

2021 FARRAGUT HALL OF FAME INDUCTION

FARRAGUTPRESS THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2021 • 1B



Similar to most every event at Farragut High School during the past year of dealing with COVID-19, the 2021 FHS Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony will be different — meaning virtual.

The festivities, which will be taped in its entirety — not available in a live broadcast — will first be available at the FHS home page, knoxschools.org/farraguths, Saturday, March 6, said David Moore, an FHS Hall of Fame coach and H of F Committee member.

Though the Class of 2021 features only two inductees, there's plenty of quality:

- Cara Gregg Bledsoe, a 2009 FHS graduate, is a former star outside hitter for Lady Admirals volleyball (2005-2008 seasons) before earning All-conference honors at North Alabama University (2009-2012).
- Curt Powell, also a 2009 FHS grad who starred as an Admirals baseball shortstop (2006-2009 seasons) before enjoying special success in SEC Baseball at Georgia for three seasons, then playing Minor League Baseball in the Detroit Tigers organizations for almost four years.
- This year's Hall of Fame Athletic Service Award honoree is the late Ray Watson, beloved and respected former FHS softball assistant coach for 23 years.
- Erik Gerhardt, 2020 Athletic Service Award honoree and Voice of the Admirals and Lady Admirals in football and basketball, once again will serve as emcee.
- As for those working behind the scenes to make this virtual production come off flawlessly is Farragut resident Mark Packer, well-known WVLT-TV 8 personality as a sports anchor and high school football play-by-play announcer.
- FHS Hall of Fame Committee, many of whom have been helping produce this annual event since its inaugural Class of 2013 was inducted, are, in addition to Moore, Hall of Fame coaches Bill Parker, Lynn E. Sexton, Natalie Sisk, John Heatherly, Donald Dodgen (FHS athletic director) and Susan Davidson, along with teacher Michelle Brossett, former coach/teacher Ben Lyle and assistant AD/teacher Ben Collins.

The late RAY WATSON SERVICE AWARD HONOREE

(Coaching, Lady Admirals softball, and a former substitute teacher at the school)

A man of many talents, the late Ray Watson was a principal, superintendent, teacher, ordained Baptist preacher and fastpitch softball star — also widely known in the Knox County area for his spot-on Santa Claus roles — before serving as Lady Admirals scorekeeper and volunteer assistant coach for 23 years, specializing as a pitching coach.

“Ray wore many hats in that very full life he lived,” an FHS Hall of Fame press release stated.

Quotes from former Lady Admirals players, coaches and parents:

• “Coach Watson was many things to many different people. I am glad God brought him to Farragut High School to help be a part of the FHS softball program. He made an impact on so many lives along the way, young and old. We are truly blessed to have had him at Farragut. I am most grateful to have called him my friend. Thank you Ray Watson for all your time and service to Farragut High School”
— *former Lady Admirals head coach David Moore*

• “I spent many game days and road trips to tournaments with coach Watson listening to his stories. He had a special

place in his heart for children, which he put on display every Christmas as Santa Claus to so many children, including my own”
— *FHS head coach Nick Green*

• “Coach Watson was consistent and kind-hearted. His devotion to the game was strong, as he gave his time and talents for many years. Most importantly he led by example. ... He was always happy to hear about the triumphs in my life and genuinely concerned for the tough moments. He was a strong grandfather figure for those who didn't have that in their lives. ... As a high schooler I don't think I truly understood your impact, but as an adult you are truly a legend”
— *Leah Seffernick Bucklin*

• “Coach Watson was someone



you could always rely on to make you smile. He was there day-in-and-day-out doing all that he could for the rest of us”
— *Bailey Young*

• “Coach Watson gave me my first pitching lesson when I started at 11 years old. I used to go through a whole bucket of wild pitches in an hour, but by the end of our time together he had me down to one. I'm grateful he was still a

significant part of our program when I was at FHS a few years later”
— *Emily Smith*

• “Bellamy Field never felt complete until I saw coach Watson's smiling face in the pressbox. I adore that man and his genuine love for the players and the program”
— *Hannah Stephenson*

See WATSON on Page 4B



Cara Gregg Bledsoe,

(Volleyball star at FHS, an All-Gulf South Conference outside hitter at the University of North Alabama, then a youth coach and primary school teacher)

Farragut High School career (2006-2009):

- An All-state outside hitter her senior season in 2008 — seasoned by five years in the Smoky Mountain Juniors Volleyball Club — she helped lead the Lady Admirals to three Class AAA Volleyball State Championships.

“She always had her biggest games in our biggest games. Her junior and senior years she was our go-to person,” then FHS head coach David Moore said of Bledsoe. “I know she had 21 kills in a win at the state tournament against Houston. “She had an outstanding career,” he added. “She was just a great all-around player. ... A good leader — and a better person.”

- A two-time All-District 4-AAA honoree who also was named to the 4-AAA All-Tournament team in 2007 and 2008, and the All-Region 2-AAA and All-KIL teams in 2008.

- She also was named District Best Hitter in 2008, while also setting the school aces record (137) and kills record (529) as a senior.

“Going to Farragut was a great experience, I just loved the atmosphere there,” said Bledsoe, who came back to her hometown as a second-grade teacher at Farragut Primary School while serving three years as an FHS volleyball assistant coach. “It was a competitive school, both athletically and academically. “All four years I was there, I had (head) coach (David) Moore and (assistant) coach (Brendon) Cleer. They not only grew me as a player, they grew me as a person,” she added. “And I had a lot of players I considered really good friends as well.”

University of North Alabama (2009-2012):

- Starting quickly at UNA as an outside hitter, she was named All-Gulf South Conference Freshman of the Year in 2009, along with being named to the All-Gulf South Conference team as a freshman.

- She earned Gulf South Conference All-Tournament honors as a junior in 2011.

Coaching:

- In addition to her FHS volleyball coaching duties, she was Club Unite 15 National head coach in 2017-18 and 2018-19.
- Also served as Club Unite Spring League Director in 2017.
- She was head coach Rogers High School (Alabama) while also a KVA club coach and position coach.

Cara and husband, Michael Bledsoe, have three children: Grayson, Lillie and Lawson.



Cara with her family

Clockwise from top left:

2007 farragutpress story about Gregg's critical role in a big Lady Admirals victory.

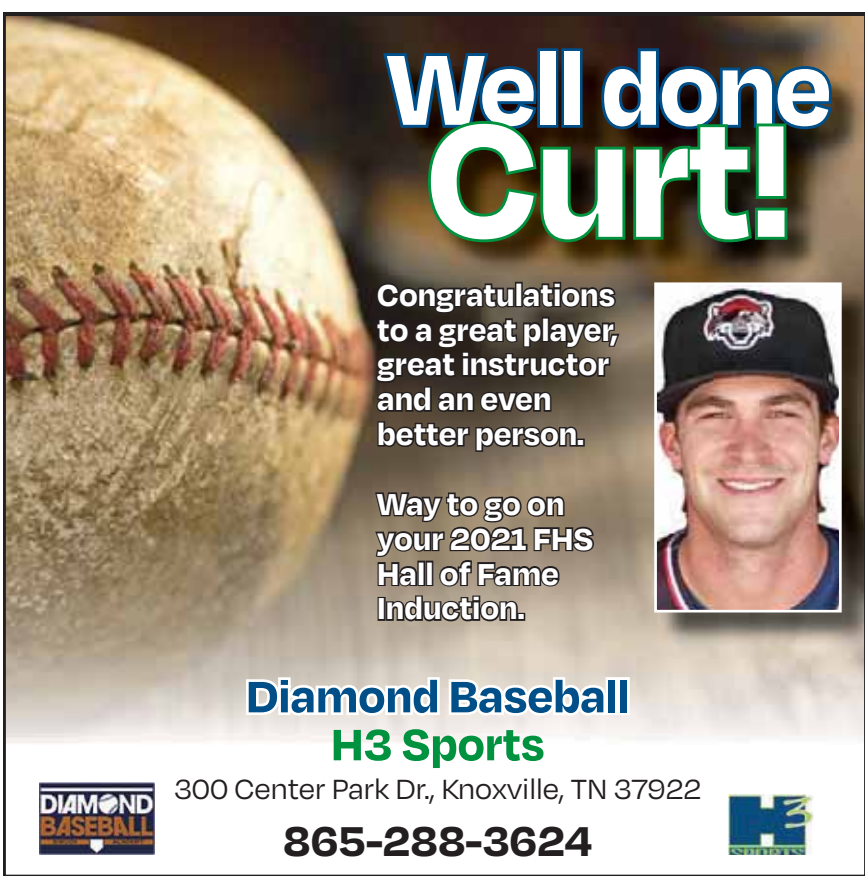
A Cara Gregg Bledsoe kill for UNA

2008 farragutpress story on Farragut's KIL volleyball championship with Cara Gregg Bledsoe's key role.

Recreational volleyball kill



Jason Zachary
State Representative
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Way to go on your 2021 FHS Hall of Fame Induction.



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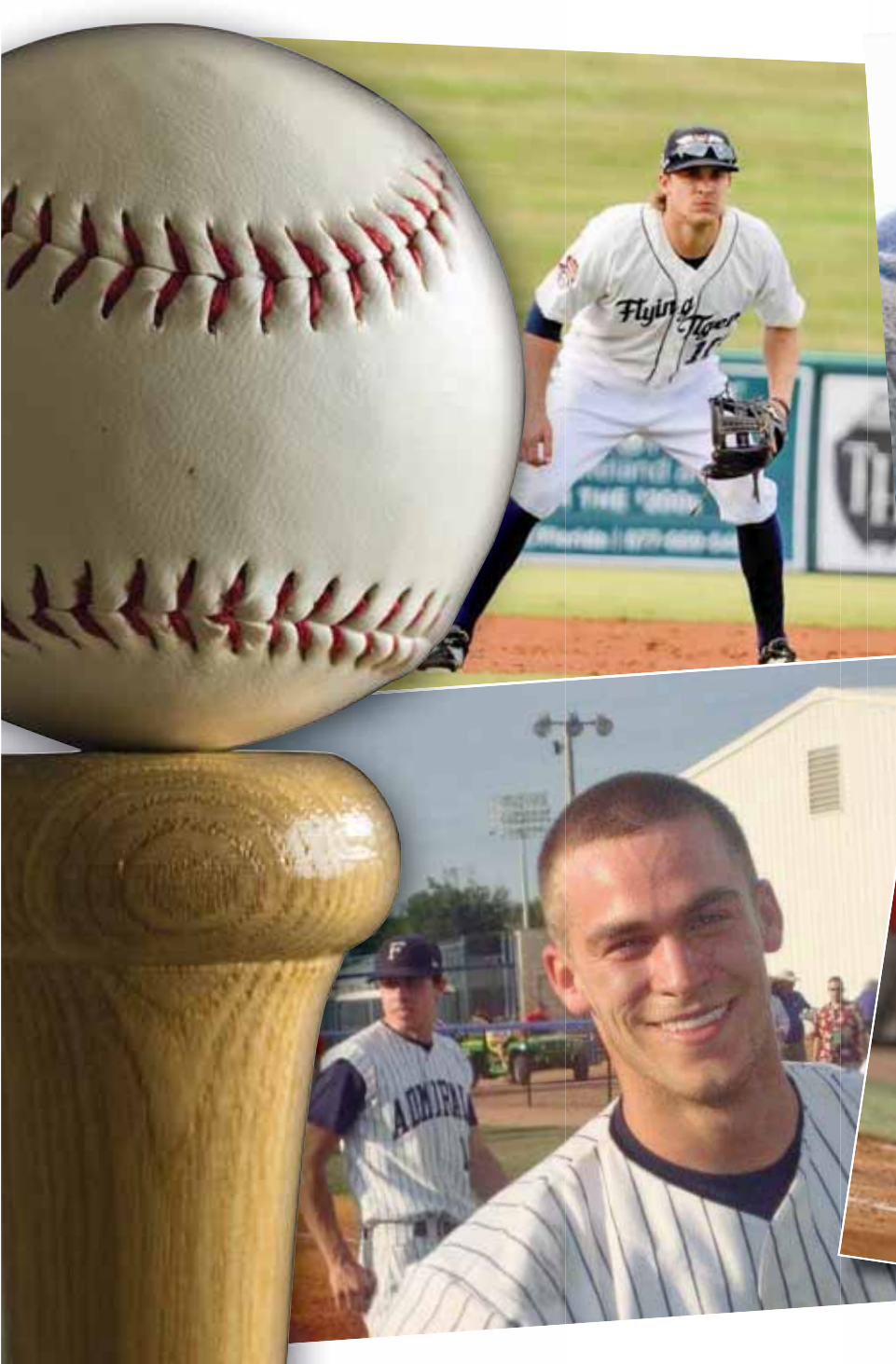
Congratulations to all the 2021 inductees.



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(Clockwise from top left):

Curt Powell in action in the Detroit Tigers' AA organization.

Curt and wife, Kerri Powell, with children, Henry, left, and Olive.

A Curt Powell base hit as a Georgia Bulldog.

Curt celebrates one of his three Class AAA state titles at FHS.

Curt Powell,

(Baseball star at FHS, an All-SEC third baseman at the University of Georgia before almost four years in the Detroit Tigers organization, reaching AA level)

Farragut High School career (2006-2009):

A 2009 graduate of Farragut where he played for East Tennessee legendary head coach Tommy Pharr.

- Having started every game in his four-year career, except one, as the Admirals' lead-off hitter, from the first game of his freshman season — all but about a dozen at shortstop — he helped lead the Admirals to Class AAA state titles in 2006, 2008 and 2009.

- Named 2009 Gatorade State Player of the Year after batting .504 — and despite being the team's leadoff hitter still hit eight home runs and produced 39 RBI — with 79 runs scored and 21 stolen bases in helping FHS go 39-5. "He had all the tools. He was a great player and started as a freshman, which was very unusual at Farragut High School, especially to start at shortstop," Pharr said of Powell. "But also was a great young man and an extremely hard worker. "I have a soft spot for him and his family, they were always supportive of the program," he added. "He was obviously a special player for us."

- Key member of the 2008 squad that went 43-3 and finished the year ranked sixth nationally by ESPN/USA Today. Batted .493

with eight home runs, 56 RBI, nine doubles and five triples as a junior in 2008.

- Named Prep Xtra Player of the Year in 2008 and 2009. "I had a fantastic experience at Farragut," said Powell, vice president of sales with Capital-Plus Construction Services in Hardin Valley. "... Had some great teachers, they supported me on the academic side. Supported me on the athletic side as well."

As for a special influence on his life from FHS, "There were several teachers and coach Pharr," he said. Specifically about Pharr, who led Farragut to five Class AAA state titles and three runner-up finishes in 12 seasons, "He was just a fantastic coach," Powell said. "He really stressed competition, which is the part I think I enjoyed the most. "I would say coach Pharr definitely had the biggest influence," he added.

2010 (freshman at Volunteer State Community College):

- Good enough to sign with SEC power Vanderbilt, he transferred to Volunteer State Community College in Gallatin.

- One of the nation's top junior college hitters in 2010, he batted .489 with 34 stolen bases in 38 games started — leading his

team in both categories.

- He tallied 56 runs scored, drew 28 walks and smacked 15 doubles.

Georgia Bulldogs career (2011-2013):

- A three-year letterman and two-time All-Southeastern Conference Second Team selection, all but a few at third base, who started 163 of his 169 games. • He posted a .341 career average (212-for-622) with 25 doubles, two triples, three home runs, 54 RBI and was 22-for-32 in stolen base attempts.

- In 477 total chances, he registered a .931 career fielding percentage.

2011, sophomore UGA season:

- Played in 60 games with 55 starts (53 at third base, one in right field and one at second base) in helping Georgia advance to the NCAA Tournament Corvallis Regional Final.

- He batted .289 with one home run and 13 RBI, and hit .296 in SEC action.

2012, junior Bulldogs season:

- He ranked fifth in SEC batting with a team-best .355 average.

- Appeared in 56 games, with 55 starts at third base, hitting .355 with two homers and 20 RBI.

- He led team with 45 runs scored, managed a .434 on-base percentage and tied for team-high with 20 multiple-hit games.

- While he ended that season on a seven-game hitting streak, his longest streak during the year was 14 games.

- The ex-Farragut star went 12-for-16 in stolen base attempts and had six three-hit games.

- He batted .345 with a .948 fielding percentage in SEC action.

2013, senior UGA season:

- Appeared in all 53 games with 52 starts at third base and one at shortstop.

- Team MVP who batted a team-best .376 with 82 hits in 218 at bats, ranking among SEC leaders at the end of the regular season.

- Posted a team-high .425 on-base percentage.

- Registered a team-best 25 multiple-hit games, including a four-hit game versus then No. 20-ranked Georgia Tech and a five-hit game versus Belmont.

- Posted a 13-game hitting streak during the season, along with a stretch of reaching base in 20 consecutive contests.

2013 Major League Baseball Draft:

Drafted by Detroit Tigers in the 21st round. "My ultimate goal was to be a professional baseball player," Powell said. "... I made it to AA, which was great. I didn't quite make my ultimate dream of making it to the Big Leagues. "I was glad I had some academics to fall back on," he added.

Curt and wife, Kerri Powell, have two children: Henry, turning 3 in April, and Olive, 18 months.

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Watson

From page 1B

• “I remember coach Watson especially when we were doing summer camp, and he would line us all up and teach all us to run on our toes around the bases. He was always encouraging, and taught me the love and passion for the game like he had”
— *Avery Blankenburg*

• “Coach Watson was always one of our biggest supporters and fans, and always had a story to tell”
— *Delaney Weller*

• “I remember coach Watson’s contagious positive attitude and his kind way of imparting wisdom on the players. He always made everyone smile, and he was the Best Santa”
— *Shannon Evans Harrington*

• “No matter how big the game or difficult the situation, coach Watson always had been there to give players confidence and support. I felt beyond blessed to have him at all the games, and he truly made a positive difference

with my softball career”
— *Andrea Sarhatt*

• “I can dedicate my love for pitching and many other pitchers to him. He was a light on the field. My change-up (pitch) will forever be dedicated to him because he was the master of them”
— *Callie Moore*

• “Coach Watson was always very supportive of each individual and the team as a whole, and he helped each one of us grow both as a person and ballplayer to reach and exceed our potential”
— *Kelsie Tuggle*

• “Coach Watson was always at every game, no matter the weather, no matter the team — he was always there. I will always be so grateful for him”
— *Bailey Myers*

• “Coach Watson instilled in his bullpens a sense of consistency: in our pitches, our love of the game and protection of our most important asset, our throwing arms. Thanks coach Watson”
— *Margret Morris Baudendistel*

• “Coach Watson was a legend, and many of my greatest softball memories are with him”
— *Abby Rose Martin Yates*

• “I have the sweetest memories with Coach Watson. I will treasure them always”
— *Jill O’Mealy Frost*

• “He was wonderful and loved the game. So many memories with FHS softball and coach Watson. He was always smiling and cheering us up. I was blessed to know him”
— *Jessica Koch Odom*

• “I worked with him in the press box at home games. He was a very kind man. He wouldn’t even say bad things about the umpire”
— *Steve Murr, parent of former players Kaci and Kristen Murr*

• “Coach Watson obviously loved his time with players and students. His friendly spirit will be missed”
— *former FHS coach Ben Lyle*

• “I loved coach Watson. A very special man for sure”
— *Danielle Spetar Ashley*

• “I loved him so much,”
— *Hannah Leavell*

• “We loved coach Watson”
— *Sarah Jackson*

• “He truly made an impact at Farragut” — *LaShae Wallace*

Ray’s timeline at FHS, Knox area

His love of softball was life-long, having played fastpitch softball for 47 years.

“He was a pitcher who loved the game,” the release stated. “When he moved to Knoxville and found out that there was no men’s fastpitch in the area, he was discouraged.”

In his ministerial role, “He actually performed the marriage ceremony for one of our assistant coaches one year,” the released further stated.

As for how he got to FHS, “Ray started substitute teaching at Farragut — and one day, toward the end of a season, he came by the softball field as the team was leaving on the bus for an away game,” the release stated. “Ray introduced himself to then head coach David Moore and asked if he could help with softball.” The next season coach Watson

started helping as an unpaid assistant coach working with the FHS pitchers.

A substitute teacher at the school for 21 years, “The students loved when he would sub, because another one of his talents was he was a great storyteller,” the release stated.

During the Christmas holidays, “Most of his closest friends feel he really was Santa Claus because he was the best Santa,” the release stated. “He enjoyed coming to school and handing out candy to the high school students every December, and he worked around Town doing photo shoots with kids. So a lot of students and teachers knew coach Watson as Santa. He did this for 20-plus years.”

Coach Watson died Jan. 22.

“He was honored to be receiving this award, and being his humble self said, ‘I don’t know why I am receiving this award,’” coach Moore said.

“... Well done, good and faithful servant (Matthew 25:23).”

Coach Watson’s daughter, Cathy Riessen, will be receiving the award on his behalf.

Senator Richard Briggs
- District 7 -
congratulates all of the 2021 Inductees on their success!




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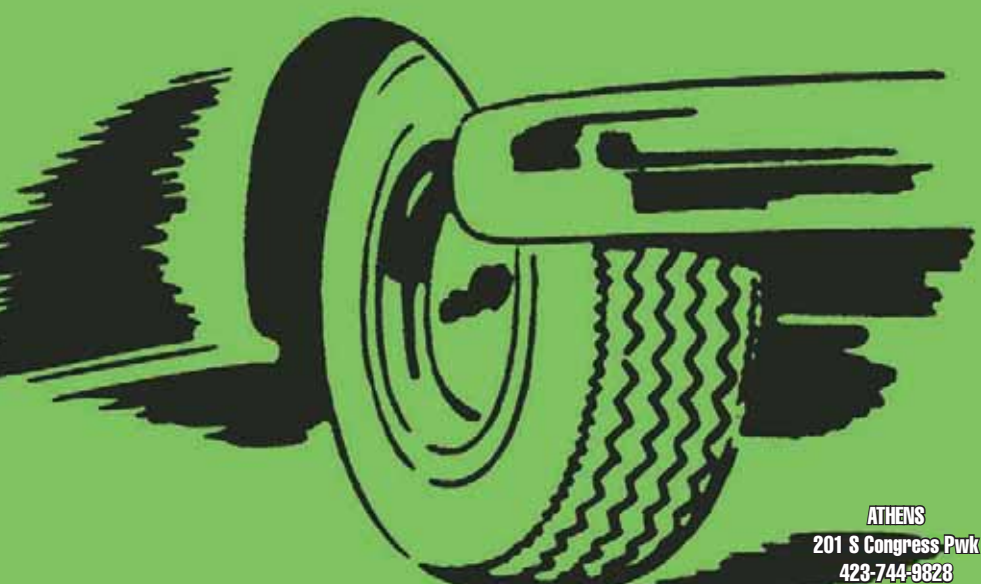



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