**Father Donald Lovas ‘55**

Father Donald Lovas, a two-sport athlete, was honored as an All-State football player in his senior year. In addition to his stellar football career, Father Lovas played exceptional baseball.

A versatile football player, Lovas played mostly offensive guard and line backer. Off the field, Lovas was personable, friendly, and mild-mannered. On the field, Lovas was hard-nosed, gritty, and tenacious. On defense, he had an inate ability to sniff out the play and the speed to make the tackle. He used that speed to tally 75% of the team’s tackles in a 13-0 win over a much bigger St. Thomas team.

In a pivotal game against the perennial powerhouse St. Agnes, it was a muddy, sloppy field and both teams were having trouble moving the ball. Late in the game, St. Agnes was forced to punt. At the snap, Lovas overpowered his blocker, threw him aside, charged in to block the punt, and then fell on the ball to help secure the 6-6 tie for Cotter.

Always a team player, Lovas switched positions when a teammate had to miss a game due to the death of a family member. Lovas stepped in the day before the game to fill his teammate’s position at center. Though injuries kept him off the football field during his freshman and junior years, he continued to contribute to his team by serving as team manager.

On the baseball diamond, Lovas batted over .300. He recalls that on the very first pitch he took in practice, he cracked a homerun. This would be a harbinger of good things to come for Lovas and his Cotter baseball team.

Father Lovas embodied the Cotter Way on and off the field. At Cotter, he was president of the Student Council, a member of the choir and the National Honor Society. His graduating class was the last to be required to wear ties in school. Of his time at Cotter, Lovas said “It gave me a sense of reverence for God and respect for human kind.”

After graduating from Cotter in 1955, Lovas attended St. Mary’s College in Winona. He majored in Philosophy, and minored in Education. His senior year in High School, he was called to enter the seminary. Father Lovas retired from active ministry in June of 2011 and celebrated the 50th anniversary of his ordination in June of 2013.

**Mary Ellen (Baisley) Sparrow ‘94**

Mary Ellen “Bingo” (Baisley) Sparrow is a highly decorated, three-sport athlete for Cotter. She played tennis, basketball, and softball; and received the Paul Gardner Female Athlete of the Year award in 1994. Mary Ellen excelled in each of her sports earning All Conference and State accolades in all three sports.

In tennis, her only individual sport, Mary Ellen qualified for the State tournament for four of her five years - '89, '90, '92, and '93. Sparrow earned All- HVL Conference honors in 1992 and 1993. She was voted Most Improved Player in 1991. Her teammates thought so highly of her that she was elected Co-Captain in both 1992 and 1993. She played both singles and doubles during her time with a racquet in her hand.

In basketball, Mary Ellen was also recognized on a state-level for her abilities. “Bingo Baisley,” as she was nicknamed, was recognized as one of the ‘Top 94 Players’ in Minnesota by *Full Court Press Magazine*. Also, a team captain for two years, Sparrow credits much of her success on the hard court to brand new Cotter coach Pat Bowlin. “We were just awful before Pat was there. He taught us how to win,” recalls Sparrow. She recalls that in his inaugural speech to the team, he said, “We’re not here to have fun. We’re here to win. Winning is fun.” She took his advice to heart and the speedy point guard lead her team to a 17-6 record her senior year. Along the road, she earned Most Improved Player – ‘92, All WSU Tournament Team player in ’93 & ’94, and team MVP in ‘94. Sparrow went on to play college basketball at St. Thomas University one year, and College of St. Benedict for a year before injuries forced her retirement.

On the softball diamond, Mary Ellen was the team’s lead-off batter and left fielder. Getting on base often, she sparked her team offensively. She again received All-Conference honors in 1993 and 1994. Most impressivley, she earned All-State, Second Team honors in 1994, and played with the state’s elite softball athletes in the Minnesota High School All-Star Series in 1994.

In addition to her athletic accomplishments, Sparrow maintained a 3.8 GPA while holding down at least 2 jobs. Mary Ellen received a BA in Social Science and Secondary Education from the College of St. Benedict and a Masters of Counseling and Pyschology from St. Cloud State University. She currently works as a College Counselor at St. Croix Prepatory Academy in Stillwater, Minnesota. Coach Pat Bowlin said of Mary Ellen, "There is no player more responsible for the transformation of Cotter basketball and softball from a last place team to a championship team than Mary. Her passion, work ethic, and the joy with which she played were inspirational to her teammates. Mary is not only one of the best shooters and clutch hitters in Cotter sports history, but one of the best people that Cotter has produced."

Sparrow resides in Shoreview, Minnesota with her two children, Kathleen, 13 and T.J., 11. Both are athletes and point guards in basketball.

**2003 State Championship Softball Team**

The story of the 2003 State Championship Softball Team is one of perseverance and determination to reach a common goal. After finishing in third place in both the 2001 and 2002 state tournaments, this softball team was determined to become state champions. Led by strong pitching, stellar defense, and clutch hitting, the 2003 team became the first girls’ team in Cotter history to be crowned state champions.

The road to the 2003 State Championship was not easy. The team had to work extremely hard just to make it to state by defeating strong section rivals St. Charles and Pine Island. In six playoff games, the Ramblers allowed only one run, shutting out five of their six opponents. The most memorable game was a thrilling 13 inning, 2-0 victory over Pine Island. The winning hit was a home run by Jessica Weisbrod that still ranks as the biggest clutch hit in Cotter history.

Throughout the 28 game season, the Ramblers allowed 2 or fewer runs in 27 games. Ironically, the only time they allowed more than two runs was in the state championship game. Entering the state tournament, the Ramblers were led offensively by outfielder Lindsay Maus at .351 and seniors Danielle Bowlin and Leah Troke each at .324. Pitchers: Senior Toni Kujak and sophomore Bethany Wolvington combined for a 0.47 ERA, 182 strikeouts, and allowed only 16 runs all season.

The state tournament opening game against Annandale mirrored the regular season as the Ramblers used strong pitching and defense to shut out Annandale 4-0.  Rambler pitcher Toni Kujak allowed only two hits and one walk, while striking out seven batters. Jessica Weisbrod blasted a two-run homer in the third inning to secure the victory.

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| After losing in the semifinals the two previous years, the Ramblers finally got the monkey off their back by playing their best game of the season: a 5-0 shutout against a strong St. Peter team. Leah Troke was 3-for-4 with a double and triple. Kujak pitched five innings and allowed five hits and one walk.  The semifinal win set up the Ramblers first ever-state championship game against a strong Pipestone team. In a back and forth game the Ramblers prevailed 5-4. Danielle Bowlin hit 2-3 in the game and delivered what proved to be the game winning RBI in the bottom of the sixth to put the Ramblers up 5-3. Pipestone battled back to within 5-4 and put a runner on third base with one out.  With their state championship dream beginning to fade, the Ramblers executed a pickoff play at third base from catcher Jess Weisbrod to SS Kelly Kukowski. This play put the Ramblers to within one out of a state championship. After a Pipestone player reached first base, a pop up to second baseman Devin Bowlin for the final out brought the Ramblers their first state championship. The Ramblers finished with a 26-2 record. Bethany Wolvington who finished all 3 games in the circle, Jess Weisbrod, and Toni Kujak were all named to the All-Tournament Team.  The 2003 State Championship Softball Team: Michelle Bernadot, Danielle Bowlin, Devin Bowlin, Hannah Callahan, Katie Florin, Kelly Klein, Sarah Kneller, Toni Kujak, Kelly Kukowski, Katie Landowski, Lindsay Maus, Megan McDonald, Katey Shea, Gretchen Strelow, Leah Troke, Jessica Weisbrod, Bethany Wolvington  Coaches:  Pat Bowlin, David Wolvington, Mike Mook, Bridget Wilma Hale   Manager:  Heidi Spande |  |  | https://mail.google.com/mail/images/cleardot.gif  https://mail.google.com/mail/images/cleardot.gif |