

# Woman honored decades after her letter led to transformation of women's sports at UAF

By Weston Morrow [wmorrow@newsminer.com](mailto:wmorrow@newsminer.com) | Posted: Saturday, February 14, 2015 11:44 pm

FAIRBANKS — In 1973, University of Alaska Fairbanks student Linda Moffitt knew one thing: she wanted to play basketball. Unfortunately for Moffitt and her teammates, the university didn't offer an intercollegiate program for women's basketball.

Though Title IX — the landmark federal legislation that would require gender equity from educational institutions receiving federal money — had just been passed the year prior, UAF still provided precious little attention to its women's sports.

The university's men's basketball budget at the time totaled \$40,000 while the women's team was only recognized as a club and received less than \$1,000.

Moffitt, then only 19 years old, wrote a letter to the United States Office of Civil Rights after reading the address in a Sports Illustrated article on women in sports.

Her letter, which detailed the unequal treatment of the university's programs, lodged a formal complaint of discrimination against UAF and set in motion events that would transform the face of women's sports at the university.

Two years later, the women's basketball team, the UAF Dahls, would play its first intercollegiate game, defeating the University of Alaska Anchorage Sourdoughs at the Patty Center.

On Saturday, 40 years and three months after that first game, the UAA women's basketball team — now the Seawolves — came to the Patty Center to take on UAF — now the Nanooks — and continue the tradition Moffitt and her teammates started in 1974.

Moffitt received recognition at the Patty Center on Saturday. Diann Darnall, one of the first women's basketball coaches at UAF, and university Athletic Director Gary Gray shared Moffitt's story prior to



## Honoring Women's Intercollegiate Sports

Former UAF women's basketball players and coaches from the 1970s pose for a picture during halftime of the college women's basketball game between the Alaska Nanooks and the UAA Seawolves Saturday afternoon, February 14, 2015 at the UAF Patty Center. They were being honored for their roles in helping give women's athletics intercollegiate status at UAF.

the game Saturday.

Darnall and Gray unveiled a plaque containing Moffitt's letter to the Office of Civil Rights that will be hung in the Patty Center, alongside the school's greatest athletic honors.

"We are so proud to honor Linda Moffitt as our first recipient of Women Who Dared, who took a daring action to advance the equal opportunity and status of women on our campus," Darnall said. "Because of that one action, that one person took one action that changed history."

Moffitt was unable to attend the ceremony Saturday; she passed away in August, shortly after Darnall spoke with her about the letter for the first time. Her brother, Stephen, attended the game Saturday in her place.

When Moffitt sent her letter to the Office of Civil Rights, she elected to deny her right to privacy as the filer of the complaint, taking an open stand against the discrimination her letter alleged.

Moffitt publicly stood behind her statements, but she never asked for recognition. Darnall said not a single member of Moffitt's family knew about the letter until after she passed away. In the 40 years after Moffitt sent the letter, no one ever thanked her for the service she rendered to women's sports in Alaska, Darnall said.

Just before tip off Saturday, that drought finally ended as Gray, on behalf of the university, recognized Moffitt's legacy.

At half-time, Darnall and Gray also recognized Ellen Hannan, the first basketball player in UAF's history to have a jersey retired by the school. Hannan, who wore number 33 from 1977 to 1981, had her jersey rededicated Saturday. It was originally retired in 1981, but the jersey was lost sometime later. After searching in every likely location, Gray said, the school elected to commission a replica to be installed in its place.

In addition to Hannan and Moffitt, the rest of the team members who played in that first intercollegiate game were recognized by the university Saturday, many of whom were in attendance. Linda Dolney, Shannon Jones, Nancy Hansen, Diane Hutchison, Linda Walsh, Denise Wallace and Carol Carlson were honored in person at half time. Paula Messer, Heidi Hyser, Etta Ahkivgak and Lori Major were honored but could not attend.

Other players from the 1970s who did not play in the first game in 1974 — Sharon Everette, Roberta Ferree and DeeDee Jonrow — were honored, as was Jim Houston, who coached the team from 1969 to 1973.

Read more in Kris Capps' column on Monday.

*Contact staff writer Weston Morrow at 459-7520. Follow him on Twitter:*

*@FDNMschools.*