



Bill Ackerman - For Shaw Media

Julie (Todd) Mesmer (from left), Mark Lenkowski, Denise Lazzeroni-Kavanaugh, Ron Havelka, Greg Ktistou, and Megan (Rossi) Bremer are the 2017 inductees of the Downers Grove South Athletic Hall of Fame. They were inducted before the Mustangs' varsity basketball team delivered a 58-55 comeback win Jan. 28 against Proviso East.

Mustangs rise to occasion on Hall of Fame night

By **DAVE OWEN**

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DOWNERS GROVE – Elements past and present combined for a memorable night at Downers Grove South.

The pregame inductions into the school's Hall of Fame honored former star athletes Greg Ktistou, Mark Lenkowski, Megan (Rossi) Bremer and Julie (Todd) Mesmer and state championship coaches Denise Lazzeroni-Kavanaugh and Ron Havelka.

On the court, South's boys basketball team ended a wild game with a Hall of Fame-worthy finish.

With the Mustangs ahead 37-29 in the third quarter, Proviso East used speed and a trapping defense to power a 23-4 run and go up 52-41 with 4:21 left.

Downers South (14-9, 6-2 in the West Suburban Gold) responded, and its 10-0 run over the last 2:10 was the final twist in a 58-55 win that kept the Mustangs within one game of first place in the WSG.

"We just put things together, played team ball and pulled it off somehow,"

said Downers South's Darnell Wallace (12 points, seven rebounds), whose layup off a great Dylan Kaczmarek pass with 15 seconds left put his team up for good at 56-55.

A Pirates' turnover, two free throws by T.J. Clifford (10 points, 11 rebounds) and a missed Proviso East 3-point attempt at the buzzer sealed the comeback win.

Tyree Spencer also had 10 points and five assists.

"The difference was they have all juniors and we have all seniors," Mustangs coach Kris Olson said. "Our veteran kids never stopped believing, and at some point they were going to regain their poise. We were able to end with a great run."

Denis Alibegovic led all scorers with 23 pointers, hitting seven 3-pointers, five in the first half.

"I got hot early and my teammates kept looking for me," he said. "I came in there in attack mode and knocked down some shots."

Proviso East forced 10 turnovers over an eight-minute second-half

stretch to surge into the lead, but the Mustangs regrouped.

"Coach [Olson] told us just to slow down and control the ball," Alibegovic said. "We had to make good, smart passes and finish our shots."

The win was a huge lift heading into a big February stretch that starts at Addison Trail on Feb. 3.

"January is a grind," Olson said. "Then every game in February is like a playoff game when you're in the hunt like we are. It's a great experience for our kids, and great preparation for the state tournament."

Two experts on state tournament success were part of the pregame spotlight.

Lazzeroni-Kavanaugh coached the Mustangs to three girls volleyball state titles in just 10 years.

"For me [the Hall of Fame] is about thanking all the kids I coached," she said, "and I had a lot of great mentors – Judy and Rich Griesheim my coaches here, Rick Butler [of the Sports Performance club] taught me a lot about volleyball, and my parents.

"I was lucky to have good people in my life. That's what it's about."

Havelka retired as softball coach in June with the most wins of any coach at Downers South (704), and won the school's first state title in 1993.

"I was so honored by this," Havelka said, "and for so many former players [22] to come back tonight, that was really nice."

Ktistou's story epitomized the hard work that paid off for the four athletes honored. Averaging three points a game on the Mustangs freshman team, Ktistou developed into a star senior and went on to a pro basketball career in Europe.

"I was fortunate to have great coaches here," he said. "When you surround yourself with good people, work hard and are willing to fight through adversity, a lot of good stuff can happen."

Good stuff is happening for the 2017 Mustangs, who own a three-game winning streak.

"It's good for our momentum," Wallace said. "I think we can make a run the rest of the season."