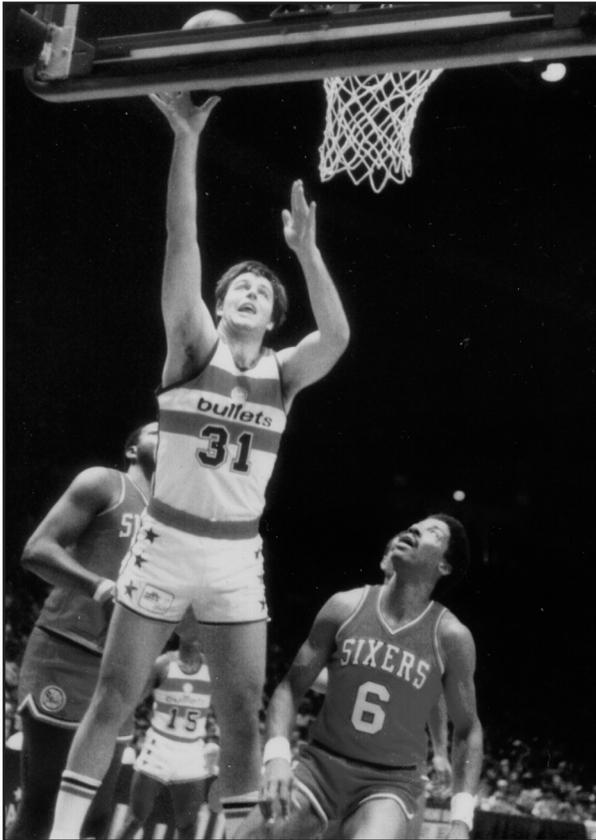


MATT DOBEK SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD

JOE KOPICKI



In a year when the NPASHF annual Special Recognition Award is being re-named in honor of our dear departed colleague, we could not think of a more appropriate and more deserving recipient than this year's winner, **Joe Kopicki**.

The only Macomb County native ever to play in the National Basketball Association, Joe Kopicki began his basketball at Warren Fitzgerald High School, where he was named to the First Team Class A All-State squad, and selected as Macomb County Player of the Year in 1978. His number 34 has since been retired by his high school alma mater.

Continuing his education and his hardwood success in college, Joe went on to four strong years at the University of Detroit, where he scored an impressive 1,410 points and hauled in 771 rebounds during his U-D career. His point totals ranked in the school's top 10 all-time when he graduated in 1982, and earned him induction into the Detroit Titans Sports Hall of Fame last year.

Kopicki was drafted in the third round of the 1982 NBA Draft, and went on to play three seasons with the Washington Bullets and Denver Nuggets, before opting for European pro ball, where he starred for four years in Italy, and another four years in Spain. While playing in Europe Joe was a seven-time All-Star, and was named the Spanish League's MVP in the 1986-87 season.

But Joe Kopicki earns this award not only for his athletic success, but for all he has done for the game following his retirement as a player.

Returning to his high school alma mater, Kopicki has spent the last four seasons as head basketball coach at Warren Fitzgerald High School, compiling a solid 57-32 win / loss record. Joe's coaching philosophy comes down to one simple concept – communication.

"You really have to pay attention to the kids, and give them the nourishment they need," he states. "It's like putting water on a flower – if you don't do it, they'll just wilt away."

Joe feels that many of his student-athletes are looking for discipline and many of them respond well when it is provided in a positive manner. "Instead of being called 'coaches', we should probably be referred to as 'mentors', because that's what we really need to be, if we do our jobs well," he states.

Proof of Joe's coaching *and* mentoring success is found in a statistic that he finds more important than wins and losses; 10 of Joe's student-athletes have gone on to play college basketball, and receive the benefits of a college education.

"I'm very proud to be back in Warren, and for having the opportunity to give back to the community that gave so much to me."

Joe has been married to his wife Jennifer for 25 years, and has three adult children, Jessica, Joseph, and Matthew.

A perfect recipient of the award given annually to the individual who demonstrates "extraordinary dedication, devotion and service to sports," the National Polish-American Sports Hall of Fame is proud to honor **Joe Kopicki** with its **2011 Matt Dobek Special Recognition Award**.