

# SPORTS FAITH INTERNATIONAL

## Honoring the Exemplary: Sports Faith Hall of Fame 2021 Inductees Score on Many Counts

**LAKE FOREST, IL. JUNE 7, 2021** –Since 2008, Sports Faith International has showcased the many virtues and life lessons learned from sports through powerful personal testimonies. Inductees into the Sports Faith Hall of Fame are world-class athletes, coaches and teams at all levels, dedicated to inspiring and improving communities through their lives in sports and faith.

“Our 2021 inductees are a diverse group of spectacular people with the essential trait of good character on and off the field” said Chicago Bears Patrick McCaskey, Sports Faith International’s Chairman and Co-Founder. “They provide an instructive example of how faith firms their will to win.”

### The 2021 inductees are:

#### **Varsity Girls Soccer Team, Catholic Memorial High School, Waukesha, WI**

*Athletic, Academic and Social Service;  
All- Star Catholic High School Lifetime Achievement Award*

Catholic Memorial’s girls’ soccer team—Wisconsin state champions for six consecutive years and 14 overall, begins every game with their favorite prayer, the Hail Mary. Every Saturday for several years, members have volunteered at TOPSoccer, a community-based training and team placement program for children with disabilities and special needs. Through the pandemic, when team members couldn’t play matches or gather, they kept in touch with the youth they had taught at TOPSoccer by creating and sending cards. The Waukesha Catholic Memorial Varsity Girls Soccer team also focuses on education. NHSCA’s (National High School Coaches Association) has named the team Academic All Americans 21 times for consistently carrying a 3.6 or above grade point average and their wins on the field.

#### **Varsity Head Baseball Coach Dave Pishkur, Andrean High School, Merrillville, IN**

*Sports Faith Hall of Fame Lifetime Achievement Award*

During his 41-year career at Andrean, his alma mater, this 59er has coached seven state championship teams with a 78% winning record overall and holds the Indiana Most Wins Record. Graduating in 1971, returning in 1978 and joining the coaching team in 1980, Pishkur is already a member of Indiana H.S. State Baseball Coaches Hall of Fame. MaxPreps, a source for High School sports, also has named Pishkur one of the top 100 coaches in high school sports based on his successes and longevity. Pishkur trains his teams in baseball and life skills—punctuality, quality work, competitiveness in pursuit of high goals, caring for their field and most of all, thankfulness. He’s proud of the adults his former students and players have grown into. The Rosary is Coach Pishkur’s daily prayer. To honor his mother and the Blessed Virgin Mary, in 1998 Coach Pishkur gathered donations and volunteer workers to build a grotto where the school holds an annual May crowning and the football team light candles before every home and away game. Faith and God will carry Coach Pishkur and Andrea High School into its future home in Highpoint, IN where 65 acres have been set aside for a new school building. Pishkur has helped write the school’s strategic plan for the next 30 years.

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## **Hugh Brown and St. Michael the Archangel Catholic High School Fredericksburg, VA** *All-Star Catholic High School Team of the Year Award*

Hugh Brown, founder and football coach of St. Michael the Archangel Catholic High School in the greater Washington D.C. area, led his team to win the 2019 VISAA Division III State Football Champion and was named Coach of the Year for the accomplishment. The team themselves called their first ever championship season for football and final win over Roanoke Catholic “miraculous.” After that Friday night win on Nov. 15, 2019, every player, their families and support staff returned to home field on Sunday to thank and praise God. Hugh, who played football at the University of Maryland, tells his players to walk away from confrontation on the field and leads by the motto: “Football is the vehicle, Christ is the destination.” A businessman and father of five children, Hugh also serves as Executive Vice President of American Life League founded by his mother Judy Brown in 1979, which supports the advancement of the culture of life. The Browns are known for their entrepreneur spirit, courage and straight talk on matters of the Catholic faith. As for his role as a football coach, Brown says: “Our goal has got to be to help mentor good Christian men, raise good fathers, and good husbands. That’s what sports is.”

## **Former NBA Referee, now Deacon Steve Javie in the Philadelphia Archdiocese** *Wins Father Smyth Award, Sports Faith Hall of Fame Basketball Inductee*

Deacon Steve Javie, Newton, PA, has moved from a career in sports to a calling in faith. He’s built a bird’s-eye view of sportsmanship as an NBA referee for 25 years, an ESPN NBA commentator and at the start of his career as a minor leaguer for the Baltimore Orioles after playing baseball at Temple University. His journey back to his Catholic faith began after meeting his future wife Mary Ellen when he was 35 years old and already traveling extensively as a referee for the NBA. Before asking her out, he learned she was Catholic. He worked up the nerve to invite her out to dinner and suggested that on the next date they should go to Mass and then brunch, which she agreed to. Afterward, Steve told Mary Ellen he didn’t get much out of the service. “What did you put into it?” she asked. These six words changed his life, he says. When he retired from the NBA in 2011, he felt called to become a Deacon, an ordained lay person who shares in the ministry of the Church, assisting the priest at Mass, proclaiming the Gospel, officiating at baptisms and marriages, carrying out funeral rites, administering Holy Communion to the sick and dying and performing works of charity. “The Church needs good Priests and

Deacons,” he says, “Please pray for those vocations and for your own that you may pause, and listen to know where God is calling you to serve.” Deacon Javie believes sports connects people. He relates his lifetime experiences to his faith in his homilies at St. Andrew Parish in Newtown where he serves. Javie also continues to work part time as a referee analyst for ESPN/ABC during NBA telecasts.

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## **NFL greets Rich Gannon and Jim Grabowski** *Professional Football Inductees to the Sports Faith Hall of Fame*

After busy years in professional sports, many ex-players find new victories in a deeper relationship with their faith. Two are among the newest inductees to the Sports Faith Hall of Fame:

**Rich Gannon** played 18 years and won a Super Bowl ring with the Oakland Raiders and continued with a 16-year career as a CBS Sports football commentator. He had an Irish Catholic upbringing with an aunt and cousin who are Franciscan nuns. Fascinated by the saintly life of St. John Neumann, he recalled seeing these words of Pope Pius XI at the St. Neumann's National Shrine in Philadelphia, PA, "The soul of education is the education of the soul," and has taken the meaning to heart. He prays a rosary every morning and includes prayers for his daughters and their future spouses. He is particularly moved by the New Testament Bible stories on the obedience of the Apostles. "When Christ said I'll make you fisherman, how obedient they were, they went at once. It's about right here and now," he said. "I think about the Catholic laity, that we make up the body of the Church, where we are all called to share the Good News [of Christ Jesus]."

**Jim Grabowski** finished his career playing for his hometown Chicago Bears in 1971. He played for five seasons with the Green Bay Packers winning Super Bowl I and II Championships, and college football at the University of Illinois, when as a sophomore in 1963 was named Most Valuable Player of the Rose Bowl. He is a member of the Academic All-American Hall of Fame, Chicago Sports Hall of Fame, National Football Foundation College Hall of Fame, the National Polish-American Sports Hall of Fame and now a Sports Faith Hall of Famer. He also spent 30 years as color commentator for University of Illinois football. Jim cites his parents and his coach Vince Lombardi, who attended daily Mass, as having a big influence on his faith formation. Early on in Catholic grammar school he learned a valuable lesson—his grades were fine, but received too many check marks from the Sisters of Charity of BVM (Blessed Virgin Mary) on self-control. One of the sisters provided the talkative student with a punishment of not letting him speak, teaching him the lesson of knowing when to keep quiet. He's grateful to God for all the blessings he has had in his career and personal life as he marks his 60 th wedding anniversary with his wife Kathleen, his two daughters and four grandchildren. "I've been a lucky man," he says.

*Hosted by Patrick McCaskey, the 13th Annual Sports Faith International Hall of Fame induction banquet took place on May 22 at the Double Tree Hilton in Pleasant Prairie, WI, preceded by Mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church in Kenosha, WI.*

For the YouTube video of the inductees please click here: <https://sfint.org/>

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