

## INDUCTEE PROFILE



Allen (front row, left) was a junior on the 1951-52 Hollidaysburg High School basketball team. Other team members included, from left: Ron Coho, Bert Criste, Gene Showalter, Gene Watson. Second row: Faculty manager Cletus Miller, Fred King, Ed Soyster, Bruce Fox, Jack Nash, manager McDonnell. Back row: Head coach Ralph Harden, Bob O'Brien, Mike Marshall, Marcy Criste, assistant coach Charles Hill.

# *Driven by pride*

## Fear of failure led Allen Griffith to Villanova

By Jim Lane  
*Altoona Mirror*

Allen Griffith never wanted to let anyone down, and he didn't.

The first great basketball player in Hollidaysburg High School history, Griffith went on to an outstanding career at Villanova University in the 1950s.

"Whatever I accomplished, it was because I was driven by fear of failure," Griffith said. "I learned to never separate the team and the fans

because they're all one family."

Former high school teammate Ed Soyster, now retired and living in Alexandria, VA., recalled that Griffith once was considered too small to play basketball.

"Allie was a great ballhandler and a great shot, but he was little — thin and small," Soyster said. "A lot of coaches thought he would be too small to play, but he was so dedicated, so focused on basketball."

Griffith, Soyster and Bruce Fox grew up playing for different grade schools in the Hollidaysburg area. They were the best players for their respective schools and became even closer when they reached junior high and high school.

"I really didn't grow until I was a sophomore in high school," Griffith said. "When I was playing in grade school, nobody knew my number because my jersey always was tucked

into my pants. My mother got me knee guards and they went almost to my shoes.

"I was a small guy, but I grew to almost 6 feet."

Griffith spent most of his young life playing at the YMCA with Soyster and Fox.

"We went to different grade schools, and there was growing anticipation within the community as we grew up," he said. "Soyster was the center on the team, the tight end on the football team and an honor student. Fox was the purist athlete of all. He was a great football player (quarterback) and was even better at baseball."

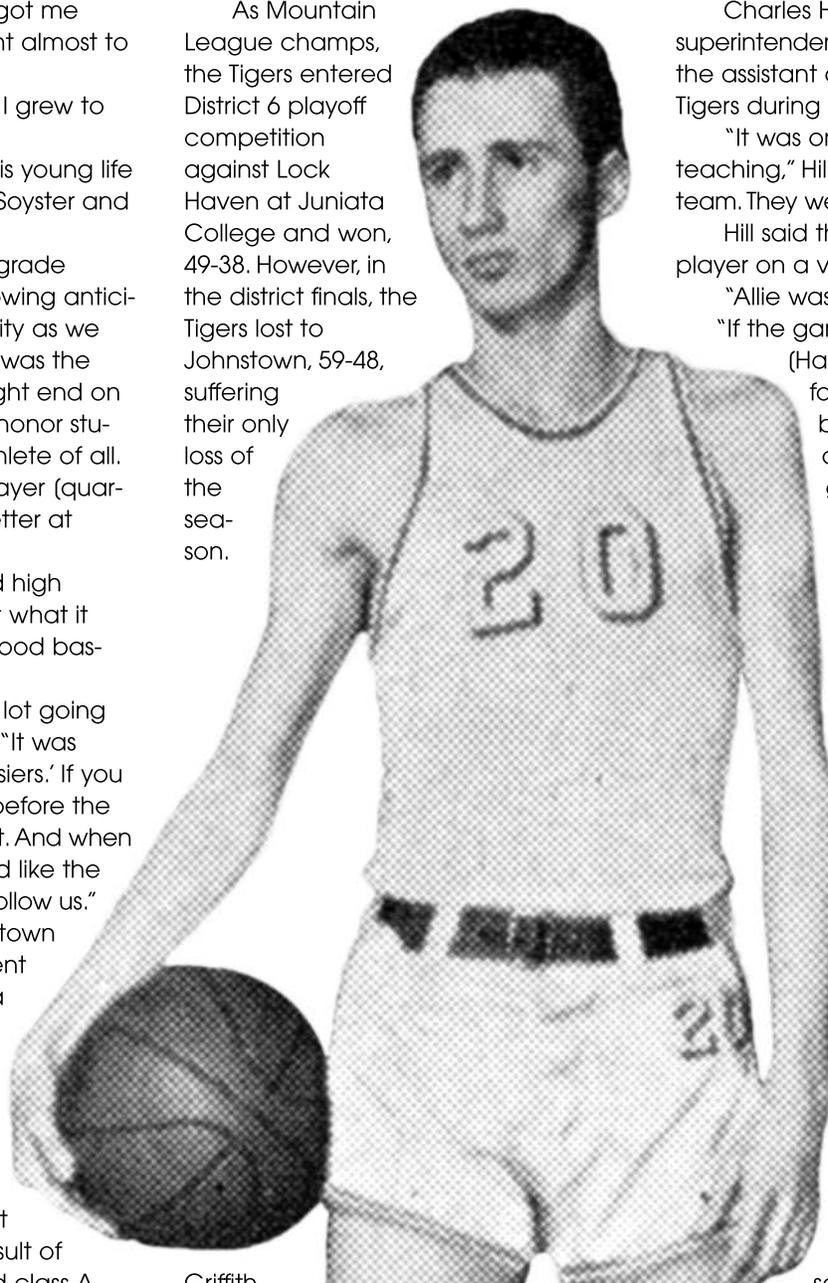
When the trio reached high school, the community got what it was hoping for — a very good basketball team.

"There wasn't a whole lot going on in the '50s," Griffith said. "It was almost like the movie 'Hoosiers.' If you weren't in a seat an hour before the game, you didn't get a seat. And when we played away, it seemed like the whole town shut down to follow us."

Griffith noted that the town was so supportive that it sent the team to New York for a couple of days after the season as a reward for its success.

According to Hollidaysburg High School's 1953 yearbook: "The 1952-53 team brought glory to the school as a result of being the only undefeated class A quintet in the state. Coach Ralph Harden's boys won 17 consecutive games and the Mountain High League championship for the second time in two years."

As Mountain League champs, the Tigers entered District 6 playoff competition against Lock Haven at Juniata College and won, 49-38. However, in the district finals, the Tigers lost to Johnstown, 59-48, suffering their only loss of the season.



Allen captained Villanova in 1956-57.

Griffith, who was the county scoring leader, tallied 18 in the loss to Johnstown.

Charles Hill, who later became superintendent of Altoona schools, was the assistant coach for the Golden Tigers during the 1952-53 season.

"It was one of my first years teaching," Hill said. "I remember that team. They were a great group of kids."

Hill said that Griffith was the best player on a very good team.

"Allie was the go-to guy," Hill said. "If the game was tight, Ralph (Harden) depended on him for the shot. He'd get the ball, drive, stop and pop all the time. He was a great kid."

Following high school, Griffith chose Villanova over Penn State and Notre Dame.

"Penn State and Notre Dame were more football schools," he said, "and George Pequignot, a Hollidaysburg guy, introduced me to the people at Villanova."

Griffith played in 78 games over three seasons (1954-57, freshmen did not play varsity then) and became a three-year starter. The Wildcats were 18-10 in his sophomore year and reached the NCAA Tournament.

They went 14-12 and 10-15 in his next two seasons and he captained the team as a senior when he led them in scoring with a 13.2 average. He was

named to the Big Five/Quaker City all-star team, which comprised players from Villanova, Temple, LaSalle, Penn and St. Joseph's.

Inducted into Villanova's Hall of Fame in 1993, Griffith finished with 735 points and 502 rebounds for his career.

Hollidaysburg has only had three basketball players earn scholarships in its history — Griffith, Jack Trueblood (Penn State) and most recently John Boyer (Buffalo).

"I was the first Hollidaysburg player to go to Division I, and I always felt I had a responsibility not to disappoint



## Griffith bio

**Sport:** Basketball

**High school:** Hollidaysburg

**College:** Villanova

**Hall of Fame achievement:** Three-year starter at Villanova (1954-57) was later inducted into Villanova Hall of Fame.

**Current residence:** Pittsburgh

Griffith recalled Harden, his high school coach, as "one of the finest gentlemen I ever met. He was a tremendous human being, a great role model, and a great coach, too."

anyone so I took it very seriously," Griffith said of his college career.

Now 76 years old, Griffith received a degree in business and worked most of his life in sales in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and New York. Although he spends the winter months in Florida — "golf is my passion now" — he lives most of the year in the Pittsburgh suburb of Mount Lebanon.

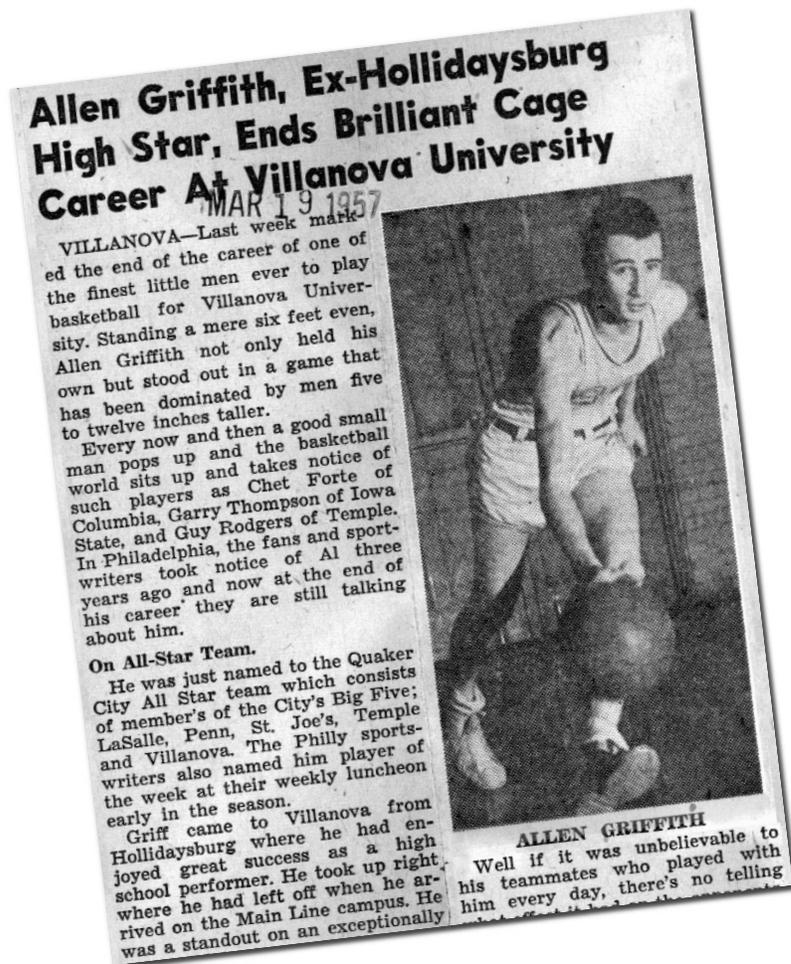
He has two sons, Mark and Gordon, and two grandchildren in the Pittsburgh area.

"I got back to Hollidaysburg for my 50th high school reunion," he said. "But I don't have much connection there anymore. My good friend Bob Reese, a great golfer, is still there. We were partners in the Park Hills Classic a long time ago.

"When I get back, though, I love to go to Dave's Dream, the finest restaurant from New York to Chicago, and I love the Meadows also."

He's looking forward to the Hall of Fame ceremony.

"It means a lot to me," he said of his selection. "It's an honor and privilege, and I want to thank Hollidaysburg for being so good to me."



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