

# The Time Machine

## A True Pioneer

Article 30

### The Athlete

At the age of four she recalled an incident on the beach of the family's lake home. It is our first glimpse into her competitive nature. In this case she was competing against herself. The rather large rock she held in her tiny hand was about to be tossed out into the lake, at least that was her goal. She reached back, and with all of her might threw it as hard as she could. Unfortunately, it never hit the water because it hit her dad on the head. After seeing him drop to the ground she ran as fast and far as she could. Luckily everything worked out and her dad did not punish her.

Spending summers at the lake made it difficult to participate in summer recreation activities. A few years after the rock throwing incident the lake home was sold and summers were spent in town. That resulted in swimming lessons and boys' baseball. For boys under 10 there was "Rinky Dinks." Miss competition and another girl, or two, joined in. At 10 she was the only girl to move up to the "Little League." At 12 she was selected to the Wadena Little League All-Star team and started at third base as that all-star team competed against the all-stars of other towns. Then her baseball career ended. Injury? No. Lost interest? No. Why then? Rules. Girls could not participate on boys' teams after age 12. That was the rule.



★

She moved on. Fishing, hunting, snow skiing, water skiing, and bowling filled the void. Bowling gave her the competitive challenge she needed. By the time she was 14 she had bowled a 263 in league play and she won the Minnesota State Bowling Tournament! At 15 she entered the Junior State Track Meet, in the softball throw. Out of an abundance of caution, dad wore a football helmet and watched from his car. Anyway, she threw that softball over 183 feet, good enough to win the intermediate girls softball throw.

What next? Let's try tennis and then golf. Her parents hired Mr. Mead, the WHS tennis coach, to teach her how to play tennis. Eventually she realized it took two to tango, so to speak, and she could not find anyone to regularly play against. Solution, golf. With a new set of clubs, purchased from a hardware store, she would be dropped off at the golf course between 8-9:00 A.M. and picked up around 5:00 P.M. She played multiple rounds of golf all day long. Soon they signed her up for golf lessons, however they were in St. Cloud. After a few trips south, mom discovered Alexandria had a golf pro. After working with him a couple of times, the pro told mom, "If she is to get any better she will need real clubs." A set of Spaulding professional clubs were promptly purchased. When she was not at the golf course, or in Alexandria taking lessons, she was set up on the east side of the municipal pool. Her personal driving range. If she hit 100 balls, she retrieved 100 balls, or close to it. For the next two years she competed in many junior golf tournaments before heading off to college.



Golf had become her passion. Wherever she would go to college they must have a women's golf team. She was probably not good enough for the Florida, Arizona, and California universities but her mom put together a "scrapbook" of sorts and sent one to each college offering women's golf. A fishing expedition to see if there were any golf scholarships. Remember, there was no such thing as Title IX at that time. Lo and behold a smaller division one university replied with a scholarship offer that would cover her tuition. Mom and dad would need only pay for room and board.

The golf coach was Dr. West, a phy. ed. teacher, athletic director, and the basketball coach. Once settled in at college our multi-sport athlete found out she could go out for other sports, so she did. Field hockey and volleyball in the fall, basketball in the winter, and of course golf in the spring. By her junior year she was on the varsity in all four sports. She was in heaven. By her own admission her least capable sport was basketball, describing herself as one that was strong on defense, but she could not make a basket to save her life. If I were writing an article about one of her brothers, I could use that exact same sentence. But I digress. Forgive me. To close on her basketball experience, she did say that she learned a lot about the game while riding the pines (aka sitting on the bench). That comes in handy later on.

She won one big tournament in golf and their team qualified for the national tournament twice. The volleyball and basketball teams won their respective state tournaments and made it to the regional tournaments but never advanced to the national tournaments. A great athletic career, with a “rocky” start at the age of four. Does it end at the age of 22? Hardly. Teri Merickel, WHS class of 1969 had only just begun.



### **The Career**

Here is a dose of irony. In her first job out of college she was hired to teach, coach, and be the athletic director in a small town, Benton IL. Title IX, a new law designed, among other things, to bring equity to girls’ and women’s sports. It was just starting to make a difference. Participation in girls’ and women’s sports was about to explode.

Five years later she was hired by the largest school district in Illinois to teach phy. ed., coach basketball and serve as the women’s athletic director at Palatine HS. She made more money coaching basketball than she did coaching four different sports in Benton. She led the PHS girls’ basketball team to a Mid-Suburban Basketball Championship. A feat that has not been repeated to this day. As previously stated, she learned a lot about basketball sitting on the bench at Southern Illinois University, where in 1998 she was inducted into the Saluki Hall of Fame.

Teri’s career, and educational pursuits, were constantly in full motion. She never slowed down. But she did eventually retire. At 55, was that the end? Nope.

### **The Retirement**

Upon retirement she moved to San Diego where the weather is predictable and some family members resided. Eventually a neighbor asked her if she ever played softball. “Not since I was 35,” she replied. That was about to change, as she was invited to play in a local senior women’s softball league. Teri is still playing softball to this day, but not locally. It should come as no surprise that one thing led to another and her softball journey is off the charts! She has played for at least 11 different teams and currently competes in the over 70 division. She competes in tournaments all over the country. That’s why she has played for so many different teams. Other tournament participants see her in action and then recruit her. Teams from Missouri, California, Arizona, and Ohio to name a few. She has played in national tournaments in Tennessee, Minnesota, Alabama, Florida, and New Mexico, where they won the National 65 Division Championship.

Let’s reflect on this on this incredible story for a moment. Title IX. Better late than never. But what would this story be about had Teri been in youth sports under Title IX? We will never know. My brother Greg was Teri’s classmate. I idolized my brother and his teammates in football, basketball, and track. My 13-year-old female classmates probably didn’t know much about Teri Merickel. They should have known but did not have the opportunity.

Teri’s story has come full circle. From throwing the rock at the beach to throwing a baseball at Rinky-Dinks and Little League, to throwing a softball in the senior circuit, and everything that occurred in between. She is indeed a “True Pioneer” of women’s sports.

\*Bowling Team Members L-R: Barb Merickel, Linda Stuntebeck, Teri Merickel, Missy Merickel, Mary Kay Schiller