

## **Columbia High boosters honor top athletes**

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By Jim Levesque

WEST COLUMBIA — Roughneck fans got a glimpse of past great athletes at Columbia High School on Friday when the latest class of inductees into the Columbia-Brazoria ISD Athletic Booster Club's Hall of Honor were recognized.

During halftime of the Roughnecks' football game against Brookshire Royal, six of the eight honorees stood on the turf at Griggs Field and received rousing applause from spectators.

Inducted into the Hall were coaches Jack Hays and Marvin Gray; football standout Wayne Williams; and the 440- and 880-yard championship relay team of Sharion Higgins, Earlene Williams, Willene Williams and Margo Diggs.

**Marvin Gray.** Awarded posthumously, Gray was represented by sisters Esther Umphries and Shirley Gray Sanders, nephew Michael Gray and great-nephew Cory Gray. Marvin Gray played basketball, football, boxing and wrestling at Columbia. He was awarded his high school diploma in absentia in 1943 after he left school early to join the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II.

After returning home in 1945, Marvin Gray earned a football scholarship at Southwestern University in Georgetown. An injury cut his playing days short. He then crossed the border and went to Mexico City College, playing fullback for the Aztecs. Gray coached in Mexico City after school and returned to West Columbia as an assistant football coach in 1956. His life was cut short because of heart disease just before his 37th birthday in August of 1962.

Columbia High School gives the most valuable player award for the football team every year in memory of Marvin Gray.

**Margo Diggs** headlined the 1974 state championship relay team honorees. To this day, Diggs still ranks second all-time in gold medals at the state track meet with eight wins.

“It's great to be recognized, and that the school and everybody involved would look back at what everybody did,” Diggs said. “I never expected anything like this.”

Diggs was a member of the 440 relay teams that won the state title from 1972 through 1975, the 880 relay teams that won 1973 through 1975 and won the 100 dash in 1972.

**Sharion Higgins** won five golds with the 440 and 880 relay team in 1974 and '75 and in the triple jump in 1976.

**Willene Williams** won gold with 440 and 880 relay teams in 1973 and '74.

**Earlene Williams** won six golds as a member of the 440 and 880 relay teams 1973-75.

**Jack Hays** is the winningest coach in Columbia football history. In 11 years with the Roughnecks, he finished with 81 wins, 37 losses and eight ties.

Hays coached 18 total years, seven with El Campo, and compiled an overall 130-60-8 record as field general. In all, he has seven district titles, 15 playoff appearances and two trips to the state title game. He has received many honors from the Texas High School Coaches Association and was inducted into its Hall of Honor in 1981.

**Wayne Williams** was a Roughneck standout in the mid- 1980s, leading Columbia football to the state quarterfinals in 1987. He received the loudest and longest ovation from the Griggs Field crowd Friday.

“This is just a great honor,” Wayne Williams said. “I wish all those guys I played with were out there on the field with me. It was great playing with them, and I share this with them. They did all the dirty work and I got all the glory. I’m proud to be part of that.”

He lettered in track, baseball and football from 1985-88. He was a regional track qualifier in the 100 as a senior and was an all-district pick in football as a running back and defensive back during his sophomore, junior and senior years. He was a two-time all-state pick at running back, three-time selection at defensive back and was the Class 4A player of the year in 1987.

Wayne “The Wonder” Williams went on to play football at Louisiana State University for four years. His professional career included time as a member of the New York Jets practice team and tryouts with many Canadian Football League squads before landing with the Tampa Bay Storm of the Arena Football League. He played five seasons with the Storm, winning a pair of Arena Bowl titles and ended his career after two years at the Buffalo Destroyers.

# Hall of Honor inductees feted

The sophomore class of the Columbia-Brazoria ISD Athletic Booster Club Hall of Honor will be inducted at the Roughnecks game Friday night.

Those chosen included the 1974 state champion 440 and 880 girls relay team of Margo Diggs, Sharion Higgins, Earlene and Willene Williams, former coaches Marvin Gray and Jack Hays and football standout Wayne Williams.

A reception will be held in their honor from 5 to 6 p.m. Friday at Scott's Barbecue in West Columbia, followed by recognition during half-time ceremonies at the game.

The 1974 girls 440 and 880 relay team set the

national high school record in both events that year at the state track meet, winning the 400 in a time of 47.1 and the 800 in a time of 1:39.6.

Additionally, Diggs won seven gold medals in individual and relay events during her time at Columbia, the second highest number of gold medals ever won by an individual girl in state meet history.

Marvin Gray was born in West Columbia in 1925 and attended West Columbia High School, graduating in absentia in 1943 because he left school early to join the Marines. After World War II he returned home and played football at Southwestern University

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on a scholarship. A broken leg suffered during an intramural game cost him his scholarship,



**JACK HAYS**

and in 1949 he went to Mexico City College where he played fullback for the Aztecs. He remained in Mexico coaching first at the American College and then at the Mexico City College. Nicknamed the "Bald Eagle", he was considered somewhat of a hero to the Mexican people and was featured on the cover of *Life* magazine's Mexico edition.

He returned to West Columbia as a backfield coach in 1956, when the team won district, and the team went to the quarterfinals in 1957. He died in 1962 at the age of 37 from heart disease. The Roughnecks' overall MVP award is named for him.

Coach Jack Hays, his wife and three children (Jackie, Jenna and Jeff) came to West Columbia in 1969 from El Campo, where he had coached for seven years.

Over 18 years, Coach Hays' head coaching record was 130 wins, 60 losses, and 8 ties. His record at Columbia was 81-37-5.

He led his teams to seven district champions - two at El Campo, five at CHS; 15 playoff games, and two state finalists, one each at El Campo and CHS. Twice, he was named Brazoria County Coach of the year.

Coach Hays holds every major honor the Texas High School Coaches Association can bestow. In 1971, he was elected to the Board of Directors. In 1974, Coach Hays and some of his staff - Charlie Forehand, Ed Derrich, and Charlie Brand - were selected to coach the South team at their annual All Star game, defeating the North team in the Astrodome.

In 1975, he was elected President, and in 1981, he received the Association's ultimate honor with his induction into the Texas High School Coaches Association's Hall of Honor. After leaving coaching, Coach Hays remained in West Columbia, starting a successful insurance agency and remaining active in business, his Church and in Rotary.

Wayne Williams is one of the true legends in Columbia High School athletics. He was a three sport star at CHS from 1984 to 1988. He lettered in basketball, football and track, and was a regional qualifier in the 100 Meter Dash as a senior. He was All District as both a running back and defensive back his sophomore, junior and senior seasons. Those same three seasons, he was named All Brazoria County as running back and defensive back. In

1987 he was the Most Valuable Player of Brazoria County. He was twice named to the All Greater Houston Area Team.

Wayne was twice named All State at running back and was a three-time selection at defensive back. In 1987 he earned Texas Class 4A Football Most Valuable Player Award. At the Texas High School Coaches Whataburger All Star Football Game in the summer of 1988, Wayne set the All Star Game rushing record, running for 273 yards against a defense of All Stars on the North team. This feat earned him the Texas Whataburger All Star Game Offensive Most Valuable Player Award.

Wayne earned a football scholarship to Louisiana State University. He played 4 straight years. His freshman year he excelled as a wide receiver and on special teams, then played as a defensive back the next three years. Wayne participated with the New York Jets on their practice roster in 1992. There were several brief tryouts and participation with several Canadian League teams, before landing with the Tampa Bay Storm of the Arena Football League. He played five years with the Storm and was member of two Arena Bowl Championship Teams. Wayne finished his pro foot-

ball career by playing two years with the Buffalo Destroyers.

Wayne Williams is presently working in the profession of law enforcement at the Brazoria County Sheriffs Department and is coaching little league football.



**WAYNE WILLIAMS**



**MARVIN GRAY**