

By Derek Pyda  
Butler Eagle

Editor's Note: Melinda Hale-Rhoads is now a member of at least three Halls of Fame. She was previously inducted into the Slippery Rock (2024) and Pittsburgh Women's (1992) Halls.

## *Jence Rhoads*

Excelling in sports became a habit for Rhoads, a 2007 Slippery Rock High graduate.

She was named all-state in two sports, scoring 100 goals in soccer and became Butler County's all-time girls basketball scoring leader with 2,170 points. Following her senior season, during which she led the Rockets to a District 10 championship, she was voted Pennsylvania Girls Basketball Player of the Year.

"Playing those two sports taught me resilience and how to handle challenges."

In college, she was a four-year starter at point guard for Vanderbilt University, tallying 1,000 points, 500 assists and 500 rebounds.

She played professional basketball in Europe for three seasons before spending seven years as a member of the U.S. Women's national handball team.

One of Saturday's other inductees was Jence's mother, Melinda Rhoads.

"A lot of people come up here and thank their parents for taking them to practice and for the emotional support, but not everyone can thank them as a fellow hall of famer," she said.

"My mom has been a huge role model for me my entire life. She set the foundation for all of my accomplishments. Her being inducted tonight makes this even more special for me."

## *Melinda Rhoads*

Rhoads, a graduate of Oil City High School, has spent most of her life living in Butler County. She was the first four-year starter for the women's basketball program at Slippery Rock State College, helping the team to a 53-20 record during that span.

She played on the U.S. Women's handball team 1975-84, was named MVP of the squad at three national championship events and was Player of the Year in 1980. She also earned a roster spot for two Summer Olympic teams.

In 1996, Rhoads was selected as one of the Olympic torch bearers prior to the summer games in Atlanta. She carried the torch for a half-mile in Erie.

She has coached youth basketball in Slippery Rock for 30 years.

"I've done some pretty cool things in my life, but none cooler than being a mom," she said. "My daughters — Jence, Karly and Kourtney — are my pride and joy.

"This is a defining moment in my life, for me to go into this hall alongside the best athlete I have ever known, and that athlete happens to be my daughter. That takes special to a whole new level."