

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE
HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS



NEWS RELEASE

12 Leaders in High School Activity Programs to Receive NFHS Citations

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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INDIANAPOLIS, IN (June 27, 2016) — Twelve leaders in high school activity programs across the country have been selected to receive National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Citations.

An award designed to honor individuals who have made contributions to the NFHS, state high school associations, athletic director and coaching professions, the officiating avocation and fine arts/performing arts programs, the NFHS Citation is one of the most highly regarded achievements in high school athletics and performing arts.

The 2016 NFHS Citation recipients will receive their awards July 1 at the 97th annual NFHS Summer Meeting in Reno, Nevada.

Eight of the 12 award winners represent NFHS-member state high school associations. The other four Citation recipients represent NFHS professional organizations for officials, coaches, music leaders and speech/debate/theatre directors.

The eight state association recipients are Nina Van Erk, retired executive director of the New York State Public High School Athletic Association; Butch Cope, associate commissioner of the Kentucky High School Athletic Association; Gene Menees, assistant executive director of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association; Gina Mazzolini, assistant director of the Michigan High School Athletic Association; Kevin Merkle, associate director of the Minnesota State High School League; Peter Contreras, retired assistant athletic director at the Texas University Interscholastic League; Marc Ratner, Southern Nevada commissioner of officials for the Nevada Interscholastic Activities Association; and Brad Garrett, assistant executive director of the Oregon School Activities Association.

Other Citation recipients are Harold Cooper, Official Citation recipient, basketball official, football official, baseball umpire, Mississippi; Richard Robertson, Coach Citation recipient, retired boys basketball coach at Andalusia (Alabama) High School; Jay Dunnahoo, Music Citation recipient, executive secretary of the Texas Music Adjudicators Association; and Pam McComas, Speech/Debate/Theatre Citation recipient, retired director of forensics, Topeka (Kansas) High School.

Following is biographical information on the 2016 NFHS Citation recipients:

Nina Van Erk, New York
Section 1

Nina Van Erk retired in 2012 after 12 years as executive director of the New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSAA). For the past four years, she has served as executive director of Section 8 of the NYSPHSAA.

During her tenure as NYSPHSAA executive director, Van Erk was responsible for adding boys volleyball and girls golf as state championship events as well as the development of cheerleading into an NYSPHSAA-sponsored regional invitational. She also led the development and implementation of athletic director workshops, acquired the new office building in Latham that the association jointly owns, and instituted the NYSPHSAA Hall of Fame.

Van Erk began her career in education at Rhinebeck (New York) Central Schools in 1977, and was athletic director from 1983 to 1995. She then served as the director of health, physical education and athletics in the Katonah (New York) Lewisboro School District for five years before being named NYSPHSAA executive director in 2000.

Prior to joining the NYSPHSAA staff, Van Erk served on numerous committees including the Section 1 Athletic Council, the Section 1 Executive Committee, the NYSPHSAA Executive Committee and the NYSPHSAA Championship Advisory Committee.

At the national level, Van Erk served a four-year term on the NFHS Board of Directors and was president in 2010-11. She also was a member of the NFHS Annual Summer Meeting Advisory Committee, the NFHS Strategic Planning Committee and the NFHS National High School Spirit of Sport Award Selection Committee. She was a speaker at the NFHS Summer Meeting and Legal Meeting, as well as the National Athletic Directors Conference.

Van Erk has been honored by the New York State Athletic Administrators Association (NYSAAA) with the Apple Award in 2004 and the State Award of Merit in 2015. She received the NIAAA State Award of Merit in 2012. On July 29, Van Erk will be inducted into the NYSPHSAA Hall of Fame. She earned a bachelor's degree

from Ithaca (New York) College in 1977 and a master's from Russell Sage College in Troy, New York, in 1981. In 1984 she earned certification as a school administrator/supervisor from the State University of New York in New Paltz, New York.

Butch Cope, Kentucky
Section 2

Butch Cope is in his 21st year with the Kentucky High School Athletic Association (KHSAA). He began his tenure as the KHSAA sports information director before being promoted to director of promotions and media relations, then assistant commissioner and his current position of associate commissioner.

Prior to joining the KHSAA staff, Cope worked for Host Communications, Inc., in Lexington servicing printing and publishing projects for HCI's local and national field offices. Cope also served as an intern in the sports information office for the University of Kentucky Athletics Department for three years.

Cope currently manages the sports of volleyball and baseball and the sport-activity of competitive cheer for the KHSAA, and he is supervisor of the Officials Division. He assists with the sports of football, basketball, tennis and swimming and diving, and works with special programs including the Dawahares/KHSAA Hall of Fame, the KHSAA HYPE Student Leadership Conferences and the KHSAA participation in the NFHS Student Leadership Summit.

Among his previous duties with the KHSAA, Cope assisted with the development of the original KHSAA website and management of the statewide radio network for the KHSAA Boys and Girls Sweet 16 State Basketball Tournaments; managed golf and tennis; coordinated corporate sponsor

solicitation and fulfillment; and was the contact person for the membership with regard to the initial implementation of the governance of middle school athletics.

Cope has been involved at the national level with the NFHS, having served on the initial Student Leadership Committee and a term on the Citizenship and Equity Committee (now Student Services Committee). He has conducted several presentations at the National Athletic Directors Conference and the NFHS Summer Meeting, moderated a variety of other sessions, and served as the master of ceremonies for the NFHS Hall of Fame Banquet.

Cope received a bachelor's degree in marketing and a master's in sport management from the University of Kentucky.

Gene Menees, Tennessee
Section 3

After eight years of teaching and coaching at the high school level, Gene Menees joined the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) in 1990 as assistant executive director and remains in that capacity today.

Menees oversees the sports of baseball and basketball, handling everything from assigning officials for tournaments, overseeing officials' camps, conducting rules meetings, organizing and running state championship events, and working closely with officials, coaches, supervisors, and school administrators.

Additionally, Menees assists with the state cross country meet, oversees the registration of all officials and answers eligibility questions and inquiries regarding TSSAA rules and regulations.

Prior to joining the TSSAA staff 26 years ago, Menees was a teacher and coach at Donelson Christian Academy and Davidson Academy in Nashville. He is a

1971 graduate of Madison (Tennessee) High School and a 1975 graduate of Vanderbilt University.

Menees played baseball at Vanderbilt and was drafted by the San Diego Padres. He spent seven years in professional baseball, including four years in Class AA and two years in Class AAA. After being released in spring training while with the New York Mets organization, in 1978 he was able to sign a contract with the Cincinnati Reds and was assigned to Nashville. He played with the Nashville Sounds in 1978 and 1979.

In addition to his years as a teacher and coach and his work with the TSSAA, Menees officiated at the collegiate level until 2011.

Menees resides in Madison with his wife, Patsy. He has two grown daughters and four grandchildren.

Gina Mazzolini, Michigan
Section 4

Gina Mazzolini is retiring this summer after an outstanding 23-year career as assistant director of the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA). She has served as the administrator for girls volleyball, swimming and diving, alpine skiing and tennis, and she also handled sanctioning and foreign exchange/international student issues.

After graduating from St. John's (Michigan) High School in 1974, Mazzolini was a basketball and volleyball standout at Central Michigan University, where she graduated in 1978. She led the Chippewas in scoring and rebounding three straight seasons and was inducted into the CMU Athletic Hall of Fame.

Mazzolini earned a master's degree from Michigan State University and then moved to Texas, where she was assistant volleyball coach and interim women's sports information director at the University of Texas in Austin for one year.

In 1982, Mazzolini joined the staff of the Texas University Interscholastic League (UIL) as activities director and was promoted to assistant athletic director in 1988, a position she held until joining the MHSAA staff in 1993. Her 34 years combined with the UIL and MHSAA marks one of the longest tenures by a state association assistant director in the history of the NFHS.

Mazzolini has given many hours of service to the NFHS during her career, having served on NFHS rules committees in soccer, swimming and diving, and volleyball. She was chair of the Volleyball Rules Committee from 2004 to 2008. Mazzolini also was a member of the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee and the Athletic Directors Advisory Committee.

In other national service, Mazzolini was a member of the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET) Board of Directors, which identifies, promotes and supports international youth exchange programs.

Among her awards, Mazzolini received the MHSAA's Women in Sports Leadership Award in 2010 and the MHSAA's Charles E. Forsythe Award earlier this year.

Kevin Merkle, Minnesota
Section 5

Kevin Merkle has served the students of Minnesota in a variety of educational roles for the past 42 years. After a successful career as a high school

teacher, coach and administrator, he joined the staff of the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) as associate director in 2001.

After four years as a teacher and coach in Iowa and Minnesota to begin his career, Merkle, served 23 years in Northfield, Minnesota, including four years as a business teacher, five years as a middle school administrator and 14 years as Northfield High School activities director. During his tenure at Northfield, Merkle also coached football, basketball and baseball.

Among many responsibilities at the MSHSL, Merkle directs football, dance team, boys basketball and baseball, and he previously directed debate, one-act play, music, speech and visual arts. Merkle's contributions to football include coordinating the development of a pre-season heat acclimatization plan and contact restrictions for football practice; as well as development of a unique statewide scheduling system. In basketball, he implemented an instant replay system for the state tournament. In baseball, Merkle worked with the Minnesota Twins to develop a Prep Championship Series played at Target Field.

As MSHSL's director of officials, Merkle led the change to have all officials' registration, testing, and rules meetings to be completed online, saving money and time for officials statewide. He also developed an officials' training clinic program that spans 11 sports, and created an awards and recognition program for individual officials and associations. Most recently, Merkle has led a special initiative to recruit and retain officials.

On the national level, Merkle has been part of the NFHS Football Rules Committee for 15 years, including chairperson of the Risk Minimization Committee. He was chairperson of the NFHS Officials' Advisory Committee and also served on the National Athletic Directors Advisory Committee.

Merkle has been honored with the Minnesota Football Coaches Association Distinguished Service Award, and has been inducted into both the State Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Honor, and the State Baseball Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

Peter Contreras, Texas
Section 6

Peter Contreras retired last year after 26 years with the Texas University Interscholastic League (UIL). He began his tenure with the UIL in 1989 as media director and assumed duties of assistant athletic director in 1994.

During his years as assistant athletic director, Contreras was director of volleyball, wrestling, soccer, softball and golf, and he was assistant director of boys and girls basketball, cross country, baseball, football, swimming/diving and track and field.

In addition to his sport-specific duties, Contreras assisted with the reclassification and realignment process every other year and answered eligibility questions. He also was involved in the selection and assigning of officials in the sports of basketball, volleyball, wrestling, soccer, softball and baseball.

Contreras also served as staff liaison to the Texas High School Coaches Association, Texas Golf Coaches Association and Texas Girls Coaches Association.

At the national level, Contreras served on NFHS rules committees in the sports of volleyball, softball, soccer and swimming/diving.

Prior to joining the UIL staff, Contreras was sports information director at his alma mater, Southwest Texas State University (now Texas State University) in

San Marcos, for 3½ years after six months as assistant sports information director. During his final two years in college, Contreras was a sportswriter for the San Marcos Daily Record. He then served short stints with the San Antonio Gunslingers of the United States Football League and assistant sports information director at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, before returning to Southwest Texas State in August 1985.

Contreras has been an NCAA Division I Women's Basketball official since 1989 and has been selected to 18 Division I women's post-season tournaments. He is a member of the Western Athletic Conference, Mountain West Conference, Big West Conference, Sun Belt Conference and Southland Conference.

Marc Ratner, Nevada

Section 7

For the past 25 years, Marc Ratner has been invaluable to the work of the Nevada Interscholastic Activities Association (NIAA) in his role as commissioner of officials for Southern Nevada with his demonstrated dedication to education-based high school sports.

After beginning his high school officiating career in 1967, Ratner was selected Southern Nevada commissioner of officials during the 1990-91 school year. In that capacity, Ratner has been responsible for supervising assigners in 12 sports, organizing rules clinics, reviewing film, making rulings on incidents occurring in any of those sports, handling complaints from schools and officials organizations, as well as evaluating officials and approving playoff assignments.

Ratner, who has worked several NIAA state championship contests in football, basketball and softball, served on the National Association of Sports

Officials (NASO) Board of Directors from 2002 to 2006, including a term as chairman.

Ratner was an NCAA football official for 20 years from 1986 to 2006. During that time, he worked three bowl games including the 2006 Cotton Bowl featuring Alabama and Texas Tech. He is still active as a timer and replay official for the Mountain West Conference.

In 1993, Ratner was appointed executive director of the Nevada State Athletic Commission and served in that position until 2006. He is currently the senior vice-president of regulatory affairs for the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) a responsibility which takes him around the globe.

Despite his extensive duties with UFC, Ratner is still highly connected with high school sports as his contributions to the NIAA and high school sports in Nevada continue to be immeasurable. He spends countless hours on behalf of the students of Nevada and is a valuable asset to the NIAA and all of its member schools.

Brad Garrett, Oregon
Section 8

After 14 years as a teacher, coach and athletic director at two Oregon high schools to launch his career in secondary education, Brad Garrett accepted the position of assistant executive director with the Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) in 2001 and remains in that position today.

Starting his 16th year with the OSAA this summer, Garrett is responsible for administering the sports of cross country, football, wrestling, and track and field, and he assists with the coordination of tournaments in volleyball, basketball and

golf. Additionally, he is staff liaison to the Oregon Athletic Officials Association and works closely with certification and training of officials in all local associations in Oregon.

A graduate of Western Oregon University in Monmouth, Oregon, who later earned a master's degree from Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon, Garrett was a teacher and coach at Woodburn High School in Oregon for two years before taking a similar position at Sam Barlow High School in Gresham, Oregon, in 1989. He coached football, wrestling, and track and field for five years before becoming the school's athletic director in 1994.

During his seven years as athletic director at Sam Barlow, Garrett had extensive involvement with the Oregon Athletic Directors Association (OADA) and the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association (NIAAA). He served on the OADA Executive Board and the NIAAA Leadership Training Institute National Faculty.

Garrett's contributions to the NFHS have been extensive. He is concluding 12 years in a leadership role on the NFHS Football Rules Committee this year, serving as second vice-chair (2004-08), first vice-chair (2008-12) and chair (2012-16), and this year begins a four-year term as chair of the NFHS Track and Field Rules Committee. He also is a current member of the NFHS Officials Advisory Committee and is a former member of the NFHS Wrestling Rules Committee.

In other related national service, Garrett is a member of the USA Football Board of Directors.

Harold Cooper, Mississippi
NFHS Officials Association

Harold Cooper began his officiating career in 1969 and dedicated 39 years of his life on the court and field as a high school basketball and football official. He also was a baseball umpire for a period of time during his career. However, his contributions to the avocation of officiating go well beyond his accomplishments on the court, field and diamond.

Through his position as the football and basketball rules interpreter for the Mississippi High School Activities Association (MHSAA), Cooper has coached, mentored and encouraged more than 4,000 officials during his career, with a focus on rules changes and points of emphasis for the coming season. He has become one of the key leaders in the state with regard to officiating through his role as an evaluator of football and basketball officials.

As the Middle Mississippi Assigning Secretary for football and basketball, Cooper supervises, trains, evaluates and assigns officials to more than 1,500 basketball games and 900 football games each year. He also has hosted and organized numerous basketball camps for officials.

During his days as an active official, Cooper was selected to official several state high school basketball and football championships. At the college level, Cooper officiated several football bowl games, and he was an official for a number of NCAA women's basketball tournaments.

Cooper officiated at the college level for more than 20 years and worked in numerous conferences, including the Southeastern Conference, Sun Belt Conference, Southland Conference, Conference USA and the Southwestern

Athletic Conference. He also was a women's basketball official in the Big 12 Conference.

Cooper, who earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from Jackson State University, retired in 2007 from his position as court administrator for the Henley-Young Juvenile Justice Center. During his 39-year career, Cooper also worked for the Mississippi Department of Youth Services in a number of different positions.

Richard Robertson, Alabama
NFHS Coaches Association

Richard Robertson retired as the boys basketball coach at Andalusia (Alabama) High School following the 2014-15 season after 40 years at the school and 50 years in interscholastic athletics. Dating to his days as a high school athlete at Ralph Bunche High School in Andalusia, Robertson's association with his hometown extends to 57 years.

During his remarkable career, Robertson compiled a 749-357 win-loss record to rank sixth in victories in state history. Among his coaching achievements, Robertson's 2010-11 team registered a 31-3 record, and his 1996 squad won the Alabama High School Athletic Association state championship.

Despite these outstanding accomplishments, his "victories" off the court were even more impressive. "Coach Rob" as he was affectionately known was a tremendous leader who was a second father to many of his players and an only father to other boys during his coaching days. Among the many individuals who played for Robertson was Robert Horry, who was a part of six NBA championship teams during his professional career.

Robertson played a key role in helping Alabama move through the difficult time of integration as the AHSAA merged with the Alabama Interscholastic Athletic Association in 1968-69. Through the years, Robertson became a mentor to hundreds of coaches as he remained in his hometown of Andalusia throughout his career.

Robertson was a member of the AHSAA Central Board of Control for many years, including a term as president, and he was granted Central Board Emeritus status in October 2015. In 1996, Robertson was inducted into the AHSAA Sports Hall of Fame, and, in 2012, he received the AHSAA's highest honor, the "Making a Difference Award."

Jay Dunnahoo, Texas
NFHS Music Association

Jay Dunnahoo was a moving force in school orchestra programs in the state of Texas for more than 30 years as his orchestras were among the finest in the state and his programs were role models for music education.

After graduating from Southwest Texas State Teachers College (now Texas State University) in 1958, Dunnahoo was orchestra director in several Texas high schools during the ensuing 32 years, including six years in the Austin Independent School District and 14 years in the Pasadena Independent School District. In addition to his existing position as orchestra director at Sam Rayburn High School, in 1975 he was named the Pasadena Independent School District's coordinator of instrumental music. From 1979 to 1990, he was director of music education for the Pasadena ISD, a Houston suburb.

Dunnahoo's orchestras consistently won Sweepstakes Awards at Texas University Interscholastic League (UIL) contests. In 1976, his Sam Rayburn High School orchestra won the Honor Orchestra award from the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA). That same year, 13 of his orchestra students were named to the all-state orchestras and bands.

Since he retired from the school setting, Dunnahoo has impacted music education in countless other ways. He has served as executive secretary of the Texas Music Adjudicators Association (TMAA) since 2000. The TMAA provides adjudicators for all UIL Music Contests in the state of Texas.

In 2001, Dunnahoo founded the Symphony of the Hills and served as conductor and artistic director until retiring last year. He now performs in the violin section of the orchestra, a professional group from Kerrville, Texas, that presents five concerts annually. In addition, Dunnahoo was director of music at First Presbyterian Church in Pasadena, Texas, for 20 years (1974-94).

Among his honors, Dunnahoo received the Leadership and Achievement Award from the Texas Music Educators Association in 1976, the Orchestra Director of the Year Award from the Texas Orchestra Directors Association in 1992 and the Outstanding Music Educator Award from the NFHS in 2008.

Pam McComas, Kansas
NFHS Speech, Debate and Theatre Association

Pam McComas retired in 2014 after an outstanding 35-year career as director of forensics at Topeka (Kansas) High School. McComas coached 170 students to national competition, including 33 years in a row. She coached

finalists in almost every National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) main event, and built a nationally recognized debate and forensics program.

McComas coached 15 NSDA All-Americans (top 25 students in the nation), and she coached five national champions in Foreign Extemporaneous, Student Congress, U.S. Extemporaneous and Constitutional Extemporaneous. In 1989, her National Policy Debate Team finished second at the event in Golden, Colorado.

At the state level, McComas' teams won four Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA) Class 6A state titles and finished second six other times. In addition, she led her teams to 12 KSHSAA Class 6A State Speech Championship Sweepstakes.

McComas made tremendous contributions to the speech and debate profession as well. She attended the NFHS Debate Topic Selection Committee from 2005 to 2013 and chaired the Wording Committee on three separate occasions. She served a four-year term on the NFHS Speech Committee and is currently serving her third four-year term on the NSDA Board. In 2007, she co-authored the debate topic report on alternative energy, which was selected as the National Policy Debate Topic for 2008-09.

McComas was appointed to the KSHSAA Executive Board for three separate terms and was tournament manager and host site for numerous KSHSAA State Debate Tournaments and State Speech Championships. She also was a member of the KSHSAA Speech Liaison Advisory Committee for 15 years.

Among her numerous awards, McComas was inducted into the NSDA Hall of Fame in 2004 and the Kansas Speech Communication Association Hall of Fame in 2009. She received her seventh Diamond award from the NSDA in 2013 and

was recipient of the NFHS Outstanding Speech/Debate/Theatre Educator Award in 2015.

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About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and performing arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 17 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,000 high schools and 11 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 7.8 million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; offers online publications and services for high school coaches and officials; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, speech and debate coaches, and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org.

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