

Skip Molitor enters the EHS Athletic Hall of Fame

A three-sport athlete in high school, Molitor incorporated what he learned at EHS and Gonzaga University into a successful coaching career.

BY RICHARD BYRD
of the Journal

EPHRATA — Skip Molitor is a humble fella. As a 2021 Ephrata Athletic Hall of Fame inductee Molitor knew there would be a point in time when he would be asked to think back about his experience as an athlete at EHS and describe his favorite memories. Molitor isn't the braggadocios type though. Nine times out of ten if you ask Molitor about his time as a Tiger the conversation will center around the EHS culture, the Ephrata community as a whole and — of course — his coaches and teammates. Even though his individual accomplishments in athletics were many, he prefers to prop up and speak about the community and those who inhabit it rather than talk about himself.

Molitor's story is one that started right here in Ephrata. A local kid through and through, he and his family have deep roots in the community.

Tiger orange and black were a common sight in the Molitor household while Skip was growing up. His four siblings — Pat, Steve, Mary Ann and John — all graduated from EHS.

"(We were) an athletics-oriented family. Most of us played several sports," he recalls. "(For me) it was primarily football, basketball and baseball, with basketball pretty much taking the lead."

"I am from a golfing family. Dad was very involved with the Lakeview Golf and Country Club and was a several time club champion out there — as were Pat and John. I am the black sheep of the family when it comes to golf accomplishments."

In high school Molitor may not have enjoyed some of the success that EHS teams in the 1980s enjoyed when coaches like Bill Betcher (football) were leading teams to state championships, but his teams in the late 1960s and 1970 were successful in their own right.

"My senior year (1970) we either won or tied the conference championship in all three sports (baseball, basketball football)," he said. "So we tied the conference championship in football for coach Bob Mack. And then we won it out right in baseball for coach Chuck Panerio. In basketball we had a good year my senior year, but Quincy and Eastmont had better years. We did advance to the AA state championships and made it to

the final 16 teams."

A team captain his senior year in each of the three sports, Molitor got the most out of his athletic experience at EHS. As quarterback on the football team, a guard in basketball and shortstop/pitcher in baseball, he was good enough in each of the three sports to draw a lot of attention.

His main sport was basketball though and it became his main athletic focus immediately after receiving his coveted EHS diploma.

He received scholarship offers from schools like the University of Idaho and Washington State University, but Molitor ended up committing to play basketball for Hank Anderson at Gonzaga. The decision was a personal one for Molitor, as his dad played football for the Zags back in the 1930s.

In 2021 the name "Gonzaga" is synonymous with success, but back when Molitor was on campus there were few outside of the Inland Northwest that even knew of the school. This was long before coach Mark Few and players like John Stockton, Adam Morrison and Jalen Suggs brought the school into the national spotlight.

"I just really liked the fit for me and their basketball program," he explained. "When I went to WSU (for a campus visit) it was more of hodge podge. I could have either played football or a combination of basketball/baseball. I was a little bit higher up the priority list at Gonzaga and I was probably

a pretty accurate assessor of my own skill level at that time."

"I was probably a more Big Sky level of a player than a Pac-8 player."

Molitor only played two seasons for Anderson, as the coach left the program in 1972 to become head coach at Montana State University in Bozeman. Adrian Buoncristiani took over after Anderson left and remained Molitor's coach until he graduated.

Molitor and the Bulldogs didn't raise championship banners, but they were a formidable opponent in their own right at the very least.

"Our probably biggest claim to fame is that we never had worse than a break-even season," he said with a slight chuckle. "We never had a losing season. Our best year there was my sophomore year and we were second in the Big Sky Conference."

"We were competitive and it was a fabulous experience."

Molitor actually played golf at Gonzaga as well and was on the varsity team all four years in college.

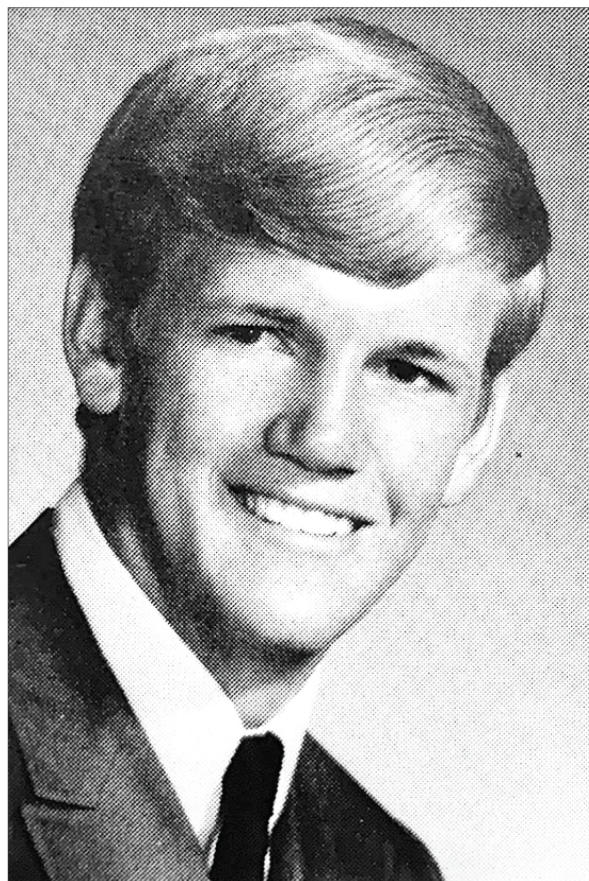
"Even though I hadn't played in high school, coming from a golfing family I had a good enough background (in golf)," he explained. "One of my assistant basketball coaches at Gonzaga encouraged me to play golf in the off-season."

"I ended up just really enjoying playing both sports all four years at Gonzaga."

As with most college athletes, Molitor had hoped to one day make it the pros.

The problem was that the National Basketball Association didn't come calling Molitor's name after he graduated.

Molitor didn't let that notion



A star athlete on the basketball, baseball and football teams at Ephrata High School, Skip Molitor successfully transitioned from college athlete at Gonzaga University to coaching at several high level college programs and high schools. Today Molitor is the head golf coach/assistant athletic director at Whitman College in Walla Walla.

sway his love for athletics however. His playing days may have been over after college, but his coaching days had just barely begun.

"Over the course of my coaching career I went back and forth a couple times from college to high school," he explained.

The preceding decades saw Molitor: coach as a graduate assistant at Gonzaga, spend time as an assistant at WSU, coach as an assistant at Santa Clara University (California) under head coach Carroll Williams and then coach under Stew Morrill at both the University of Montana and Colorado State University. On the high school side he coached at Billings Central Catholic High School and Frenchtown High School in Montana and Gonzaga Preparatory School.

Molitor's last coaching stop at Whitman College in Walla Walla is where he remains to this very day. He took over at Whitman as head basketball coach — a title he would hold for 14 years — in the 1994-1995 season.

Keeping in-tune with the legacy of Molitors being involved with golf in some shape or fashion, Skip took the helm of the golf program at the college in July 2008.

Being well-versed in sports

at the high school and college levels, Molitor knows as well as anyone what it takes to build a good and successful program.

He knows the players are just as important as the culture that they play in. He also knows that a program is incomplete without a supportive community rallying behind it.

To Molitor Ephrata is a shining example one of those communities.

He speaks glowingly about the athletic tradition at EHS, but also about the dedication to developing true student athletes that are as dedicated to the classroom as they are to their athletic endeavors.

"I think Ephrata has always benefited from being an exceptional small town, in particular educationally and then that passes along to what happens athletically," he said. "I think Ephrata has had, for a small eastern Washington town, a remarkable academic and athletic legacy and I really appreciate that being at a place like Whitman."

The 2021 EHS Athletic Hall of Fame induction ceremony is scheduled for Sept. 11

Tickets can be purchased at Goin' Postal, 159 Basin St. SW, or by visiting www.ephratati-gers.com.

