

## INDUCTEE PROFILE

# From Claysburg to UConn

## Brumbaugh proud of high school, college legacy

By Neil Rudel

*Altoona Mirror*

Jill Brumbaugh readily admits she was a tomboy.

And it served her well: She played on the Claysburg-Kimmel Junior High boys basketball team as a seventh grader because the school didn't have a junior high girls team.

By that time, though, the boys all knew her as the kid who had to be chased out of the school gym most nights because the janitor wanted to go home.

"Ever since I can remember I was a gym rat," she said. "I lived close to the school so you could walk home."

Whether she was at school or at home, Brumbaugh would have a basketball in her hands. She'd dribble down to the home of former Claysburg-Kimmel boys basketball coach Dick Hoenstine, whose sons, Dave and Doak, were accomplished athletes.

"Dick Hoenstine had a basketball hoop set up in a dirt alley in the back of his house," Brumbaugh said. "It was just a hoop on a pole. If you made it from the front, it would kick back to you."

She laughs at the memory.

"That's why I never shot from the corner," she said, "because if you missed, you'd have to chase it."

At that time, the Claysburg girls basketball program was run by the Crist brothers, Danny and Grant, and they saw something in Brumbaugh.

"Her work ethic set her apart," Dan Crist, who has won more than 300 games at Claysburg and now serves as the head coach at Chestnut Ridge High School. "She'd dribble her basketball through town, and she'd have it everywhere. That was all the way through junior high through high school."



Jill Brumbaugh was a four-year starter at the University of Connecticut, arriving just before Geno Auriemma began building the Lady Huskies into what would grow into a women's basketball dynasty.

Brumbaugh also participated in track and softball, and her athleticism translated nicely to basketball.

"We taught her to shoot a jump shot in seventh grade and then you'd see her pulling up off a screen and shooting a jump shot," Crist said. "You don't see that many girls doing that, even today."

Brumbaugh's ability as a skilled ballhandler and her intensity made her a complete player.

"If we took an eight-point lead against a tough team, we'd go into a one-man stall and they couldn't foul her," Crist said, "and I'd stick her on the toughest player. It didn't matter if they were a forward, point guard or a wing. She'd take them and frustrate the heck out of them. She was just so quick."

"I think the John Riley game was the first time a lot of people outside of Claysburg saw her play — and there was a lot of oohs and aahs in the crowd with her passing and shooting. She always made us proud."

En route to becoming Claysburg's all-time leading scorer in 1984 with 1,592 points — a mark since broken by Lacey Claar — Brumbaugh played in the Keystone Games and started to garner Division I attention.

She played with the likes of Bishop Guilfoyle's Chris O'Connor, and UConn was developing a presence in western Pennsylvania. Former Altoona players Lisa Fubio and Judy McNellis had gone there a few years earlier.

"A lot of UConn's coaches were from Pennsylvania so they did a lot of recruiting from the Pennsylvania area.," she said. "I knew Evy Doerfler, who was from Penn Hills, and she was a year ahead of me. They needed guards, and she recommended me, and that helped me out quite a bit."

The Lady Huskies, through, were struggling and by Brumbaugh's sophomore year, a new coach arrived. His name was Geno Auriemma.

"When I first met him, we were talking in the gym and no one else was there and he said, 'some day we're going to fill this place,' Brumbaugh said. "He had a great



**Jill also participated in track & field and softball at Claysburg-Kimmel.**

vision, right from the beginning."

That also led to a transition for the returning players. Brumbaugh was forced to adjust her game.

Auriemma, her Hall of Fame presenter, said that took some coaxing, but he was pleased that she evolved into a solid player who eventually became the team captain as a senior.

"Jill had a big adjustment to make when we came in in 1985 because Geno and I

weren't the people that recruited her," UConn associate head coach Chris Dailey said. "Our style and what we demanded might have been different than what she expected. But she handled everything really well. She

worked really hard, played really hard, improved, and really helped us set the tone for our success in the future years."

Brumbaugh is "definitely proud" of her UConn legacy. She had season tickets for several years before moving to Florida, where she works in the insurance industry.

But she points to her Claysburg roots as having prepared her.

"I was so

## *Brumbaugh bio*

**Sport:** Basketball

**High school:** Claysburg-Kimmel

**College:** Connecticut

**Hall of Fame achievement:**

Four-year starter for UConn Lady Huskies (1984-88)

**Current residence:** North Port, Fla.



spoiled because I never had a bad coach — I always played for the best of the best," she said. "I would have never made it to UConn if I didn't play for Danny and Grant, and I would have never made it at UConn if it wasn't for those guys."

When UConn played at Pittsburgh, Claysburg fans chartered a bus to Fitzgerald Field House.

"She had a lot of younger cousins around when she played, and that motivated a lot of kids who wanted to try to be like her," Crist said. "We were pretty strong there for a while, and it all started with Jill. Now it's her nieces that are coming through the program."

Former New York Met Danny Napoleon was Claysburg's first Hall of Fame inductee (in 2002), but he moved when he was 13 years old, making Brumbaugh the first C-K graduate to be enshrined.

"I think it's a great honor," she said. "I think it gives anybody from a small town a little hope — and I'm glad it's happening when I can share it with my family. This is a chance for me to thank the people who helped me along the way."



Jill (third from left) is the first Claysburg-Kimmel High School graduate to be inducted into the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame. Other Claysburg team members include: Sandi Way, Lori Way, Pam Black, Ellen Ebersole, Michele Weyant, Tammi Marty, Jodi Dugan, Valerie Leslie and Missy Hileman.

That includes her mother, Joanne, sister Lisa, father Alan and grandmother Margaret Gochnour. It will also include some who went before them.

"My grandfather, Ralph Gochnour, passed away when I was really young, and he was a big sports fan, a

big baseball fan," Brumbaugh said.

"One year, he got me and my sister Lisa baseball gloves. One was brown, and one was red. He gave me the red one because he said I was special."



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