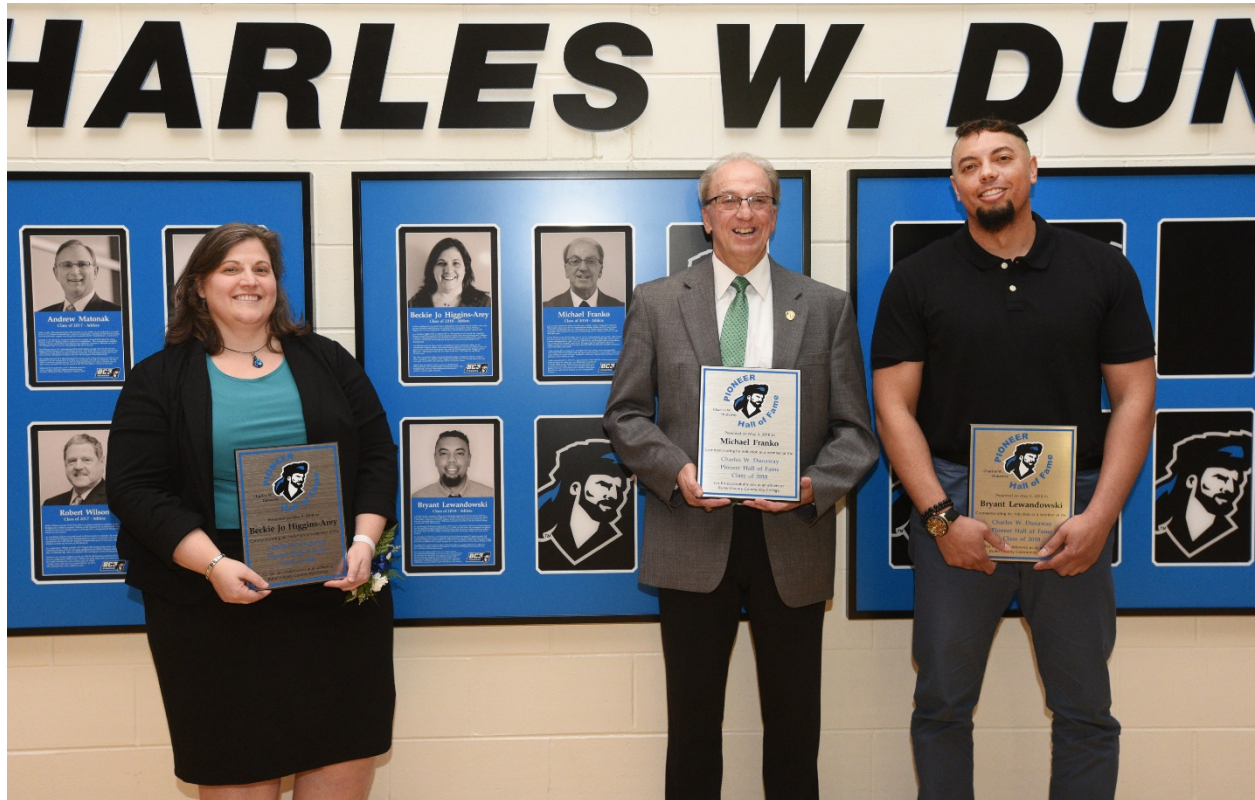


BC3 inducts 3 into Pioneer Hall, applauds 5 All-Americans

Men's basketball star finally "beats" talented big brother

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Butler County Community College's Class of 2018 inductees to the Charles W. Dunaway Pioneer Hall of Fame are shown Saturday, May 5, 2018, in BC3's Field House. Beekie Jo Higgins-Arey, left, was recognized in softball; Michael Franko, in cross-country; and Bryant Lewandowski, in men's basketball.

(Butler, PA) Bryant Lewandowski finally stepped from the shadow of his big brother, Beekie Jo Higgins-Arey relived and savored a historic championship, and Michael Franko recalled planning another run at Butler County Community College from across the globe as BC3 on Saturday inducted the men's basketball and softball players, and cross-country bellwether, into its Charles W. Dunaway Pioneer Hall of Fame.

BC3 also recognized its five most-recent National Junior College Athletic Association All-Americans, including Brittney Bianco, Julia Baxter and Nikki Houk, who in 2017 became the college's first three females to receive the post-season award in a calendar year.

Lewandowski, 39, of Cleveland, remains BC3's all-time leading scorer in men's basketball, amassing 1,311 points from 1997 to 1999.

While he and his older brother, Joe, represent the only siblings in BC3 history to be selected as All-Americans – Joe, also in men's basketball, in 1995; and Bryant in 1999 – only Bryant's photo and biography now appear on a plaque in the Pioneer Hall of Fame within BC3's Field House.

“My brother was always a ghost to me,” Bryant said of Joe, a two-time state champion and one-time national champion football player at St. Ignatius High in Cleveland, and who is five years older and 4 inches taller than the 6-foot-2 Bryant. “Basketball was his second sport. When I was very little, he would play me one-on-one, and he would just dominate me every single day.”

The family's backyard basketball court in Cleveland – an outdoor athletic classroom, sans an asphalt surface – was one where Bryant honed his ballhandling skills against his big brother.

“We would dribble on dirt and on tree roots coming up,” Bryant said. “It just really developed your game, especially when going against him in a very small, 10-by-10 area. He just beat me down until I could compete against him.

“I have been chasing him for as long as I can remember. Today I feel like I finally beat him to something. This is the first time in my life I have actually beat him to a point.”

Bryant tallied 42 points in BC3's victory against Cambria Area Community College on Jan. 22, 1999, to break Terrance Pankey's school record of 981 career points, set in 1991. Bryant ended the 1998-1999 season with all-Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference, all-Pennsylvania Collegiate Athletic Association and all-NCJAA Division III Region XX honors.

The Butler Senior High graduate earned an associate degree in general studies from BC3 and became the starting point guard for Horsens, Denmark, in the ProEuro League of the International Basketball Federation. He finished as an American Basketball Association All-Star in 2005-06 with the Ohio Aviators.

This spring he earned a bachelor's degree from Cleveland State University.

The Pioneers in 1990 earned a WPCC title and their first PCAA crown behind Higgins-Arey, a left-handed catcher who batted right-handed.

“It was movie-quality”

Higgins-Arey hit a home run and a single in BC3's Game 1 win against Westmoreland County Community College in the best-of-three WPCC championships, and her run-scoring single in Game 2 gave BC3 a one-run victory and the conference title.

BC3 went on to hold off Northampton Community College 1-0 in the deciding game of the best-of-three 1990 PCAA championships behind what Higgins-Arey recalled on Saturday as an amazing play by first baseman Maria Lewis.

With the bases loaded and two out, Lewis dove to snag a hard-hit ground ball and made the unassisted putout at first base to secure BC3's only PCAA softball title.

"It was movie-quality," said Higgins-Arey, 46, of Waynesboro, who earned an associate degree in business administration at BC3. "It was so dramatic."

Higgins-Arey spared no drama at the plate, where she led the Pioneers with batting averages of .402 in 1990, when BC3 finished 18-2, and of .366 in 1991, when the squad finished 15-4 and with its second consecutive WPCC crown.

"I just had quick reflexes," said Higgins-Arey, who attended and played softball for James Buchanan High School in Mercersburg, Franklin County, and later received bachelor's and master's degrees in English from Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania. "I had a quick snap of my wrist."

During her two seasons with BC3, Higgins-Arey – named each year to the WPCC all-conference and PCAA all-state teams – batted cleanup for the Pioneers and was known as a first-pitch hitter.

"I was always up in the (batter's) box," she said. "I was very confident in attacking a fast-pitch softball, almost hungry. I wasn't as much of a power hitter as I was quick and aggressive with the bat, and as a catcher, I understood pitching strategies."

Higgins-Arey, a National Board Certified teacher, is an English instructor at North Hagerstown High School in Washington County, Md.

While Higgins-Arey was fast with the bat, Franko was fast with his feet, and upon his enrollment at BC3 quickly helped the college to create its third program, cross-country.

"I was coming back to school at BC3"

Franko, who ran cross-country and participated in track and field under coach Bill Lennox at Butler High, worked with Dunaway, BC3's athletic director, to form a team in 1968-1969.

In his first season, Franko served as BC3's team captain, earned all-state and all-NJCAA regional honors and qualified for the 1969 NJCAA championships.

Then he left BC3 to serve in the Army during the Vietnam War.

Franko, who was pursuing associate degrees in business administration and in education, worked with a B-52 support unit in Thailand. While the specialist fifth class served as a legal

administrator and with a JAG unit, Lennox became the cross-country and track and field coach at Slippery Rock State College.

“I knew at that time I wanted to become an educator like Chuck Dunaway, my mentor, and Bill Lennox, my mentor,” said Franko, 67, of Butler. “I already knew that when I got out of the service, I was coming back to school at BC3, get my education degree and transfer to Slippery Rock.”

Franko returned to BC3, and its cross-country team, in 1973. He again served as team captain and duplicated his earlier successes with all-state and all-NJCAA regional honors and by qualifying again for the NJCAA championships. He earned degrees in business administration and in education, and lettered in cross-country, baseball and basketball to become BC3’s first three-sport athlete.

Franko continued his running career at Slippery Rock State College, where he competed in cross-country, and track and field, and posted personal bests of 1:55 in the 880-meter run and 4:18 in the mile. Franko also qualified for the Boston Marathon with a 2-hour, 42-minute time in a qualifying 26.2-mile race.

Franko returned to BC3 in 1977-79 to teach corporate fitness and direct the intramural program before moving on to a long career as a multimedia consultant for the Butler Media Group.

Franko has been an avid runner, racer and promoter of the sport. He served on the Butler Road Race board of directors, was inducted into the Butler County Sports Hall of Fame and has been honored as a BC3 Distinguished Alumnus.

BC3 lauds All-Americans

Bianco is second on BC3’s all-time assist list in volleyball with 1,254; Baxter is the Pioneers’ all-time leading scorer in women’s basketball with 1,070 points; and Houk in 2017 led the NJCAA with a .627 batting average, higher than that of any other player on the 350 squads in Divisions I and II – and in Division III of the NJCAA, in which BC3 competes.

In being chosen an All-American in 2014 and in 2015, Stefan Carlsson joined Robert Wilson and Megan Smith as the only BC3 athletes to have twice been selected for the post-season honor. Wilson, a cross-country runner, was named All-American in 1970 and 1971; and Smith, a volleyball player, in 2002 and 2003.

Golfer Thomas Dimun, named an All-American in 2015, was also recognized Saturday.

Lewandowski, Higgins-Arey and Franko bring to nine the number of those in the Pioneer Hall of Fame, which was dedicated in 2015. John Stuper, a former Major League Baseball and World Series pitcher, and the current baseball coach at Yale University, and Thomas Beckett, athletic director at Yale, were inducted in 2016.

BC3 last year inducted Wilson, baseball pitcher Dr. Andrew Matonak, volleyball player Missy (Haney) Schnur and scorekeeper Walter Fitzpatrick into the Pioneer Hall of Fame.