

# THE HALL OF HONOR AND THE MOVE TO TIER ONE ATHLETICS

By Debbie Z. Harwell

From its earliest days, the University of Houston rose to the top in athletics—not in football or basketball as you might expect, but in *ice hockey*. The team competed for the first time in 1934 against Rice Institute in the Polar Wave Ice Rink on McGowan Street. It went undefeated for the season, scoring three goals to every one for its opponents. The next year, only one player returned, but the yearbook reported that they “represented a fighting bunch of puck-pushers.” They must have been because the team had no reserves and played entire games without a break.<sup>1</sup>

The sports picture changed dramatically in 1946 when the University joined the Lone Star Conference (LSC) and named Harry H. Fouke as athletic director. He added coaches in men’s tennis, golf, track, football, and basketball, and a new director of women’s athletics focused on physical education. Although the golf team took second in conference play and the tennis team ranked fourth, basketball was the sport that electrified the Cougar fans. The team once practiced with a “total inventory of two basketballs left behind by World War II campus Navy recruits, one of them with a slow leak.” But behind the play of center Guy Lewis, who scored a record 54 points in one game, they won the conference.<sup>2</sup>

In the early 1950s, Regent Corbin Robertson Sr. pointed to “the accelerated development of a successful program of intercollegiate athletics as a *sine qua non* for any young university aspiring to greatness.” His father-in-law, Hugh Roy Cullen, seemed to agree when he announced his gift of \$2.25 million after the Cougars defeated Baylor 37-7 in 1953, stating, “The great spirit and determination shown by the Cougars last Saturday in defeating Baylor fills me with



The 1934 Houston Junior College ice hockey team, left to right: Nelson Hinton, Bob Swor, Lawrence Sauer, Donald Aitken (goalie), Ed Chernosky, Paul Franks, Bill Irwin, Gus Heiss, and Harry Gray. Not pictured John Burns, Erwin Barrow, John Staples, and Bill Goggan.

Photo from 1934 *Houstonian*, courtesy of Digital Library, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

enthusiasm and prompts me to do something for our great university.” Wendy Adair and Oscar Gutiérrez note in *Our Time: Celebrating 75 Years of Learning and Leading* that even though Cullen’s gift was already in the works, the victory forever became linked to the donation—a forerunner of things to come in collegiate sports.<sup>3</sup>

Since those earliest days, the University of Houston has built a proud tradition of athletic excellence that unites the Cougar faithful. Nowhere is that more evident than in the UH Hall of Honor located in the Alumni Center. Over

ninety individuals and two teams appear on the list of inductees. Even though the 1934 ice hockey team did not make the list, the roll of honorees takes us on a walk down memory lane.

## FOOTBALL

A crowd of 11,000 arrived at Public School Stadium (now Robertson Stadium) on September 21, 1946, for UH's first football game against Southwestern Louisiana Institute. The Cougars lost 13-7, but the fans remained hopeful.<sup>4</sup> In 1952, the team played in its first bowl game—the Salad Bowl—in Phoenix, Arizona, and defeated the Dayton Flyers 26-21. That year, UH received its first Top Twenty ranking and won the Missouri Valley Conference (MVC).<sup>5</sup>

Coach Bill Yeoman (1962-1986) arrived in December 1961 and set the team on a long-term winning trajectory. He introduced the Veer offense that “change[d] the future of college football forever.” Standout players included Warren McVea (1965-1967) and Wade Phillips (1966-1968). McVea, the school's first African American football player, ran for more than 100 yards six times and ranks tenth at UH in all-time, all-purpose yards with 3,009 yards rushing and a reception in the longest pass in Cougar history, a 99-yard pass from Bo Burris against Washington State. Now defensive coordinator for the Houston Texans, Phillips played linebacker, and his 228 assisted tackles made him the UH all-time career leader. The Cougars reached a milestone in 1968 when they defeated the University of Tulsa 100-6.<sup>6</sup>

In 1971, UH entered the Southwest Conference (SWC) with full competition beginning in 1976, when the football team ranked first in the conference and fourth nationally. In 1976, Wilson Whitley (1973-1976) won the Lombardi Award as the nation's outstanding lineman. He and the defense held the UT Longhorns to twenty-four yards rushing in a 30-0 Houston victory, and the Cougars defeated



*Coach Bill Yeoman discussed plays with Garret Jurgajtis during the Cougar's 20-18 victory over the Baylor Bears.*

Photo from the 1979 *Houstonian*, courtesy of the Digital Library, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

unbeaten Maryland 30-21 in the Cotton Bowl.<sup>7</sup>

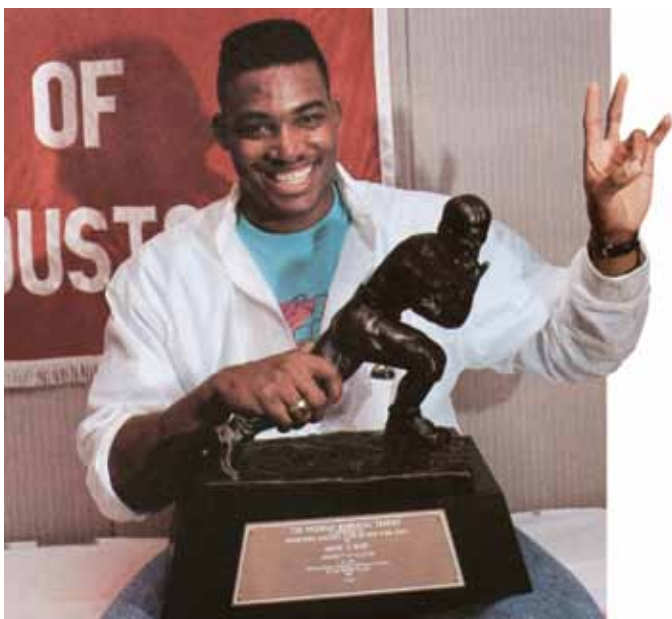
Yeoman retired in 1986 with a record of 160-108. His teams had seventeen winning seasons. They were ranked nationally eleven times, and won four SWC championships.<sup>8</sup>

Quarterback André Ware (1987-1989) came to UH under Coach Jack Pardee in 1987. Ware set twenty-six NCAA and fifteen SWC records for passing and total offense in 1989 and became the first African American, and the only UH football player, awarded the Heisman Trophy—all without playing a single game on live national television. After playing in the NFL and Canadian Football League, Ware returned to UH in 1996 and completed his degree in marketing. The consummate student-athlete, he said, “This ranks right up there with receiving the Heisman Trophy.” Today, he is a respected football broadcaster, a profession that has given him a front-row seat as recent UH players Kevin Kolb and Case Keenum have continued the tradition of excellence at quarterback.<sup>9</sup>

## BASKETBALL

The Cougars won their first ever varsity basketball game against North Texas State Teachers College 62-35, going on to a 10-5 record. Guy Lewis (1946-1947) led the team to the LSC championship in the first two years of competition and played in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) tournament. Lewis (1956-1986) returned as the team's coach and is one of only two Hall of Honor inductees named for their contributions on the field and from the sidelines.<sup>10</sup>

Lewis integrated UH athletics in 1964 when he recruited Don Chaney (1965-1968) and Elvin Hayes (1965-1968). Both players are perhaps best remembered for playing in the “Game of the Century.” A crowd of 52,639 made their way into the Astrodome on January 20, 1968, to see the Cougars battle the top-ranked UCLA Bruins. Although Chaney played the full forty minutes, the match-up between Hayes



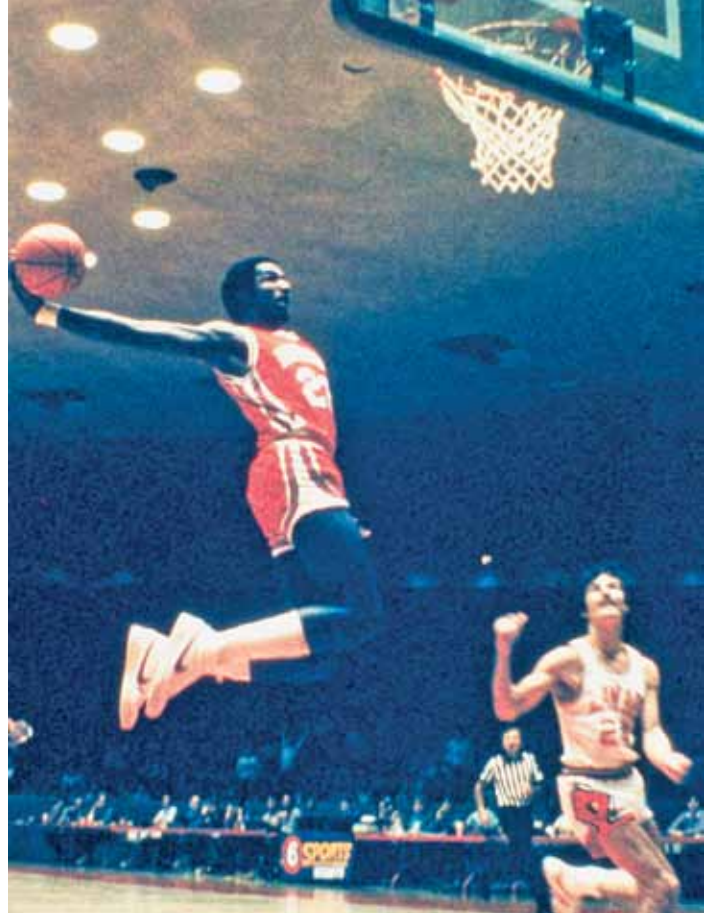
*Even though Heisman trophy winner André Ware rarely played more than the game's first half because of the Cougars' high scores, he passed and ran for seventy-five touchdowns accounting for 8,202 yards in total offense.*

Photo from 1990 *Houstonian*, courtesy of the Digital Library, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.



“Big E,” Elvin Hayes competes with UCLA Bruins’ Lew Alcindor (Kareem Abdul-Jabbar) for the jump ball at center court in the “Game of the Century.”

Photo from the 1968 *Houstonian*, courtesy of the Digital Library, Special Collection, University of Houston Libraries.



Clyde “The Glide” Drexler, called UH’s “most versatile” player, is the only Cougar to accumulate more than 1,000 points, 900 rebounds, 300 assists, and 250 steals.

Photo courtesy of UH Athletics Department.

and UCLA’s Lew Alcindor (Kareem Abdul-Jabar) drew the most attention. Hayes scored thirty-nine points and made fifteen rebounds, leading the team to a 71-69 victory.<sup>11</sup>

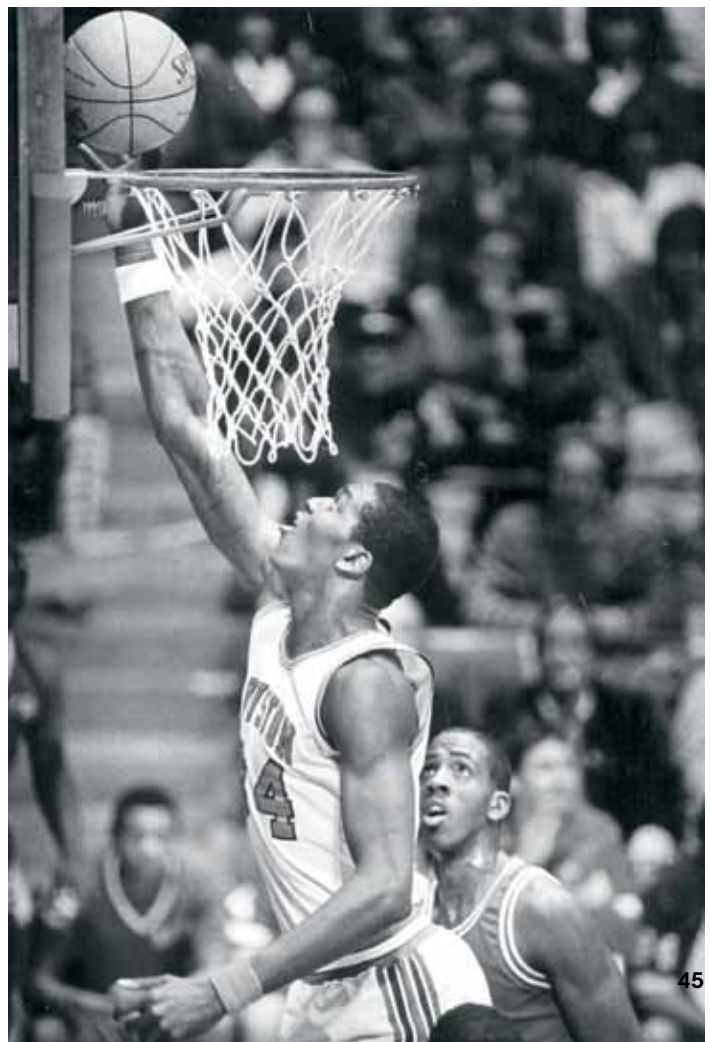
Lewis’s teams in the 1970s included greats like Louis Dunbar (1972-1975) and Otis Birdsong (1973-1977), and in the 1980s, UH basketball again rose to national prominence. *Houston Post* reporter Thomas Bonk coined the term “Phi Slama Jama” to describe “Texas’ tallest fraternity” and its style of play. The team went to the NCAA Final Four in 1982, 1983, and 1984, advancing to the national championship game in 1982 and 1984.<sup>12</sup>

Michael Young (1980-1984), Clyde Drexler (1980-1983), and Akeem Olajuwon (1980-1984) led the team. Young, the current UH assistant coach, is one of three Cougars to score more than 2,000 points during his college career, and the only one to start for four NCAA tournament teams. He led the team in scoring for the 1982-1983 and 1983-1984 seasons, averaging 17.3 and 19.8 points per game respectively. In 1982, Drexler averaged 15.2 points and 10.5 rebounds per game and, the following year, he earned first-team All-America honors after UH ended the year 31-3 and undefeated in the SWC.<sup>13</sup>

Olajuwon came to Houston in January 1981 from Lagos, Nigeria, planning to interview with multiple schools. When

*In 1984, the Houston Rockets took Akeem Olajuwon (later changed to Hakeem) as the first pick in the NBA Draft. He led the team to NBA titles in 1994 and, again, in 1995 with Clyde Drexler.*

Photo courtesy of UH Athletics Department.



bad weather delayed those meetings, he flew on to Houston. Lewis offered him a scholarship, and the rest is history. Olajuwon was a consensus All-America in 1984 after leading the NCAA with a .675 field goal percentage, 13.5 rebounds, and 5.6 blocked shots per game.<sup>14</sup>

Known for clutching his red and white towel on the sidelines, Guy Lewis retired in 1986 as UH's all-time winningest basketball coach. He led the Cougars to five NCAA Final Fours, 592 wins, and twenty-one NCAA Tournaments in thirty years as head coach. Three of his players, Hayes, Drexler, and Olajuwon rank among the NBA's top fifty players of all time.<sup>15</sup>

For the Lady Cougars, Chandi Jones (2000-2004) took the C-USA Freshman of the Year honors despite an injury that sidelined her for eleven games. After averaging 27.5 points per game as a sophomore, the Women's Basketball News Service named her its Comeback Player of the Year. She was named C-USA Female Athlete of the Decade, Women's Basketball Player of the Decade, a member of the C-USA Women's Basketball All-Decade Team, and a first round pick in the WNBA draft. Now the Lady Cougar video coordinator, Jones became the first UH woman to have her jersey retired.<sup>16</sup>

## TRACK AND FIELD

Some UH victories have come from unexpected heroes, such as Al Lawrence (1960-1963). After winning bronze at the 1956 Olympics, the Australian native came to UH where, at age twenty-eight, he won the national collegiate cross-country championship and the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) title back to back, a first in the sport. He led the UH track team, consisting of two fellow Australians, a Pole, and a Scot, to two team titles, the first all-foreign team to do so, and the oldest at an average age of twenty-six. Coach Johnny Morris (1955-1975), who is credited with bringing indoor track to Houston, guided them to victory and three MVC titles.<sup>17</sup>

When Tom Tellez (1976-1998) joined UH as the head coach for track and field, he brought his knowledge of biomechanics, which applied scientific principles to human anatomy. Tellez explained, "There are not ten different ways to run fast, there is only one way, and the coach has to teach the athlete what that way is."<sup>18</sup> His methods succeeded across the board for both men and women.

Carl Lewis (1980-1981) stands out as Tellez's most accomplished athlete. After having his Olympic hopes dashed in 1980 by the U.S. boycott of the Moscow Games, he began training with Tellez for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. There, Lewis won four gold medals, tying Jesse Owens's 1936 record. Lewis went on to win four more gold medals and one silver at Olympics in Seoul, Barcelona, and Atlanta, where his gold came in the long-jump at age thirty-five.<sup>19</sup>

As a freshman, Leroy Burrell (1986-1990) broke Lewis's UH record in the long jump. He twice set the world record in the 100-meter dash and, in 1990 and 1991, ranked as the world's best sprinter. In addition to numerous NCAA long-jump and 100-meter championships, Burrell joined with Lewis, Mike Marsh, and Dennis Mitchell to win gold in the 4x100-meter relay at the Barcelona Olympics.<sup>20</sup>

Tellez added women's track and field to UH's athletic



*Joe DeLoach, Coach Tellez, and Carl Lewis at the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988. DeLoach won the gold medal in the 200 meters, and Lewis won silver in the 200 meters and gold in the 100 meters and long jump.* Photo courtesy of UH Athletic Department.

program upon his arrival. Among the standouts are Carol Lewis (1982-1985), Carl's sister, and Third Ward native Jolanda Jones (1985-1988). Carol Lewis won a gold medal at the 1981 World University Games in the 4x100 relay, eleven national titles in the long jump at both indoor and outdoor meets, and a bronze at the 1983 World Athletic Championships. Jones won three SWC high jump championships and still holds the UH record. In 1989, she won her third heptathlon title, the prestigious NCAA Top Six Award, and GTE Academic All-American female athlete.<sup>21</sup>

Tellez coached Olympic medalists Kirk Baptiste (1983-1985), Joe DeLoach (1987-1988), and Frank Rutherford. He led the Cougars to SWC and C-USA championships and received multiple recognitions as both men's and women's indoor and outdoor coach of the year before retiring. Burrell took over the program in 1998 and has already been named C-USA Coach of the Year a combined sixteen times.<sup>22</sup>

## SWIMMING AND DIVING

In 1957, swimming and diving coach Phil Hansel (1975-1996) put an ad in the *Daily Cougar* to find swimmers for his fledgling team. After gathering some talented athletes, he learned the program had been dropped because UH lacked an indoor pool. Instead of quitting, he coached the students at the YMCA. In 1959, he entered swimmers in the AAU championship, where they competed as the University of Houston Swim Club and finished second.<sup>23</sup>

From this club came UH's first student-athlete to appear on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, Olympic medalist Carin Cone (1958-1960). The "queen of backstrokers," Cone set four world records and twenty-four American records and won sixteen U.S. Senior National championships while helping lead the Cougars to their second place finish at the 1959 AAU championships.<sup>24</sup>

UH opened a swim natatorium in 1969 and reinstated the swimming program in 1971, naming Hansel as the men's coach. In 1975, Hansel added a women's team and took them to ten consecutive Top Ten finishes with a combined 120 All-Americans.

Diane Johannigman (1978-1981) became the first UH athlete to win an Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AAIW) national championship and the first to



*Yulia Pakhalina and Anastasia Pozdniakova won a silver medal in the 3-meter springboard synchronized diving competition at the Beijing Olympics in 2008.*

Photo courtesy of UH Athletics Department.

do it three consecutive years. She ranked in the world's Top Twenty in the 100-meter butterfly, 200-meter butterfly, and 100-meter backstroke and continues to hold fifteen times in eight events, ranking in UH's ten fastest times.<sup>25</sup>

Hansel built the foundation for today's swimming and diving program, guiding UH to more than seventy dual meet victories and ten Top Twenty finishes. He trained UH champion diver Jane Figueiredo (1983-1986) who took over as the women's diving coach in 1990. Still at the helm, she has been named C-USA Diving Coach of the Year every year since its inception, C-USA Swimming and Diving Coach of the Decade-2000s, and NCAA and NIC Diving Coach of the Year multiple times.<sup>26</sup>

Figueiredo's champions include Yulia Pakhalina (2001-2003) of Penza, Russia, and Anastasia Pozdniakova (2006-2010) of Elektrostal, Russia, the only UH athletes to be named NCAA Diver of the Year. In 2001-2002, Pakhalina had a thirty-six-event winning streak, taking 64 of 66 collegiate diving events. She won six Olympic medals in synchro-



*Swimmer Carin Cone became the first student-athlete from the University of Houston to appear on the cover of Sports Illustrated, April 18, 1960. She was inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame in 1984.*

Photo from 1960 *Houstonian*, courtesy of Digital Library, Special Collection University of Houston Libraries.

nized diving and the 3-meter individual springboard in 2000 and 2004. At the 2008 Beijing Games, Pakhalina took the silver in synchronized diving paired with Pozdniakova, who holds more C-USA Athlete of the Week honors than any other individual in conference history.<sup>27</sup> With the Cougar women divers leading the NCAA with eight national championships in the last eleven years, they appear poised to continue the winning traditions.

## GOLF

During his tenure at UH, Dave Williams (1952-1987) built a world-renowned golf dynasty for the Cougars while, coming to be known as the "Father of Collegiate Golf." Originally an engineering professor, Williams earned this distinction by inventing the scoring system used by the NCAA and conferences nationwide and for introducing team uniforms.<sup>28</sup>

The victory of Rex Baxter Jr. (1955-1957) at the 1957 NCAA Golf Championship brought UH its first national championship in any sport. Over the years, many of Williams's protégés took their skills to the PGA, including Homero Blancas (1960-1962), Kermit Zarley (1961-1963), Marty Fleckman (1964-1966), John Mahaffey (1968-1969), Bruce Lietzke and Bill Rogers (1970-1973), Keith Fergus (1973-1976), Fred Couples (1977-1980), and Billy Ray Brown and Steve Elkington (1982-1985). In 1992 when Couples won the Master's, his UH teammate and sports broadcaster Jim Nantz anchored the tournament's coverage.<sup>29</sup>



*Under coach Dave Williams, UH won sixteen national championships, fourteen conference titles, seven individual championships, and over 340 tournaments.*

Photo courtesy of the Digital Library, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

## BASEBALL

The University's fourth baseball coach, Lovette Hill (1949-1974), built a strong baseball tradition at UH. His teams won 343 games, taking the MVC championship five times. The Cougars went to the NCAA College World Series in 1953 and returned in 1967 after a come-from-behind play-off victory over the University of Texas. The team, which included future major leaguer Tom Paciorek (1966-1968), advanced to the finals, but lost to Arizona State.<sup>30</sup>

Before following Hill as the Cougars coach, Rolan Walton (1975-1986) distinguished himself as a student-athlete. He hit .300 or better in his first three seasons and was the team's first Most Valuable Player in 1951. He remains UH's second winningest coach with 378 wins and a .616 winning percentage. One of Walton's star pupils, Doug Drabek (1981-1983), led the Cougars to their first NCAA regional appearance in 1982. He pitched six shut outs and one no hitter at UH before the Chicago White Sox drafted him. He saw his best success with the Pittsburgh Pirates (1987-1992), winning three division titles and the 1990 Cy Young Award after going 22-6 with a 2.76 ERA.<sup>31</sup>

## OTHER HONOREES

Hall of Honor inductees have made contributions to UH athletics beyond the high profile sports as well. The University named John E. Hoff (1946-1966) its first tennis coach. Under his tutelage, Jason Morton (1948-1951) won championships in singles and doubles in three conferences: Lone Star, Gulf Coast, and Missouri Valley. In the early 1970s, he opened the University Club, Houston's first indoor tennis facility and chaired the "Battle of the Sexes" match between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs in the Astrodome.<sup>32</sup>

Sue Garrison (1945-1979) pioneered UH women's athletics as they competed in softball, basketball, badminton, volleyball, track and field, and swimming and diving. Long before Title IX, her efforts resulted in the University being one of the first schools to dedicate funds to strictly women's sports. Garrison became the first woman administrator elected to the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics Hall of Fame.<sup>33</sup>

The accomplishments of many women athletes can be attributed to Garrison's advocacy, including volleyball stars Flo Hyman (1974-1976), the first female inducted into the Hall of Honor, Rita Crockett (1977), and Rose Magers-Powell (1978-1980). In the 1984 Olympics, the three UH women led the USA volleyball team to a silver medal, its first medal in the sport.<sup>34</sup>

Working behind the scenes, athletic trainer Tom Wilson (1953-1993) tended to UH athletes for forty years—includ-

ing hundreds of All Americans, five Final Four teams, and twelve bowl game teams—and crafted the football conditioning program nicknamed "Camp Fun." Wilson was named to the Athletic Trainers Hall of Fame, and in 1991, UH established an endowed scholarship for distinguished service in his honor.<sup>35</sup>

The University of Houston has a proud athletic heritage dating back to that first hockey team, but college sports today is dramatically different than it was then. Athletic victories garner national media exposure that leads to higher enrollment and increased giving. Echoing the words of Corbin Robinson Sr. a half century earlier, UH President Renu Khator argued in 2010 that "building the strongest athletics program possible is a key element of a Tier One university." Calling for the University's acceptance to a BCS conference, she noted that UH's case was strong in academics and athletics as Texas's third largest public university with a supportive alumni base located in the tenth largest television market. In 2011, the goal was realized when UH officially joined the Big East Conference. With plans for a new football stadium and renovated basketball arena, UH athletes will play in one of the largest, most diverse Division I conferences in the country, bringing new stories of accomplishment to the Hall of Honor.<sup>36</sup>

Debbie Z. Harwell received her Ph.D. in history from the University of Houston and is managing editor of *Houston History*.

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