one of our difficult games, our offense was not doing well. We decided to put John at the offensive end of the court as a cherry pick. When we got the ball, it was thrown down the court to John, affecting the positioning of the opposing team’s players to defend John in their offense set. This allowed us to win the game.”* (Doug Richey, personal communication)

In addition to Coach Richey’s comments, the Okemos High 1959 and 1961 *Tomahawk* yearbooks had statements about the 1958-59 junior varsity (reserve) team, the 1960-61 varsity team, and John Shick.

“The reserve basketball team had a fine season in two ways. The team, coached by Doug Richey, had a good year in the won-lost department, finishing second in the unofficial league reserve standings, and also gave valuable experience to many players, the primary purpose of a junior varsity squad.

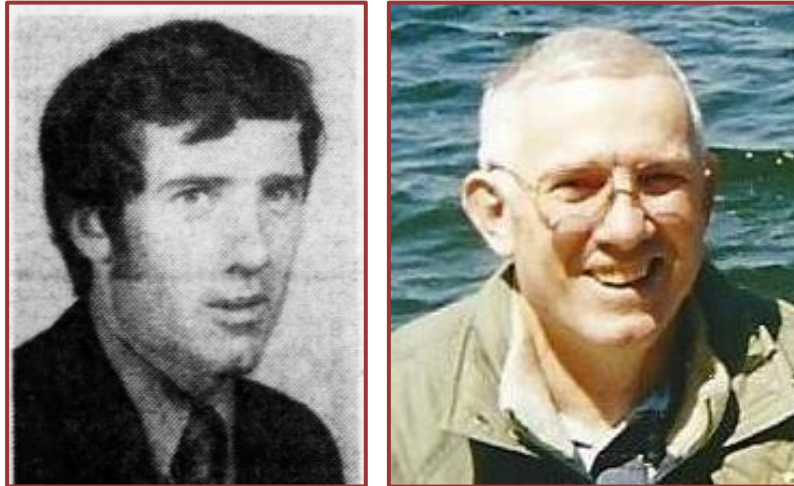
The team was led by ‘Little John’ Shick, a hustling guard with a fine outside set shot. John, the team’s leading scorer with a 14-point average, contributed to the team spirit with his determined playing.” (Source: 1959 *Tomahawk*)

Similarly, the 1961 *Tomahawk* reported on that year’s varsity squad and John Shick:

“A new school, a new gym and a new record, that’s the way it was this year for the Okemos varsity basketball squad. The Chiefs ended their season with a fine record of fourteen wins and three losses. This included a league championship and the distinction of never having been beaten on the home court [of the new high school].

*Under the fine coaching of Mr. Baker and the leadership of co-captains Bill Martin and **John Shick**, the team became one of the best teams Okemos has ever had. Two members of the team made honor teams; John Shick, unanimous choice all Ingham County league team and honorable mention all-state, and Bob Breckenfeld, honorable mention all-county league team.” (Source: 1961 Tomahawk)*

In addition to Richey’s reflections on John Shick, each of the other six coaches kindly “looked back” and shared their reflections on the **Chieftains** they coached.



Bob Porritt (1966 & Now)

Coached: **Brian Breslin (on the OHS freshman team during the 1965-66 season)**

Brian Breslin: *“Brian came from a wonderful supportive family. He was a tall skinny kid who was nicknamed “sticks” by his family because of his long skinny legs. He was a young man who was growing multiple “inches” each year. Despite his physical weakness, due to his fast maturing process, he showed a lot of potential as a basketball player because he could shoot the ball and had good court savvy. As the years passed by, it was fun to see how he grew in strength and developed into a very good high school and college basketball player.”*

One of the great blessings of being a coach is working with players who each bring a different personality to a team. The goal for the coach is to work with each player's personality and skills set and mold them so that they complement those of their teammates.

Brian was one of those kids who made that easy for me as a coach. His fun personality and work ethic were examples for all of his teammates. He played a key role in helping his teammates recognize their roles which led to our team's improvement and success. I appreciated the time I had to work with Brian and know his family.” (Bob Porritt, personal communication)



(Then & Now)

Stanley Stolz (1968-1994 – Career Won-Lost Record: 444-117)

Coached: *Joe Shackleton, Greg Lott, Bob Fossum, Greg Vanek, Kris Weshinskey*

Joe Shackleton: *“Joe played varsity basketball three years and graduated in 1971. He was an All-Stater his senior year and averaged nearly 20 points per game. Joe had a great work ethic along with his strong leadership qualities. He was a very popular with his teammates and his classmates. Joe was a pleasure to coach!”* (Stan Stolz, personal communication)

Greg Lott: *“Greg played two years of varsity basketball and was All-League his senior year. He led the team in both scoring and rebounding. Greg was extremely popular with his teammates and classmates. Greg will never forget his MSU varsity experience. As a freshman he was asked to guard Kent Benson, an All-American from Indiana, who was 6’10 and weighed 270 lbs. Greg had a great attitude and a pleasure to coach!”* (Stan Stolz, personal communication)

Bob Fossum: *“Bob was brought to the varsity his freshman year. He had exceptional quickness and speed and quickly became a favorite of the fans! Bob took Okemos to the semi-finals his junior year and the quarter-finals his senior year. He was an All-Stater in both golf and basketball his senior year. Bob ended his career as one of the top point getters in Okemos history. Bob was a pleasure to coach!”* (Stan Stolz, personal communication)

Greg Vanek: *“Greg played two years of varsity basketball and graduated in 1980. He was the “big man” on the State Championship Team of 1980. He worked very hard to make himself a player by his dedication to the gym and the weight room. Greg was All-League and Honorable Mention All-State his senior year. He was a real team player and without him Okemos would never have a Basketball State Title! He was a great kid who was a pleasure to coach.”* (Stan Stolz, personal communication)

Kris Weshinskey: *“Kris played on the varsity squad only one year for Okemos. He had a very good year as a sophomore. He was a good shooter who displayed exceptional floor savvy. I liked Kris a great deal and was terribly disappointed when his family moved. I was so proud of his MSU experiences. He made all of Okemos proud!”* (Stan Stolz, personal communication)



(Then and Now)

Ron Mott (Career Girls Won-Lost Record: 346-90)

Coached: *Sue Tucker* and *Kristen Rasmussen*

Sue Tucker: *“Sue Tucker was a wonderfully talented, gifted and caring three-sport athlete (volleyball, basketball, and track) at Okemos High School from 1980 to 1982. She loved and had a passion for all sports. As a young kid, she played six different sports. During high school, Sue was a great team player making everyone around her better. She excelled in rebounding, assists, blocked shots, and scoring. She was strong, agile, and fast, and could take over a game at any time. Sue was an outstanding person and athlete to coach. She was a three-year All-State in basketball and All-State one year in track. In 1981 she was a leader on our 1981 state champion team in basketball. Sue was 1982 State of Michigan Miss Basketball. She received All-American recognition in basketball from Street and Smith, Adidas, and Converse. Sue was a four-year Michigan State University basketball player. She is an inductee to the Greater Lansing Sports Hall of Fame and to the Okemos High School Athletic Hall of Fame. Sue earned a doctorate degree in Family and Children Special Needs.” (Ron Mott, personal communication)*

Kristen Rasmussen: *“Kristen Rasmussen was a wonderfully talented and gifted athlete in three sports (volleyball, basketball and track) at Okemos High School from 1992 to 1995. She was excellent in rebounding, assists, blocked shots, and scoring. Kristen was a very unselfish player and made everyone around her a better player. She was a three- year All-State basketball player. At Michigan State University she was a four-year starter and three-year captain on the women’s basketball team. Kristen is an inductee to the Greater Lansing Sports Hall of Fame and the Okemos High School Sports Hall of Fame. From 2000-2009 Kristen played in the WNBA for numerous teams. Kristen also played in the European and Australian basketball leagues. She has coached at the collegiate level, especially at Simmons College and is currently the Okemos High School girls’ basketball coach.” (Ron Mott, personal communication)*



Daniel Earl Stolz (1994-2012 – Career Won-Lost Record: 338-78)

Coached: *Kris Weshinskey, Mike Kebler, Anthony Ianni, and Dan Chapman*

Kris Weshinskey: *“Kris played on the JV team as a freshman, and started every game. He was one of the team’s leading scorers as well as being a good passer, defender, and rebounder. I really enjoyed coaching Kris; he was anxious to learn and picked up new moves and techniques very quickly. Kris showed a great deal of potential and had terrific quickness and vertical jumping ability. Kris moved up to the Varsity as a sophomore and had a very good season. I especially remember being shocked when he dunked on a breakaway layup at Charlotte. Unfortunately we didn’t get to watch his Junior and Senior year as his family moved to Virginia.” (Dan Stolz, personal communication)*

Mike Kebler: *“Mike Kebler was a classmate of my son Scott, so I’ve watched Mike play a variety of sports since he was in 3rd grade. Mike is a terrific athlete who was good at a number of sports. I hoped that he would someday decide to dedicate more time to basketball. As a 12-year-old, Mike was the MLB Pitch Hit and Run competition national winner. Mike was the leading scorer on the 7th & 8th grade Kinawa Middle School basketball team. I was excited to think of the HS team we might have when we joined the two Middle Schools in 9th grade. Mike had solid freshman and JV seasons but really started to blossom as a Junior when he became a full-time Varsity starter and a top defender on a team that made it to the State Championship game. He continued to improve and assumed the role of a primary scorer as a senior. Mike led the team in scoring as well as being the top defender while leading the team to League and District titles while earning All-State honors. Mike was also a State Champion in Tennis. He was also a motocross driver, which I encouraged him to take up later in life!” (Dan Stolz, personal communication)*

Anthony Ianni: *“Anthony was in the same class as Mike Kebler and my son Scott, so I was able to watch Anthony play since he was in 5th grade. Anthony always gave a great effort in whatever sport he was playing. He was always much taller than the rest of his classmates, which may have been awkward at times socially but I think it allowed him to develop confidence in his basketball skills. Anthony has always had terrific shooting touch and rebounded the ball very well. His play was very instinctive and he always hustled.*

He was brought up to the Varsity as a sophomore and had three exceptional years on Varsity. During his junior year we reached the State Finals and Anthony scored 21 in the Championship game! Anthony had an excellent senior season and had several scholarship offers to choose from. Anthony was a pleasure to coach and I was so happy to see him play for the Spartans!" (Dan Stolz, personal communication)

Dan Chapman: *"Dan was a player that I can remember keeping an eye on since he started attending summer basketball camp during his middle school years. I thought he would be an excellent high school player because he was a scrappy competitor and understood the game and his role. He had solid freshmen and JV seasons and then joined me on the Varsity as a junior. Dan was an excellent defender that often times guarded the opponents best perimeter player. As a senior, Dan had such a growth spurt that he could play or guard most any position. He was a starter and had some big games his senior year, he could score, rebound and defend. I also coached Dan that spring on the Varsity Golf team; he was an excellent player that could really crush the ball. I was so pleased that Dan decided to try out for MSU's basketball team."* (Dan Stolz, personal communication)



Tom Schaberg

Coached: Tracy Nogle

Tracy Nogle: *"I first coached Tracy Nogle when she was in seventh grade on an AAU team. Even at that age she was an incredible competitor and athlete. I was able to watch her development over the next few years. She loved to play point guard and would look to pass as well as score. She was a willing student always looking to learn, and improve her game.*

I had the good fortune to coach Tracy all through high school as first her JV coach, and then her last three years on varsity. She was a three year starter at guard who could defend, score, and rebound. At 5'9' she had the size and strength to guard bigger players and the quickness to guard smaller players. I feel her best move was a pull up jump shot with which she was extremely effective. She was able to go either to her left or right which made her very difficult to stop.

Tracy could have played on scholarship at a lot of schools but she loved Michigan State and chose to walk-on there instead. While Tracy was truly a great player, she was an even better person and teammate." (Tom Schaberg, personal communication)



Jeff Cook Wonch, Jr. (2012-2018)

Coached: Conner George

Conner George: Commenting on George scoring 41 points in Okemos' 71-66 victory over **Troy Athens** in the Holiday Hoops Invitational Tournament, Okemos coach Jeff Wonch, said: *"It couldn't have happened to a better guy...With his work ethic, and how hard he goes at it in practice. ...It really couldn't have happened to a better kid"* ([Source](#)).

"Conner is the type of player every coach loves because he understands the importance of improving every day. He is one of the hardest working players I have ever coached. Conner makes the most out of every minute he is on the court and understands that he has the ability to outwork his opponents. There were many games when everyone in the gym knew Conner was getting the ball and he would still get the job done. Conner made the 2015 Lansing State Journal Dream Team and earned Associated Press Honorable Mention All-State." (Jeff Wonch, personal communication)

This chapter provided opportunity for past and current Okemos High basketball coaches to share their memories of coaching one or more of **The Chieftain Fourteen** who, in a short period of time, went on to play basketball for the **Michigan State Spartans**.

Spartan Coaches Reflections

As in the preceding section on **Chieftain Coaches Reflections**, this section provides opportunity for **Spartan** coaches to share their memories of coaching former **Chieftains** as **Spartans**.

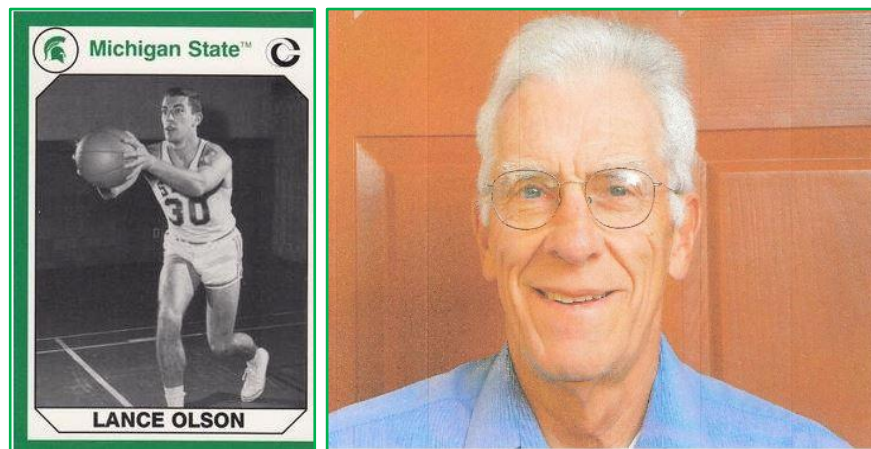


Three Spartans Head Coaches: Gus Ganakas, Jud Heathcoate, and Tom Izzo

With the passing of [Jud Heathcote](#) and [Gus Ganakas](#), plus two of Ganakas' assistant coaches ([Robert W. Nordmann](#) and [Matthew Aitch](#)), they were not available to share their memories of coaching their former **Chieftain** players as **Spartans**.

- For two players (**Brian Breslin** and **Joe Shackleton**) coached by Ganakas, comments by Ganakas about these players as reported in articles published in the *Lansing State Journal* are presented.
- For two players (**Sue Tucker** and **Karen Rasmussen**) coached by [Karen Langeland](#), Karen's comments about these players as reported in articles in the *Lansing State Journal* are presented.
- For two players (**Greg Vanek** and **Kris Weshinskey**) coached by Jud Heathcote, Jud's comments about these players as reported in articles published in the *Lansing State Journal* are presented.
- For four players (**Mike Kebler**, **Anthony Ianni**, **Dan Chapman**, and **Conner George**) coached by Tom Izzo, Tom's comments about these players as reported in articles published in the *Lansing State Journal* or other sources are presented.

However, a search for former **Spartan** assistant coaches located three such coaches. **Lance Olson**, an assistant to Forddy Anderson, shared memories of coaching **John Shick**; **Pat Miller** shared memories of coaching **Greg Lott** his freshman season; and **John Holms** shared memories of coaching **Bob Fossum** who played on both the JV team and in some varsity games during his freshmen season. **Suzy Merchant**, the Spartans women's head coach, shared her memories of coaching **Tracy Nogle**.



Lance Olson (Then & Now)

John Shick (Freshman '61-'62 & Varsity '62-'65) – *"I initially saw John Shick at the first try out practice for the selection of the members of the MSU freshmen basketball team. He appeared physically as a tall, thin, wiry figure and when his turn came to introduce himself with a brief background, he displayed an attentive and inquisitive manner with an eagerness to learn about the game of basketball. I had recently returned to East Lansing, after playing a season in the NIBL AAU League, to replace Tom Rand as freshmen basketball coach, who had been activated from the Army Reserves due to the Cuban crisis.*

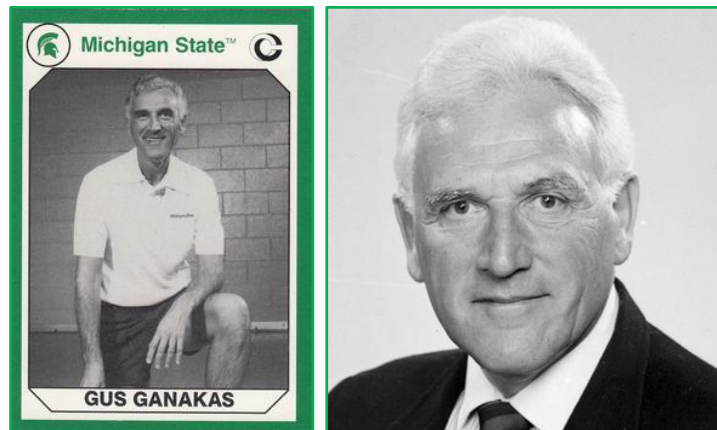
At our first practice meeting, I emphasized that the transition from high school to college basketball is characterized by a significant increase in speed and quickness, the accent on defense, and particularly the amount of physical contact in all phases of the game. And our initial practices were designed to concentrate on those areas. After several weeks of drills, plays, demonstrations, and exercises, we had an inter squad scrimmage, which was officiated by referees.

During the scrimmage I sat in the middle between the two teams on the same bench to evaluate and comment on each team's play. During one play a rebound came off the rim and was strongly contested by several players, one being John. The ball was finally controlled by a player, I recall, named Lonnie Lynn. During his attempt to clear himself from the congestion, his elbow struck John squarely in the head. John went down. No foul called by the referee!

Play was stopped and after a time for evaluation it was determined John was shaken but not injured, and then he sat next to me on the bench. After a significant period of silence he turned to me and said: "No call?" I turned to him and whispered in his ear "John, that is a very good example of the physical contact you'll have in playing college basketball." John learned quickly, became a valued member of the team, and in his senior year he made a contribution to the team in twenty three games. No physical damage was done to John that day during his freshman year but he remembered that event 58 years later when I recently talked with him on the phone. John went on to a successful 30-year career in the Navy."
(Lance Olson, personal communication)

[Note: While Lance recalls this incident happening during his first year coaching the freshman team, John recalls it actually occurring during the fall quarter of his sophomore year. MSU Registrar records show that was the only quarter that Lonnie Lynn was enrolled at MSU. By his sophomore year, John recalls, "Lance might have been assisting Forddy ... and assigned to coach/manage one of the two squads [during the intra-squad scrimmage]. Allowing Lynn to scrimmage with the varsity as a freshman is consistent with [Coach Anderson's] intention of enticing [Lynn] to come to MSU" (John Shick, personal communication). As it turned out, Lynn did not stay at MSU, leaving the university shortly after Thanksgiving of that year.]





Gus Ganakas (July 3, 1926 – January 11, 2019)

Brian Breslin (Freshman '69-'70 & Varsity '70-'72 & '73-'74) – Looking to the 1970-71 season, coach Gus Ganakas projected Brian Breslin as *“a possible starter because...he can fill one of our voids....Brian has the desire and ability to play aggressive, defensive basketball, and that is what we need.”* In an upset 72-62 overtime victory over **Toledo**, while Breslin scored eight points, he was 0-3 from the charity stripe. At the post-game press conference, a reporter asked Ganakas about Breslin missing his three free throw attempts, making Brian 0-6 on free throw attempts over the previous two games. Ganakas responded: *“Basketball is a crazy game.... “We worked out at noon at the Toledo fieldhouse and finished the session with a free throw shooting contest. Who do you think won? Brian Breslin, of course. Beat every player on the team.”* (Gus Ganakas as quoted in *LSJ* articles)

Later in the season at Lexington, the Spartans pulled off a 91-85 victory over **Kentucky**. Only six Spartans played in the game, Breslin the third leading Spartan scorer with 17 points (seven field goals and 3-4 on free throws). Ganakas said that he was *“greatly impressed”* with Breslin’s rebounding. On December 19, playing at home in Ann Arbor, **Michigan** scored a last second buzzer shot to defeat the Spartans, 84-82. Michigan’s Campy Russell powered the Michigan attack with 27 points, despite *“a fine defensive effort by 6-5 senior Brian Breslin”* Ganakas said: *“Breslin did everything any coach could ask to stop a player of Russell’s caliber.”* (Gus Ganakas as quoted in *LSJ* articles)

Joe Shackleton (Freshman '71-'72 & Varsity '72-'74) – On November 20, 1973, the Spartans played their annual **Green-White** game, with the Green team posting a 95-81 victory. Shackleton, on the White team, scored 16 points. Joe’s play *“pleased [Coach Gus] Ganakas. ‘We thought we might have to start using him more at forward because we are so deep at guard and then [he] turns out to be one of our steadier guards in the game.... He’s a very fine shooter and played some good defense.’”* (Gus Ganakas as quoted in *LSJ* articles)





Patrick (“Pat”) Miller (Assistant Coach at MSU, 1972-76 & Now)

Greg Lott (Freshman '74-'75) – *“I first became aware of Greg Lott when he was a junior in high school. Jeff Tropf from Holt HS in the Lansing area was one of the kids on our recruiting radar and I recall Greg being very competitive when his Okemos teams matched up against Holt.*

Our Head Coach at MSU, Gus Ganakas, had great respect for Okemos Coach Stan Stolz and his program and consequently knew they were fundamentally sound.

While Greg was an undersized post he battled on the inside regardless of who the Chieftains were playing and was especially tough against Tropf as they moved into their senior years. Greg could hit the outside shot and without the 3 pointer being in vogue was more than able to hit from what we would call the ‘short 17’ if moved out of the post. We continued to recruit and eventually signed Tropf which began for him a stellar college and pro career.

While Greg was out of position in the post I envisioned him being a wing player in college. While I don’t believe the term ‘preferred walk-on’ was used in those days, I was happy to see Greg at our junior varsity tryouts and almost certainly green-lighted him onto the team where his competitiveness and skill set showed up again.

Big Ten teams were in the process of adjusting budgets and scholarships because of the impending Title IX legislation and the introduction of women’s sports was imminent. As such, JV teams were being phased out, MSU’s included, and Greg endured a part of that process with our merry band of mostly walk-ons that season.

When the necessity arose, unfortunately, for our reserve team to be pressed into service against the presumed soon to be #1 Indiana, the game was improperly characterized by the media as a ‘walkout game.’ But the Spartans had a game to play that afternoon and Greg was one of the first reserve players I called to instruct him to come to Jenison to help us

fulfill our commitment to play the game. I say 'improper characterization' because of my encounter with the media that covered the game and how throughout my lifetime I've witnessed how the press sets the 'meme' and then crafts the reporting of the story to fit that meme, facts be damned!

The varsity players in question, all black, were ordered by Coach Ganakas to exit the scene twice that day. Once after they had been poorly advised to challenge the starting lineup at a pregame meal hours before the game, and the second time when they reappeared in our Jenison locker room shortly before the game, seeking forgiveness for their insubordination and expressing their strong desire to play in that day's game. That those ten players had collectively challenged Coach's decision to start our one freshman, Tropf, a white player, made it racial in spite of the black players asserting that it was not. But ill-advised and poorly thought out 'group think'—probably not racial—did not fit the media 'meme.'

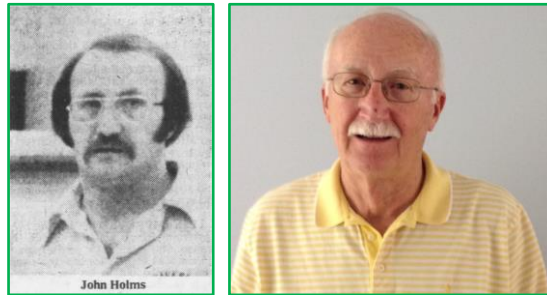
With our reserve players already dressed in their game uniforms in the locker room, Coach Ganakas stood fast and informed the ten black players that they might never play again for the green and white but most certainly not that day. Those players responded by leaving the locker room and eventually the field house, with the media 'meme' characterizing what had transpired as a 'walkout' without regard to what the actual facts were, facts that did not square with the way the media ultimately reported the story.

I've seen this press frenzy with ill-fated memes dozens of times in my lifetime and watched it negatively impact our public discourse of events in our country and contribute to the sorry state of 'journalism' as it exists today. Many lives were affected that day and a presentation of the facts versus fulfilling the media 'meme' would have been appreciated and useful. They didn't walk out; they were told to exit or leave (twice) which necessitated Greg and the reserve team to step up and play the game that day. Coach was very aware of the gravity of the situation and did not overreact in anger but instead employed a measured approach just as he did when debating their fate about returning—a huge decision for his future as well as their lives as well.

Regardless, Indiana Coach Bobby Knight entered the Spartan locker room with a knock shortly before we were to take the floor. He informed the reserve team that they were involved in a 'great tragedy' in college sports but we were playing Indiana University and [Scott] May, [Quinn] Buckner, and [Bob] Wilkerson, along with the other Hoosiers, were going to 'come after us with everything they had. Good luck and we will see you on the court!' Shortly after that visit Greg and his quickly assembled teammates took the floor and began the process of acquitting themselves quite courageously and competitively by scoring the first four points. Greg and his teammates including his high school nemesis, Jeff Tropf, gave as good as they got with the final score not as important as the effort that day.

Greg was not so much an overachiever as he was a player who maximized his athletic abilities as he had during his Chieftain days. As such we appreciated his efforts that season and especially greatly that day.

I'm certain Greg's patients and their owners have been beneficiaries of the same approach in his career as a well-respected veterinarian." (Pat Miller, Assistant Coach, Michigan State Basketball Staff, 1972-76, personal communication)



John Holms (MSU 1965-'69 / MSU Junior Varsity Coach '80-'81 / Now)

Bob Fossum (JV & Varsity '80-'81) – *"During the 1980-81 basketball season, I was Jud Heathcote's JV Coach at Michigan State and Bob Fossum was a member of Jud's team. Occasionally, Jud had Bob play on my team when we played the outstanding junior colleges in the state. Bob was a complete player at the guard position. On the court, his qualities included being a leader who was respected by his teammates. He had the ability to include everyone in the scheme of the game offensively, he scored within the confines of the offense, he controlled the flow of the game, and he epitomized one of Jud's famous quotes "BE A GUARD!" These were the qualities of a good guard in Jud's estimation. Bob was truly a 'student of the game' and he was a pleasure to be associated with as a person and a player."* (John Holms, personal communication)



Karen Langeland (Then & Now)

Sue Tucker (Varsity '83-'87) – Karen Langeland's comments on **Sue Tucker** as quoted in *Lansing State Journal* articles are presented below.

1983-1984 (Freshman Season)

- *"I think Sue Tucker has so much versatility in her play," Langeland said. "(Okemos coach) [Okemos High girls basketball coach] Ron Mott has played her as a forward, he's played her as a guard, he's posted her up inside . . . that is going to be a great asset for us in the Big Ten" (LSJ, April 14, 1983)*

1984-1985 (Sophomore Season)

- *"She's really improved offensively (at center) because she plays very well with her back to the basket," Langeland said, "and she's very strong on the boards. Right now, defense is her weakness. She's not to the caliber she should be." (LSJ, November 22, 1984)*
- *It's very important for the team to have Tucker in the lineup," Langeland said. "This is more like the Sue Tucker we saw earlier in the season." (LSJ, February 5, 1985)*

1985-1986 (Junior Season)

- *"I don't know if you can really say that Sue is playing out of position, because her post-up and offensive moves are more like a center," Langeland said. "But the biggest key with Sue is her defense. If she can contain the opposing center, it will be much to our advantage." "Secondly is her rebounding, which we desperately need. Although she will be playing against taller opponents, Sue uses the tools she has well. She has great basketball sense and is a finesse player." (LSJ, December 19, 1985)*
- *"Sue Tucker, she's been coming along and seems to be getting better each game." (LSJ, January 7, 1986)*
- *"She's doing a good job for us now going against our opposing center," Langeland said. "She's scoring and rebounding well. She came out of high school with a lot of hype and it's difficult to live up to everybody's expectations. She also had some injuries which were more serious than people thought." (LSJ, January 14, 1986)*
- *"So many people contributed for us, but if I had to point out one player that made the biggest difference it would be Sue Tucker. She was just outstanding for 40 minutes." (LSJ, February 24, 1986)*
- *"And I would say it was by far the best game Sue Tucker has ever played here. She may not have been the one that hit the key buckets down the stretch, but she kept scoring and rebounding through the whole game, which kept us in a position to be in it." (LSJ, February 25, 1986)*

1986-1987 Senior Season)

- Karen Langeland, Michigan State's women's basketball coach, feels forward Sue Tucker is *"playing better than she's ever played as a Spartan. She's been great for us. She's back at forward and playing with confidence,"* Langeland said of the 5-foot-11 senior from Okemos. *"She's scoring well and rebounding well."* (LSJ, December 18, 1986)
- *"We won't have to worry about emotion this weekend,"* said Langeland. *"This series [against Iowa] is a biggie for the seniors. There's a lot of incentive to win."* MSU got an emotional boost with the return of Tucker last weekend. Sidelined since Feb. 1 with an ankle injury, Tucker scored just four points in two games but contributed solid rebounding and pressing.
- *"She's playing real tentative right now,"* Langeland said. *"When you have an injury as serious as hers, you have a tendency to think about it. You go up for a shot or a rebound and you're afraid to come down on a foot. But her presence on the court is a real factor, and the team has a lot of confidence in her."* (LSJ, February 25, 1987)

Kristen Rasmussen (Varsity '96-'99) – Karen Langeland's comments on **Kristen Rasmussen** as quoted in *Lansing State Journal* articles are presented below.

1996-1997 (Freshman Season)

- *"Kristen is a great all-around athlete who has good size to play on the perimeter,"* Langeland said. *"She is the most versatile of the [three incoming freshmen]."* Langeland said Rasmussen will play the forward position and face the basket, because of her ability to shoot the ball." (LSJ, April 12, 1996)

1998-1999 (Junior Season)

- The former Class A All-State performer at Okemos High School has transformed herself into an All-Big Ten Player. Her versatility forced MSU coach Karen Langeland to rearrange the Spartans' offense. *"One of the reasons we selected the offense that we did was so that we would have a little more flexibility with her,"* Langeland said. *"We can post her up on occasion but also get her out on the outside. That's opened the game up for her and allowed her to do some things in the structure of the offense that she wasn't able to do before."* (LSJ, January 24, 1999)
- *"She understands her role and her responsibilities on and off the court,"* Langeland said. *"She handles them very well."* (LSJ, January 24, 1999)
- Junior forward Kristen Rasmussen scored 28 points and pulled down 17 rebounds as Michigan State dropped Northwestern 81-59. . . . *"It wasn't pretty but I thought we shot the ball well and rebounded well,"* MSU coach Karen Langeland said. *"This was an outstanding performance by Kristen Rasmussen. She was just scoring in the framework of the offense."* (LSJ, February 13, 1999)

1999-2000 (Senior Season)

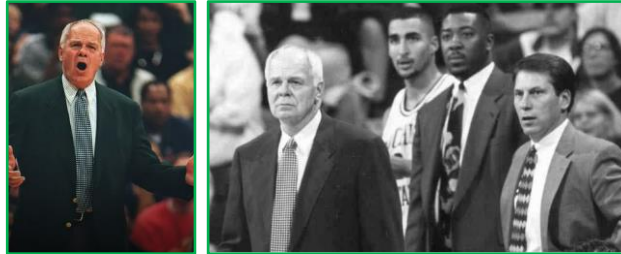
- *"When you look at the really good teams that have players like Kristen and Max [Maxann Reese], it's the support players who really end up making the difference,"* MSU coach Karen Langeland said. *"They take advantage of people double-teaming Kristen and Max and create opportunities for us."* (LSJ, December 11, 1999).
- *"I think [Kristen] does have a shot [at playing in the WNBA]"*, said MSU basketball coach Karen Langeland, who called Rasmussen into her office after her junior year to discuss the possibility of playing pro. *"She is such a versatile player. I think she would be pretty valuable to a team."* (LSJ, February 28, 2000)



Suzy Merchant (Then & Now)

Tracy Nogle (Varsity '09-'13) - Tracy Nogle is the epitome of what it means to be a Spartan. She is a Spartan legacy student-athlete that was passed on from her mother, Sally, who has been taking care of Michigan State athletes for years. As MSU's head athletic trainer, Dr. Sally Nogle has helped lead Tracy toward her love for medicine.

Growing up in the area and graduating from Okemos High School, Tracy has been part of the Spartan family her entire life. Her contributions were extremely important to our program's success, as our program won a Big Ten Championship as well as went to four straight NCAA tournaments. Tracy's was an incredible leader and a vital part of our team's culture and dynamics. She had a way of reaching everyone from her teammates, to coaches, to our community. Tracy had tremendous work ethic on the court and in the classroom, which was evident as she was a three-time Academic All-Big Ten honoree. She was also a two-time recipient of the prestigious Pat Canning Coaches Award, which is given to Spartans who are strong leaders. (Suzy Merchant, personal communication)



Jud Heathcote (and Assistant Coach Tom Izzo)

Greg Vanek ('84-'85 with Izzo as Assistant Coach)

- *"Jud Heathcote gave me the opportunity, and I dearly thank him for that. Tom Izzo was one of the Assistant's at that time. Jud called me into his office, sat me down, and offered me a position and scholarship, and added, 'You'll always be labeled as a 'walk-on.'" I responded, 'It would be an honor to play for you, coach.' I called my parents afterwards, and they didn't believe it through at least 15 minutes of conversation!" (Greg Vanek, personal communication)*
- *"A fond memory was before the season began, Coach Izzo wanted him and me to play 2 on 2 against [Scott] Skiles and [Larry] Polec, up to 15 on a side basket in Jenison Fieldhouse. Izzo and I ended up beating Scott and Larry, who at the time were starters! I believe that was the best 2 on 2 game of my life!" (Greg Vanek, personal communication).*

Kris Weshinskey ('90-'94 w/ Izzo as Associate Head Coach)

- After 2/17/94 win over **Northwestern**: *"I thought Weshinskey gave us a lift with his thirteen points"* (Head Coach Jud Heathcote, LSJ, 2/22/94)
- After 2/26/94 win over **Ohio State**: *"When Shawn [Respert] scores only 19 and we still win easily, ...that's a credit to the supporting cast. If I had to single out two players, I think it would be Kris Weshinskey and Jamie Feick coming off the bench, playing very good defense and contributing offensively also."* (Jud Heathcote, LSJ, 2/27/94)
- After 3/9/94 win over **Indiana**: *"Heathcote happily termed 'unbelievable'" Weshinskey's double double (20 points and 11 rebounds) (Jud Heathcote, LSJ, 3/10/94).*
- After 3/18/94 win over **Seton Hall** in the NCAA Tournament, Heathcote *"thought Kris played excellent."* *"No one's happier that Kris regained his shooting confident than me."* (Jud Heathcote, Detroit Free Press, 3/19/94)



Tom Izzo (Then & Now)

Mike Kebler ('07-'11 w/ Izzo as Head Coach)

- *"Mike Kebler is the All-American boy," Izzo said. "He's everybody's dream. You grow up wanting to play in your hometown at the major university and here it is his senior year and he gets the chance to do that on a fairly consistent level at least down the stretch. ... Not many people get to live their dream." (LSJ, 3/3/2011)*

Anthony Ianni ('10-'12) w/ Izzo as Head Coach)

- *"What he's done for us, not many people can do," Izzo said. "He still hasn't really been a big part of the games, but he's probably been the captain of our scout team. Bangs Nix and (Adreian) Payne and (Alex) Gauna and (Green) every day, and that's no fun job. He does the dirty work, and that's what I respect about him the most." (LSJ, 3/2/2012)*

Dan Chapman ('10-'14 w/ Izzo as Head Coach)

- *"Chapman is my resident unbelievable pet," Izzo said. "He's done a great job on the scout team. ... I wouldn't trade him for the world" ([Source](#)).*

Conner George (Redshirt '15 & Varsity '16-'20 w/ Izzo as Head Coach)

- *"Conner George has probably been as good a scout team player and as good of a student and representative. Of course his mother is a coach. I think he has a good understanding of what it's like for me and our staff. And he brings a great perspective to everything." ([Tom Izzo reflects on careers of outgoing seniors](#)) 3/21/2020)*



The Chieftain-cum-Spartan Dream Team

Wouldn't it be interesting to field an all-time **Chieftain-cum-Spartan** dream team and see how well they might play together against a randomly-picked opponent. With only three **Okemos High** girls who went on to play basketball for **Michigan State**, it is a bit difficult to field a **Chieftains-cum-Spartans** women's dream team. This, however, is not a constraint to envision a **Chieftains-cum-Spartans** dream team that includes the three **Chieftains** who played four seasons on scholarship on the **Spartans** women's varsity squad.

To qualify for the **Chieftains-cum-Spartans** dream team, the former **Chieftain** had to play on the **Spartans** varsity squad at least two seasons (# of seasons played on the varsity squad noted in parentheses).

- **Point Guard:** **John Shick** (4) or **Sue Tucker** (4)
- **Shooting Guard:** **Mike Kebler** (4) or **Tracy Nogle** (4)
- **Center:** **Brian Breslin** (3), **Anthony Ianni** (2), or **Kristen Rasmussen** (4)
- **Left Wing:** **Kris Weshinskey** (4) or **Joe Shackleton** (2)
- **Right Wing:** **Dan Chapman** (4) or **Conner George** (4)

Note: **Brian Breslin** also played one season on the freshmen squad. **Bob Fossum** played as a Spartan only his freshmen season, splitting the season between the JV and varsity squads. **Greg Lott** played as a Spartan only his freshmen season except for starting in one varsity game against **Indiana**. **Greg Vanek** played as a Spartan only his junior season as a transfer from NCAA Division II **Ferris State College**.



Where Are The Chieftain Fourteen Today?

After dribbling a basketball down the **Red Cedar** from **OHS** to **MSU**, in some cases with interim stops in between, each **Chieftain** took his or her life in different directions:

- **John Shick** – Served his entire working career in the U.S. NAVY; now retired, he lives in Virginia Beach, VA and is active in real estate investments and travel to other countries.
- **Brian Breslin** – Worked for Meijer for much of his professional career and later in his career was elected to be a member of the Michigan State University Board of Trustees, until recently in 2019 finishing a term of service as the Board's Chairman.

- **Joe Shackleton** – Now the President of Bridge Hospitality, a firm that manages the Beaver Run Resort & Conference Center in Breckenridge, Colorado.
- **Greg Lott** – Works as Associate Animal Veterinarian at the Riverview Animal Hospital in Detroit, Michigan.
- **Bob Fossum** – Runs a golf range business (Fossum Family Golf) and provides research and logistics support for the Abood Law Firm in East Lansing Michigan.
- **Greg Vanek** – Now a National Account Manager-Drug with Perfetti Van Melle in Illinois.
- **Sue Tucker** – Was a School Psychologist in Illinois (Waukegan Public Schools) but has relocated to Tampa, Florida.
- **Kris Wishenskey** – Initially worked in banking and now in asset management for First Centrum (a commercial-residential construction business) in Virginia.
- **Kristen Rasmussen** – After playing basketball professionally in the WNBA and in Europe, and coaching Division III basketball at Simmons College, returned to her *Alma mater* in 2017 to become head coach of the Okemos High girls' basketball program and otherwise stay-at-home mother to three children.
- **Mike Kebler** – Now working as a Financial Advisor Associate with Morgan Stanley in Traverse City, Michigan.
- **Anthony Ianni** – Now works for the Michigan Department of Civil Rights and is an anti-bullying advocate, activist for the Autism Alliance of Michigan, and the principal advocate on The Relentless Tour where he speaks about bullying.
- **Tracy Nogle** – Currently Chief Resident, the Florida Hospital in Orlando, studying family medicine-osteopathic.
- **Dan Chapman** – Currently in medical school at Central Michigan University.
- **Conner George** – Conner's 2019-20 redshirt senior season was preempted by the cancellation of the 2020 Big Ten and NCAA tournaments, just after the Spartans had won a tri-share of the regular season Big Ten Championship. In the spring of 2020 Conner complete his Master's at Michigan State.



Who Will Be The Fifteenth Chieftain?

In spite of the many achievements of **The Chieftain Fourteen** and their contributions to the **Chieftains** and **Spartans** basketball programs, many fans of Chieftains Basketball yet hope a Chieftain will someday help Okemos High's boys and girls teams to win a Class A state championship and then go on to help the **Michigan State Spartans** to win a Big Ten championship or even a national championship. As with Don Quijote in *Man of La Mancha*, a **Chieftain** helping the **Spartans** win a third national championship would be achieving, what one might call, "the impossible dream"!

While I never made the Chieftains Basketball squad, I did occasionally "step" into the Red Cedar, albeit in a canoe or daydreaming, wondering where that river might have taken me had I been blessed with more basketball talent, skills, IQ, and passion, and achieved my own dream of making the Okemos High basketball team.

But, in spite of not making that team four years in a row, I was the first Okemos High graduate to play for a future **Spartans** coach, **Gus Ganakas**, who later became head basketball coach of the Spartans men's team. In 1958-59, while I was a student at St. Thomas Aquinas elementary school in East Lansing, Ganakas coached our 8th grade basketball, a story you can read at [Gus Ganakas vignette in Chapter 6 of Vol. 2 of "Giants in Their Realms"](#).

But, for up and coming generations of **Chieftain** basketball players, one can practice hard every day to make the team this year or next, a thought that raises the ongoing question of who will be the next **Chieftain** to travel down the Red Cedar to become a member of a **Michigan State Spartans** basketball squad, and perhaps even the first **Chieftain** to be on a **Spartans** squad that wins a real (not virtual) NCAA or WNCAA championship.



Conclusion

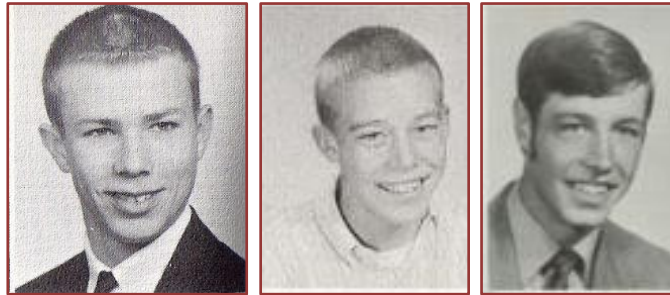
This retrospective has chronicled the basketball careers of the fourteen **Okemos High Chieftains** who later played basketball for the **Michigan State Spartans**, providing a time machine that took the reader back to those days when, even if the **Chieftains** or **Spartans** didn't win a championship this season, one always hoped that next year's team might win its way to a division, district, state, conference or national championship.



Looking to the future, whether you are a boy or a girl on a **Chieftains** basketball squad, may you also achieve your dream of taking your basketball talent to the next level, perhaps even becoming the 15th **Chieftain** to dribble a basketball down the **Red Cedar River** from the **Chieftains O-ZONE** to the **Spartans IZZONE** – and make the **Michigan State** basketball squad and have the opportunity to score a “buzzer beater” basket to secure another victory for the **Michigan State Spartans**!

Please see the Annex for “**The Chieftain Fourteen Quiz**” (with answers). A portrait gallery is presented on the next page, showing the **Okemos High** senior year photos of twelve of **The Chieftain Fourteen** as well as the corresponding Okemos High photos of **Brian Breslin** as a freshman and **Kris Weshinskey** as a sophomore.

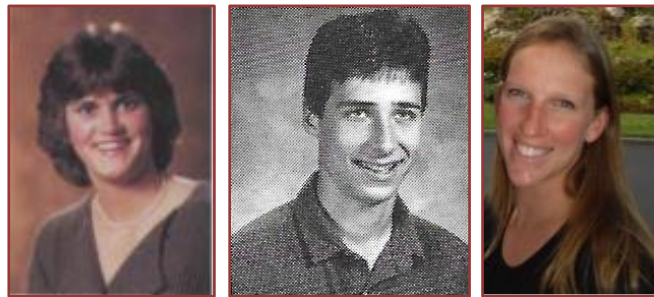
Portrait Gallery of The Chieftain Fourteen



John Shick - Brian Breslin - Joe Shackleton



Greg Lott - Bob Fossum - Greg Vanek



Sue Tucker - Kris Weshinskey - Kristen Rasmussen



Mike Kebler - Anthony Ianni – Tracy Nogle - Dan Chapman - Conner George