

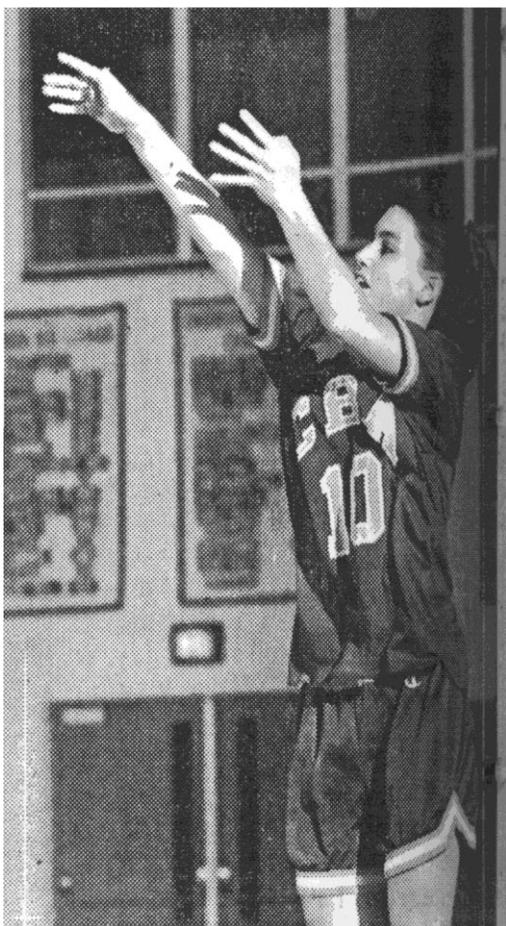


In the summer of 1987, the Franciscan Academy was forced to close its doors and left its 200 or so returning students looking for a new school to attend. After long and tedious and sometimes heated discussion, the CBA board of trustees decided to break an 87 year tradition and accept female students. This insightful decision would prove to be one that is considered by many to have saved our school. So when Marianne Oliva enrolled on September 1, 1987 a new era began for Christian Brothers Academy as she and 80 or so other young women became the first Brothers Girls. At that time Erica Speach was entering her final year at Wellwood elementary school. Her father Norm, a 1956 graduate of the Academy had already sent his son Brian to the school and never thought the day would come when his daughter could also proudly wear the Purple and Gold. With events happening so quickly, the Speech family decided to wait until the following year to make Erica

When Erica came to CBA her main focus was on Academics. She was a member of the Brother Adolphus Honor Society and achieved first honors in virtually all of her semesters at CBA. She eventually became a member of the National Honor Society and graduated near the top of her class. She was a serious student and took pride in her achievements.

As focused and hard working as she was in the classroom she was equally as impressive in the athletic arena. A gifted athlete, Erica participated on an athletic team in each season of her four years at CBA earning 11 varsity letters. On the track, Erica was a sprinter. During her years at CBA she set school records in the 100 and 200 yard dashes and was one of the early stars

As gifted as she was in track, she was even more accomplished on the soccer field. Now you have to remember that the girls sports program was still in its infancy. In fact when Erica was a freshman, CBA only fielded a JV team, hence the only season she did not earn a varsity letter. Our teams competed in the powerful metro division of the OHSL which included schools that had two to three times our enrolment. To make matters worse, our enrollment was about five to one girls to boys, putting our girls teams at a distinct disadvantage. But the soccer team seemed to defy the odds stacked against them. After a struggle in their first season as a varsity program, Coach Godwin Iwelumo led his girls to the sectional playoffs in Erica's junior and senior years. She was achieved all league honors in both 1990 and 1991 and was one of the leagues leading goal scorers her senior year.



But her main love was basketball. Even before she attended CBA she had shown promise as an eighth grader when she played on the junior varsity team at FM. So it was not a stretch for her to be part of the schools first varsity girls basketball team during her freshman year. As a tri captain along with Marianne Oliva and Felicia Nowicki, she would lead a team with no upperclassmen in a varsity schedule against the established programs of the OHSL Metro Division. The program got off it an inauspicious start, losing to then perennial power JD 82 - 16. Erica led the way with six points, all in the first half (actually all of CBA's points were scored in the first half in that game.) Such went the season. The first win for the program came on December 13 when they defeated Whitesboro 33 - 30 behind Erica's 17 points. The final numbers... a 2 - 16 season (thank God for Whitesboro) ... Erica certainly did her part scoring 252 points which equaled half the teams total for the year. For her efforts she was named to the third team all league all star team. In her junior year, veteran coach Theresa Quilty replaced Tom Colucci to take over the fortunes of the young still fledgling CBA program. Quilty's contagious upbeat attitude was just what the girls needed. Even though the Brothers could only match the 3 - 17 record of the year before it was obvious that program was moving in the right direction. Erica scored 287 points and was honored by being a first team all league selection. Senior year brought more of the same. Speach performed impeccably and was recognized by all as one of the best players in the area. The team had certainly improved and had become more competitive. In fact the highlight of the season was a one point victory over JD. In that game,

Erica scored 20 points, nine in the last quarter to give CBA its first win over a quality opponent and helped to pave the way for the programs future successes.

As she concluded her career, she left behind a great legacy. She became the first female in CBA basketball history to score 1000 points, 1173 to be exact. The community recognized Erica's ability and perseverance. The Italian American Athletic Club named her the areas top female athlete, an award earned by her male CBA counterparts such as Frank Cappelletti, Chuck Zimmerman, Tom Filicia, and Walt Patulski, putting her in very elite company.

After high school, Erica put away the sneakers and focused on her education. But the mark that she made on our athletic program is indelible. She blazed a trail that CBA's female athletes have been following for the last 20 years. Erica, when you wore the purple and gold, the girls programs were in their infancy and you helped them grow and earn respect. Tonight, we show are thanks by making you the first female athlete to be inducted into the LaSallian Athletic Hall of Fame.

