

## Tara Sweeney - 1991



It was the “best of times” as Mr. Dickens would have said for Coach Tony Alario and the Fitchburg High School Girls basketball squad. The Raiders entered the post season in late February of 1990 with a fine 16-4 record. Led by their senior captain Paula Goodchild, the Red and Gray had come on strong after tough early season defeats to Holy Name, Marlboro and Wachusett to give them a solid seed in the Districts. Coach Alario’s squad had been aided by the tall presence of Tracey Smith in the middle and the outstanding shooting of junior swingman Tara Sweeney. Their first playoff would be against powerhouse St. Peter-Marion who had been the gold standard on Central Mass. basketball for nearly fifteen years. But the Raiders had a surprise for the Guardians at the old Brickyard as young Tracey Smith dominated in the low post, and Tara Sweeney unleashed her deadly bombs from the outside. The youngster, who had entered FHS just a year ago, was firing on all cylinders as she took Goodchild’s precisely placed passes, and hit soft jump shots as

she and Smith scored 17 out of 19 points in the decisive second quarter. Despite a late run by St. Peters, the Raiders knocked off their longtime nemesis 68-59 to give FHS their first District win ever. Tara Sweeney had been near perfect as she scored 26 points in the great FHS victory. Her pinpoint shooting made Tara Sweeney the perfect counter point to Smith’s inside game, and Goodchild’s overall floor game.

Tara’s sharp shooting continued as the Red and Gray moved deeper into the tourney with the upset victories against Marlboro and Holy Name who had defeated FHS earlier in the season. Coach Alario could now count on his emerging All-Star shooter, Tara Sweeney, as the Raiders took down their opponents. All the girls were playing out of their skulls, but Tara Sweeney’s shooting was driving opposing coaches crazy. In early March of 1990, Tara and her teammates raced off the court at WPI with a 44-40 victory and a District trophy for their efforts.

Next came undefeated Agawam at the Springfield Civic Center before 4,000 screaming fans and the Red and Gray shocked the world with a great 56-51 victory. Paula Goodchild had been the field general and Windy Rosebush had a great eight minutes in the last quarter, but Tara Sweeney’s outside shooting had kept the Red and Gray in front throughout most of the contest. The clock finally struck twelve against a powerful Bridgewater-Raynham squad in the state finals at the Centrum, but Tara Sweeney had been a major cog in a wonderful stretch of FHS history. For her wonderful efforts in this tremendous basketball for FHS, Tara was named a Mid-Wach League All-Star and awarded the team’s Best Offensive Player Award from Coach Tony Alario and his staff.

One aspect of Tara’s high school years at FHS, which had to be mentioned, when discussing her Hall of Fame career is her excellence in the classroom. It is not wrong to say that the teachers noticed her long before her coaches in basketball or softball even knew her name. If Tara was a star on the basketball court or the softball field, she was a superstar in the classroom. Having set her sights at a very young age upon the United States Air Force Academy, Tara worked extremely hard in the classroom to achieve excellent grades. Her strong effort would mean that Tara’s name was always found on the Special Honors lists when grades were released, which led to membership to the National Honor Society and eventually a “Gold F” at graduation time. Tara was not just a high achiever when it came to test grades, but when she was intellectually curious when it came to learning. Even though her superior academic strengths were in mathematics and sciences, Tara had a U.S. History teacher who remembered her

reaction to the Billy Joel song, "We didn't start the fire." He presented the class the words to Mr. Joel's song, and Tara independently found out all of the references to life in the 1940's, 1950's and 1960's, which the song mentioned. That's called intellectual curiosity and that was Tara Sweeney at FHS. At graduation, Tara was awarded Fitchburg High School's highest honor, the General Excellence Award.

In late January 1991 as her senior basketball season was taking place, Tara received notice from the office of Senator Edward Kennedy that she had received appointment to the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Her lifetime dream had been achieved through athletic and academic excellence.

Despite all the excitement of the Academy acceptance, Tara's excellent play continued for the Red and Gray during the 1990-1991 basketball season. Elected Co-Captain of the squad Tara continued to "score the ball" as the say on ESPN for the Red and Gray as they rolled through the competition. Tara, Megan Normandin, Tracey Smith, Amy Robichaud and company dominated with a regular season record of 19-1 and entered the District tournament as the number one seed.

In the finals at WPI the Red and Gray fell to old nemesis St. Peter-Marian 54-51 in double overtime. In this contest the old "Worcester referees bugaboo" hit the Raiders, as the three team members fouled out of the contest. Tara finished the season averaging nearly 17 points a game despite playing on an injured ankle during the latter stages of the season. For her efforts she was picked to the Telegram and Gazette Super Team and was also named to the All State Scholastic All-Star Team. Tara was a star on the court and in the classroom.

But basketball was not the only sport at which Tara excelled during her years at FHS. She was a two-year starter on two excellent softball squads during her sophomore and junior seasons. The 1989 Raider squad led by the excellent pitching of Stephanie Dantini went to the finals of the District Softball tourney only to lose in an extra inning heartbreaker. Tara was given the 10th player award for her efforts in this 1989 campaign.

Throughout her high school years Tara Sweeney made sure that she was a volunteer for the Special Olympics, as a softball and basketball coach for the special needs kids. Her teams always played quite well which is only of secondary importance. It was the effort put forth and the humanity of the volunteers, which really counted. That effort by Tara may have been noticed by Ted Kennedy, which led to a subsequent Air Force Academy appointment.

After high school it was off to the Air Force Academy where her academic and leadership accomplishments are really hard to believe. With athletics on the back burner, Tara in her senior year attained the highest rank of Cadet Colonel with an assignment as Cadet Commander-Group 1 with responsibility for 1,100 cadets in her Cadet Wing. Tara was elected Class Vice President for the Class of 1995 for all four years at Colorado Springs and was in the top 3% of Military Order of Merit and top 18% of Academic Order of Merit in her four years. Pretty good for a kid from Fitchburg or really anywhere! Tara received her commission on May 31, 1995.

During the years after attaining her commission, Tara earned a M.A. in Geography from UNC at Chapel Hill in 1996 and a M.B.A. from Regis University in Denver, Colorado. An idle mind becoming the devil's workshop was never a problem for Tara Sweeney. Tara recently returned to the area where she resides with her wife, Jennifer Bishop and their two great pals, Calie a 5 year old Boston Terrier and Jake a 4½ year old Goldendoodle. Congratulations Tara on your induction into the FHS Hall of Fame. You are one of FHS' first scholar-athletes ever.