



## Celebrating 50 Years of Title IX

### **50 For 50:**

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By Diane Gasper-O'Brien

The mid- to late-1970s were a prime time for young female athletes who had yearned for years to participate competitively for their high schools. Girls were starting to benefit greatly from Title IX – a federal law that provided equal athletic opportunities for boys and girls - and it was a great time to be a Grinnell Warrior.

Led by a strong group of multi-sport competitors, Grinnell High School excelled in girls' athletics for several years. And most folks in this small northwest town of about 300 can point to one name that stood out among all the rest.

By the time she was a sophomore, Jacque (Struckhoff) Stedman had become a household name for local and area competitors, and it would soon spread across the state as she helped lead Warrior volleyball, basketball and track teams to state titles.

Struckhoff, who is now married and goes by Stedman, also excelled in other activities and was the epitome of a student-athlete from 1979-83. A straight-A student, she was

valedictorian of her senior class of 26. She was a member of the school's Scholars Bowl team, the pep club and student council.

"Jacque was good at everything she did, but she also worked hard at everything she did," classmate Bev (Heier) Birney said. "She was a great role model."

Birney, a standout multi-sport athlete in her own right, remembered Jacque playing the trap set in the pep band at a time when most bands featured male drummers.

"She was phenomenal at the drums, and she was an incredible artist, too," Birney said. "I can't think of anything she ever failed at."

Stedman admits there were times she might not have been as confident as it seemed.

The quiet, unassuming farm girl – the second of six siblings – well remembers the angst of having to make a decision where to attend college. What's a small-town girl from rural Kansas to do when Division I Kansas State University comes calling?

K-State wanted Stedman to bring her talents across the state and run cross country and track for the Wildcats. Thing is, Stedman loved team sports – specifically volleyball and basketball – and she had the chance to play both at the junior college level.

Stedman ultimately chose K-State, went on to earn All-America honors four times in cross country and track, and even qualified for the 1988 U.S. Olympic Trials in the 10,000-meter run.

In reminiscing about her storied career, Stedman credits her teammates, coaches, family and community – and all those athletes who went before her back home – for contributing to her success.

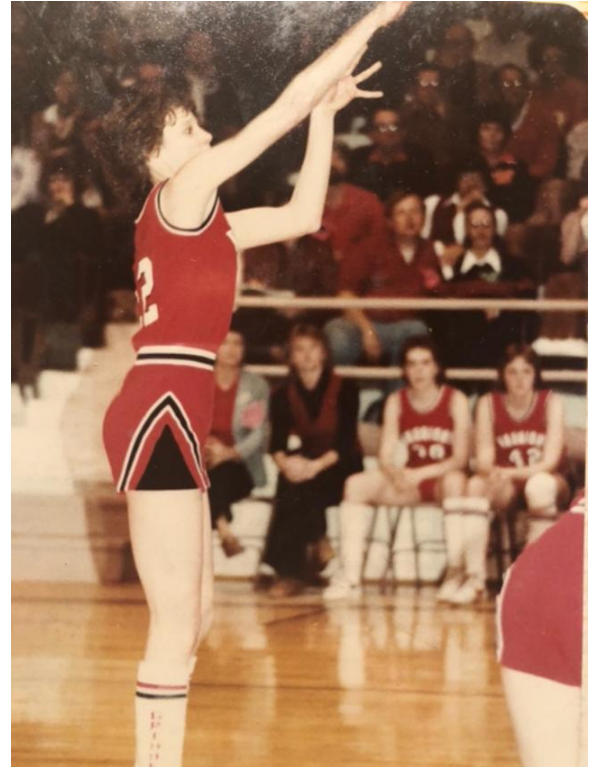
"Grinnell had great volleyball teams as long as I can remember," Stedman said. "There were always a lot of talented girls who had great work ethic. We certainly looked up to the high school girls when we were in seventh and eighth grade."

Once Stedman and her friends reached high school, they knew it was their turn to represent Grinnell to the best of their abilities, and they took that responsibility seriously.

The early '80s rank as the best in a highly successful history for Grinnell girls' athletics. After finishing third in 1980, Warrior volleyball teams won back-to-back titles Jacque's junior and senior years. GHS basketball teams claimed second- and third-place state finishes those same two years when Stedman played key roles for the Warriors.

"Jacque was extremely talented, but she was also extremely motivated," said Peggy Moore, head volleyball coach and assistant track coach during Stedman's GHS career. "And she was just a fantastic person. She worked so hard to do her best, and because everyone looked up to her, that brought out the best in all the kids around her."

Stedman might have saved her best for the spring seasons. She qualified for state in track



as a sophomore in 1981, when Grinnell placed second in team standings. But the best was yet to come.



Stedman's junior year, a new coach for the Warriors – distance guru Larry Morel – talked her into trying distance racing in track. (Morel had guided the girls' cross country team to its fourth straight state title in the fall.) Up to that point, Stedman's longest race was the 400 meters.

The switch proved golden for Jacque - several times over.

"I was up for the longer distances because I liked to run, to put in the miles," Stedman said. "It's a gift I guess. But it was a lot of hard work, too. Nothing comes easily without working hard."

Stedman took advantage of that gift of athleticism. She went on to set Class 1A state track meet records in the 800 and 1,600 her junior year. As a senior, she set another state meet record in the 3,200. Her times of 5:02.8 in the 1,600 and 10:57.3 in the 3,200 are marks that still stand today. She also ran on winning relay teams to lead

the Warriors to team titles both years, then took off for Kansas State.

Now a mother of three, Stedman makes her home in Oklahoma with her husband, Scott. She still returns to the Kansas state track and field meet occasionally. After standing atop the awards stand so many times as an athlete, Stedman was front and center again at this year's Class 2A and 1A state meet in Wichita – as an inductee into the Kansas State High School Activities Association Hall of Fame.

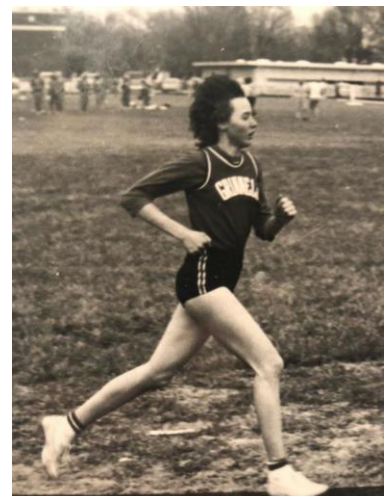
"That was a real honor; there have been so many great performances and athletes in the state over the years," she said. "I owe an awful lot to a lot of people for encouraging and supporting me."

Moore, for one, wasn't surprised at Stedman's reaction to being named a Hall of Famer.

"She was successful in a lot of things, but she was very humble," Moore said. "She was one of those who don't come along very often."

Birney said she feels blessed to have gotten to compete with Stedman, a childhood friend who she still keeps in touch with today.

"All the things that Jacque accomplished, you would never know it talking to her," Birney said. "She was a very quiet leader, and she made us all better in her own quiet way."



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