



NJSIAA TRAILBLAZER

"The passage of Title IX in 1972 brought new, unprecedented opportunities for female athletes. Mary Scharff, who was a student at the time at Paul VI in Haddonfield, took full advantage in not only high school but for the rest of her life.

She was one of the state's early post-Title IX basketball stars, becoming the first 1,000-point scorer in South Jersey history.

Known as an exceptional shooter, she took her game to nearby Immaculata College in suburban Philadelphia, where she became a key player for the school's famed "Mighty Macs," which won the AIAW national championship her freshman year in 1974. That marked the school's third-straight national title, and the tiny school was riding a huge wave of publicity. The 5-8 guard had a prominent role going forward, including major contributions in a 1975 victory over Maryland in the first nationally televised women's game, as well as a victory over Queens College a few weeks later before 12,000 fans in the first women's contest at Madison Square Garden.

Scharff's teams lost in the national final her sophomore and junior years and finished fourth during her senior season. She closed out her college career by being selected an All-American and totaled 1,231 points during her stellar Immaculata career.

She then coached at high schools in Philadelphia, while also competing for the California Dream in one of the early domestic pro leagues. She also worked as an assistant at Villanova, before returning to Immaculata, where she served as head coach for 11 years from 1987 through '88. Her final coaching assignment was as a volunteer assistant at Paul VI.

She achieved her coaching success despite being diagnosed with a brain tumor in 1979. She battled the disease for 39 years before passing away at age 64 in 2019.

Among many honors throughout her life, she was inducted into the Paul VI Hall of Fame, Camden County Hall of Fame, and South Jersey Basketball Club Hall of Fame. In addition, she has a spot in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame as part of the 1972-74 Mighty Macs, who were inducted as a team in 2014.

