



The sisters Hale (from left): Bridget, Jan, Melinda, Beth and Tish.

Oh that Melinda Hale. She sure knows how to rekindle the memories.

Melinda – Hale when she starred in basketball, swimming and track at Oil City High School in the early 1970s, and Rhoads, after she married Posey – was inducted into the Slippery Rock University Hall of Fame on Sept. 9. Family, old teammates and many friends were there for the ceremony – and let me tell you: there was a whole lot of hugging going on. Not to mention reminiscing.



I tagged along with two of her high school coaches, Dottie Valimont (track) and Dixie Cox Agnew (hoops), both of whom went to The Rock themselves. (The chatter on Route 8 or thereabouts included triple bunk

beds in the dorms back in the day.)

Melinda is probably the greatest all-around female athlete in the history of Oil City; I don't know, maybe a case could be made for Katie Koontz who played basketball for an independent team called the Tartans in the 1950s when she wasn't excelling in swimming and tennis.

Now, I didn't go to this induction with the idea of writing anything, so I didn't take notes. Everything that happened at the Rock is off the top of my head.

So, I did ask Dottie and Dixie where Melinda inherited her athletic ability. They didn't know; they just began talking admiringly about how, wow, she had that athletic build and that certain *glint* in her eye. Put Melinda in a gym and She. Meant. Business.

Well, we got there and Melinda, looking spry, was on hand to greet and hug everybody. I have to say nobody looked like they did 50 years ago. Roxie Dale, Beth Hale, Scott Sherick.



Scott, who is married to Melinda's baby sister, Bridget, was in hog heaven just being there. He was very animated. He remembered me sitting in the basketball press box above the OCHS gym smoking cigarettes and saying things. (The smoking days have long gone, but I still say things.)

Melinda was one of seven inductees representing five other different sports. The others were Thomas Bell (football), Kayla Blackburn (tennis), Cameron Daugherty (track/pole vault), Rodney Irwin (wrestling), Amanda Seigworth Quigley (track/hurdles) and Ron Wasko (baseball).

*(At left, Roxie Dale gets a hearty laugh over something Scott Sherick said.)*

Melinda was a basketball player – the school's first female four-year starter – *when* she wasn't getting involved in team handball or spending time with tennis, la crosse, softball or track. (After she made the basketball team freshman year, she decided, yeah, I think I'll go out for tennis, too.)

I told Melinda afterward that I thought her speech was very good – interesting. She asked me what I liked about it. I said the part about early women's basketball at the Rock.

Melinda scored 963 points, including a high game of 35, at Oil City, where she still ranks among the top 10 scorers. But girls didn't play that many games back then, otherwise she would have topped 1,000. Easily. And, oh by the way, Roxie Dale added 16 in the game where Melinda had 35 in January 1972.

Despite those credentials, Melinda had to try out for hoops at the Rock. She was one of 85 to show up for tryouts in September 1973. They began practice in November for a meager

10-game schedule in February. So all was not glamorous, even though Title IX had just been passed.

By her senior year she was averaging 17.5 points. And with old high school teammate and another Rock Hall of Famer, Jodi Gault, playing alongside, Melinda scored a school record 37 against Edinboro.

In the meantime, she was getting involved in team handball, a relatively new sport in the U.S. She and Slippery Rock teammate Bev Miller made the U.S. national team, which qualified for the Olympics – her dream – in 1984. In between time she was a real globetrotter, visiting Russia, East Germany, Denmark, everywhere. Even Kansas City! Her exploits abroad were chronicled in the newspaper.

And pretty much while all this was going on, at the age of 22, she was named head coach of the Mars High School girls basketball team. And remember the sports banquets the Rotary Club had. She was the first woman to sit at the celebrity table. Cy Young Award winner Jim Palmer was there. So was Bob Prince.



Another thing I liked about her speech – I thought of this later – is when she paid homage to her parents, Gene and Helen Hale. She said her mother would be over the moon over her induction, or words to that effect. I chuckled. In fact, I said out loud, oh yeah. You had to be acquainted with Mrs. Hale.

Melinda grew up on Linden Avenue in Oil City with four sisters, Jan, Beth, Tish and Bridget and two brothers, Chris and Matt, who died in 2014. Bridget was “filming” her speech on her iphone.

And, of course, she didn't forget her late husband Posey (given name Robert), the old mid-60s Mercer High School hoops star who died in 2013, and three daughters, Jence and twins Karly and Kourtney (pictured here.).

They, too, excelled in either basketball, team handball or both.

Melinda has lived in Slippery Rock for years now and can still be seen in local/ area gyms coaching, helping out.

Undoubtedly with that *glint* in her eye.

