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Two pioneers in the broadcast coverage of women's basketball -- Mimi Senkowski Griffin (left) and Robin Roberts -- cover a game from the court of Gampel Pavilion in Storrs, Conn. in Sept. 2001. Roberts entered the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame as a member of the Class of 2012. Griffin will be formally inducted on June 14, 2014. (Photo by Ray Martin/ESPN Images)

Women's Basketball Hall of Fame Class of 2014: Mimi Senkowski Griffin -- A love affair with the game

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Editor's Note: This is the second in a series of profiles on the six players, coaches and contributors who will be inducted into the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame on June 14 as part of the Induction Class of 2014. The 1976 U.S. Olympic Team will also be honored as "Trailblazers of the Game."

When Mimi Senkowski Griffin is inducted into the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame next month, it will be for her contributions to the game as a basketball commentator. But one could also see it as the culmination of a three-generation love affair with Pennsylvania women's basketball.

"I grew up on Big 5 basketball in Philadelphia. It was religion in our family," explained Griffin. "My grandmother played back in the day when they had cages around the court. They played in bloomers and guys weren't allowed in the gym." At six-feet, Griffin's mother Anne, played for Little Flower High School in the Philadelphia Catholic League, considered the elite of girls' basketball. "She told us that their coach would call her 'the point,' but not in terms that we would recognize it. She said it was because he would tell the rest of the team that 'the point' was to 'Get the ball to Anne!'"

No surprise, Griffin (then Senkowski) and her three sisters followed in the family's basketball footsteps. Griffin considers her coach at Lancaster Catholic, Pat Wallace, a woman far ahead of the time.

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"She didn't just teach us how, she taught us why. She allowed us to think for ourselves, not just in sports, but in general. It was not, 'Okay, do this and just do this.' It was, 'Do this because this will be the result if these things happen.' She made it like a chess game for us so that we would see three and four iterations down the line. It was an education beyond what anything could have given us in that day and age."

Griffin is not unaware that the role girls were expected to play in a Catholic school seemed contradictory to those they played on the court.

"That's the dichotomy of sport: allowing you to be what you weren't able to be in school," she reflected. "I think one of the reasons that young girls in Catholic schools loved basketball was it gave us a sense of identity. It was so great to find something that made you feel good about yourself and feel good about accomplishing something with others as a group. It cemented our self-esteem and," she added with a laugh, "it was just the bomb."

Griffin's high school career included a 64-game win streak, 1,168 points and, in her senior year, the 1974 Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association title.

"When we won the state tournament in the Harrisburg Farm Show Arena there were at least a half a dozen college coaches in the aisle way to our locker room -- one from West Virginia, one from Pitt, one from Florida -- and they were screaming at me, 'Do you want a scholarship? Do you want to come to our school?' I had no idea what they were talking about."



Senkowski-Griffin eschewed scholarship offers – among the first to be extended to women in the wake of the enactment of Title IX – to attend Delaware. Griffin (No. 12) was one of four freshmen whose resumes boasted state titles to play for the Blue Hens in 1974-75. (Photo courtesy University of Delaware Athletics Media Relations)

Understandable, since Title IX was only two years old and 1974 was the first year full scholarships were offered. Indeed, Griffin recalls that under the prevailing mores of the time, going to college for basketball was "something young women did not do," the implication being it somehow "diminished" one as a student.

Griffin ignored the offers and attended the University of Delaware to study computer science - and play basketball.

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"We had a team that had started four freshmen, each from four different high school state championship teams. In my freshman year, we almost beat Immaculata, the defending national champion."

But Delaware was not the right fit for Griffin, who transferred to Pittsburgh, where she finished out her basketball career and earned a Bachelor of Arts in economics.



Griffin transferred to Pitt, where she starred as a guard for the Panthers from 1975-78. (Photo courtesy Pitt Athletics)

Upon graduation there were opportunities to play professionally, but they were trumped by a job offer with Manufacturers Hanover in the special events department.

"That was pretty much a dream job because it was one of the first in sports marketing in the country," said Griffin. She ran the Women's Christmas Classic in Madison Square Garden (1980-82), moving to Converse as the national director of promotions for women's athletics (1983-85). Converse's decision to sponsor six women's games of the week on TV (though they never aired) gave Griffin her first opportunity in front of a microphone.

"I worked Leandra Reilly who, at that time, was ESPN's only female commentator," said Griffin. "She recommended me to ESPN. The very first event I did [for them] was a national high school cheerleading competition and I was awful. Just awful," she admitted. "Somebody made a triple pyramid and a girl jumped off and into a split. My comment was, 'Well, that's got to hurt.' And yet, then they invited me back to do the Division II national championship game later that year."

The rest, as they say, is history.

Griffin worked for ESPN and CBS from 1983-99 as a women's basketball analyst for regular-season and tournament games, and serving as the first female color analyst on a men's NCAA tournament game (1990). She also worked as a studio analyst, together with Robin Roberts, for ESPN's coverage of the NCAA Women's Tournament from 1996-99. She eventually left broadcasting to devote her full attention to her Allentown-based MSG Promotions, an event management and marketing company that specializes in professional golf championships and other major events.



The women's game remained the first love for Griffin, pictured here with Dick Vitale and Digger Phelps in 1996. But in 1990 Griffin, already a pioneer in sports broadcasting, became the first woman to work as a commentator on the NCAA men's basketball tournament when she worked the Notre Dame-Virginia first-round game for NCAA Productions. Though grateful for the opportunity, "I don't see this as my big break," Griffin told the *Los Angeles Times* at the time. "To be honest about it, I'd be just as happy doing women's games. I think the women's game is every bit as exciting as the men's." (Photo courtesy ESPN & Mimi Griffin)

The upcoming ceremony in Knoxville this June has given Griffin time to reflect on the state of the game she loves.

"From a talent perspective, there's nothing that compares to what these young women and coaches can do today. They really are incredible physical specimens and the coaches are so technically educated. But," she added, "I wonder if there needs to be more heart, too."

"There's success out there for everybody," Griffin continued. "Somebody else being successful does not, in any way, shape or form diminish you or your ability or chance to be successful. It just doesn't."

Which is one reason Griffin has asked former Texas coach Jody Conradt to be her presenter.

"In her most successful years, she invited anybody and everybody to Austin to come and watch them practice. She not only invited them and opened her door, [but also] had them stay in her home. She said, 'There is no secret to *what* we do. It's *how* we do it.'"


"My hope for the game is that we go back in time a little bit and remember what made us really popular back in the mid-'80s. We connected. The players, the coaches, the fans connected as people, not as a sport. Nobody truly really cares about basketball. They care about the people involved in that sport."

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