



Janine Smith

PROFILE

Maybe it's time for Castro Valley High to introduce a Smitty Award, a tribute to 1982 graduate Janine Smith, whose Herculean Award (seven or more varsity letters) was a bit of a disservice. She earned nine.

"My class had the most athletes," she gushed recently from her home in Concord as she awaits

induction into the Castro Valley Sports Hall of Fame in April. Smith – or Smitty as she is commonly referred – was the best of the bunch.

She began playing softball at age 7 1/2 when Castro Valley introduced its first girls' youth league – Miss Softball America – whose organizers rostered teams based on elementary school. That meant beginners like Smith were thrown into competition with 11- and 12-year-olds. It worked out fine for the Castro Valley Elementary student. She wound up playing four years of varsity softball at Castro Valley High, three as the starting shortstop.

Then there was volleyball, which Smith decided to try for the first time as a junior in high school. She not only made the team, but became the starting setter, the hardest position to learn, and earned two letters.

In between there was basketball, where she happened to be the same age as Hall of Famer Charlotte Lusschen, who stood 6-foot-7 and towered over the competition. But even she needed someone to get her the ball, and that became the primary task of Smith, who was all of 5-foot-4.

"Our games were packed because everybody wanted to come watch," the three-year basketball letterman recalls. "Loaded with college coaches, which was something we weren't used to. The University of Kentucky, Stanford, Cal ... they all came to watch Charlotte, but that opened the door for us, too."

From being the youngest, the least experienced and then the smallest, Smith became a Castro Valley sports fixture. Twelve high school seasons. Nine letters. "I played anything and everything," she said proudly. "We took a lot of abuse from boys. But I would do it all over again. We were laying the groundwork for today's athletes."

And also for Castro Valley High's championship teams. When the Trojans won the 1981 basketball title in the Hayward Area Athletic League, it was a first for the school in the sport. They repeated the next season.

Her greatest memory: "Probably all the friendships. Still have them to this day."



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Smith didn't play sports in college, but she did continue in them, transitioning to umpiring and coaching. She coached in some way, shape or form from 1984 to 2007, including a four-year run at Canyon in which she led unbeaten Condors softball teams in the fall, developing skills and an enjoyment of the game, then in the fall helped Marie Gray mold that talent into champions at the high school level.

She was an assistant coach for another first at Castro Valley – the school's one-and-only NCS softball champion in 1993. Her coaching schedule those days: Fall softball at Canyon, basketball and softball at the high school in the winter and spring, and travel softball in the summer.

"I just loved the sports," she reflects today. "And I wanted those kids to experience what I did."

These days, Smith has taken up golf, where her quest for a hole-in-one continues as her playing partners look for a coach's advice, even from a relative beginner. "They all want me to (help), but I don't know what I'm doing. I've never been a golf coach," she says. "It's the hardest sport I've ever tried to play, hands down."

Smitty currently serves as activities coordinator at a dementia facility in San Ramon.