

INDUCTEE PROFILE

# Officially, Beam helped pave the way

## Becomes first official to be enshrined in HOF

By Josh Langenbacher

Growing up, sports often served as the connector between Cathy (Cronin) Beam and her dad. As the oldest child, Beam accompanied her father, Bill, to Philadelphia Eagles or Philadelphia Phillies games.

But it was the spectacle of the Palestra, where first-row seats under the basket to games involving the Big 5 schools, that began a lifelong love of basketball for Beam.

“Rollie Massimino would be running up and down the sidelines with his towel,” Beam said. “The ball would come flying out of bounds, and I’d grab it and throw it back to the referee or dribble it a couple times and toss it back. I loved being with my dad and being in that environment. It was really cool.”

Beam’s immersion into basketball persisted, and a full-circle moment came when she called her parents with an update on her evening’s assignment.

“I said ‘Hey, guess where I’m refereeing tonight? I’m going to the Palestra,’” Beam said. “He said ‘You’re kidding me!’ He’s on the phone calling my uncles and aunts in Philly and New Jersey going, ‘Cathy’s reffing at the Palestra tonight!’ He thought that was so cool.”

For Beam, the Palestra was just one stop in her illustrious career as an official, where more than four decades of intense commitment to the craft has culminated in her induction to the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame.

Beam is the first official to be a member of the Hall.

“I’m thrilled,” she said. “I’m very honored. I’m so honored to be recognized because even though I graduated college and

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**Cathy officiated in the Big Ten, Big East and Atlantic 10 and also worked the NCAA Tournament five times.**

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wasn't playing sports, I was an athlete. I had to train. I was in the gym all the time in the offseason working out and lifting and doing weight training and cardio all through the offseason. Then the season started. Your high-level officials, we are athletes. For the Hall to recognize that is just awesome to me."

Beam, who was a lifelong educator teaching math at a state juvenile corrections facility, perhaps fittingly received her start as an official in the classroom.

She took a class in basketball and officiating taught by Pat Meiser, who also doubled as the head women's basketball coach at Penn State.

Meiser was impressed with how Beam handled herself academically and pulled her aside after class to vet her interest in being a basketball official.

"I said no," Beam said. "All I could think of was referees who would call fouls. On me, you know? They said 'Yeah, but you could make some money on the side while you're going to school.' And I went 'Oh, OK, I could use a couple bucks.'"

Beam began officiating in the 1975-76 season, starting out predominantly at colleges like Susquehanna and Juniata with some high school games sprinkled in.

She refereed for 34 seasons and retired as an official in 2011, transitioning right away into a role as the associate coordinator of women's basketball officials for the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference.

Beam's career took her to iconic locations like the Palestra – "That was still to this day one of my favorite places when I go in," she said – and Cameron Indoor Stadium and exotic locations like holiday tournaments in the Bahamas.

"Their national gymnasium isn't as nice as the (Altoona Area High School) Fieldhouse," Beam said of her trip to the Bahamas. "But you have your teams there from all over the country. I liked doing that. That was my favorite out of the country trip."

Collegiately, Beam officiated games at the Division I, II and III levels, including the Big Ten, Big East, Atlantic 10, Ivy League and Northeast Conference.

She officiated in the NCAA Tournament five times and served as the Big



**Cathy is shown with PIAA executive director Bob Lombardi (right) and her husband, Ted, who was a fellow official.**

Ten evaluator of officials and an NCAA Tournament evaluator.

Trips to the Bahamas, where Beam would spend her off days on the beach, offered a chance to unwind. Although Beam worked high-profile games, the nature of her job was lower profile, which she enjoyed.

"Usually you're in and you're out," Beam said. "You fly in, you're under the radar going through a back door somewhere, and no one sees you until you hit the floor. Then you leave and get out of dodge right away. You don't hang around. You're there to work."

Scholastically, she officiated six PIAA championship games and was named the National Federation of Interscholastic Athletic Association Official of the Year in 1997.

Through it all, Beam commanded immense respect.

"I would've taken Cathy on one of my college football or NFL crews," said long-time NFL official Gene Steratore. "She could have handled that. She was that type of person."

Steratore began working with Beam in the late 1980s when he

started his officiating career. His father, also named Gene, assigned officials for more than 30 schools for both men's and women's basketball. Steratore estimated he worked a few dozen games with Beam during the time (three to four years) he worked college women's basketball.

"Some officials are great partners, but when the game's over, you say 'see ya later,'" Steratore said. "Other people, you talk through the game over a beer and said, 'Hey, I said this to so-and-so, and I didn't get the best reaction. What would your thoughts be?' Those are how we all learned. Cathy was fantastic at that kind of stuff. She was always open to helping and paying it forward."

Beam's colleagues relied on her expertise and discretion, said Sue Kovensky, who worked countless college games with Beam. Kovensky said



## Beam bio

**Sport:** Officiating

**High school:** St. Hubert's Catholic

**College:** Penn State

**Hall of Fame achievement:** Officiated women's college basketball for 34 years, including the Big Ten, Big East, Atlantic 10, Ivy League and Northeast Conference. Officiated in the NCAA Tournament five times as well as in six PIAA title games. Also served as Big Ten evaluator of officials. First official to be inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Beam's tutelage helped assimilate her into college officiating.

"At first it was kind of intimidating," Kovensky said. "We'd go into the gyms, and she knew everybody. She knew all the people at the table, all the coaches, all the athletic department. I always thought Cathy was the cornerstone of NCAA basketball officiating. There was nobody any better."

Beam drew praise for an uncanny ability to recall and observe a game's detail, with Kovensky likening it to a "photographic memory."

When Beam transitioned into her role as an evaluator after knee surgeries led her to retire from the court, she worked closely with Jon Levinson, the NCAA women's basketball secretary rules editor and the coordinator of women's basketball officials for the NEC.

Levinson said when he evaluated officials, he would jot notes down here and there to use in his postgame reports.

Not Beam, who documented every call each of the three officials on the court made.

"She'd have notes next to it, indicating whether this was a correct call, incorrect call or correct no-call. Yes, these are all relatively subjective," Levinson said. "But she'd always have an explanation in her notes as to what made this correct or incorrect. It was almost by looking at her call chart, I wouldn't have had to see the game, because I'd know from her charts exactly what happened during the course of the game."

Officiating provided a lifetime of cherished memories for Beam not only professionally but personally as well. Beam, who started her career in the State College area, moved to the Altoona area a few years later and became part of a circle locally that included Ron Rickens, Dave Heim and Ted Beam, all highly respected officials.

Ted Beam's passion for sports led him to serve as a PIAA basketball official for 43 years, and he officiated two state championship games. He also officiated PIAA football and worked a state final before his retirement.

Years of friendship led to Cathy and Ted to marriage in 1999. The couple spent 25 years together before Ted died in September 2025 at the age of 73 from heart disease.

"Through officiating is how I met the

love of my life," Cathy said. "It chokes me up, especially the circumstances right now."

Ted, incidentally, nominated Cathy for induction years before his passing. In a letter highlighting his wife's achievements, he wrote, "I respectfully submit to you and your nominating committee that Cathy Cronin Beam has excelled in the world of officiating, and deserves to be the first official selected as a member of the prestigious Blair County Sports Hall of Fame for the many achievements she has received."

Cathy, of course, was deeply saddened by her husband's passing but said he appreciated the news of her enshrinement prior to his ultimately death.

"He was my biggest advocate," Cathy said. "I had to travel a lot. He understood that. He reffed his high school games, and I traveled a lot with college games. Ted always supported that. When I got the phone call telling me I had been selected to be an honoree, I was just astounded and so taken aback. After I got off the phone, he was so elated. He was truly happy for me."

"I wish he would be here to help share this incredible honor with me. I know he'll be looking down from heaven, my guardian angel, and be really happy for

me. He'll be with me."

Cathy and Ted were part of PIAA history.

In 2002, Cathy worked her sixth and final PIAA state championship game. Later that weekend, Ted refereed a boys state championship final. It was the first time a husband-wife team officiated state title games in the same year.

Beam was part of basketball's evolution, watching the sport implement a 3-point line and playing a critical role locally in the development and implementation of three-person officiating crews with the PIAA.

District 6 started the three-person crews, making the change in the late 1980s before any other districts.

The PIAA followed suit in 1992, with Cathy teaching the mechanics and workings of a three-man crew to other local officials.

One of those officials, Chris Rickens, credits Cathy with providing a steadying presence throughout a run calling games in the PIAA playoffs that culminated with Rickens working his first state title game in Hershey in 1992.

"Cathy was a trailblazer for women's officiating," Rickens said, "not just in college, but women's officiating in our area. She was one of the best."

**"Cathy was always open to helping and paying it forward."**

— Gene Steratore



**A trailblazer for women's officials, Cathy inspired Terri Piatak (left) and Sue Kovensky.**