

Billy Ray Adams

Born: Oct. 18, 1938 in Reform, Ala. Raised in Columbus, Miss.

Died: June 1, 2023.

Parents: William Franklin Adams and Flora Mae Kelly.

Marital Status: Married to Dorothy Jean Bearden Adams.

Children: Brad and David.

Lowndes County Connection: Competed in football, baseball and track at Stephen D. Lee High School, where he graduated in 1958.

Billy Ray Adams' story is one of what could have been.

It looked like Billy Ray was destined for a promising career in the National Football League only to never see it come to fruition.

Billy Ray was drafted by the San Francisco 49ers of the National Football League and Houston Oilers of the American Football League. He opted to sign with San Francisco after being selected with the 36th pick in the third round of the 1962 draft. He chose the 49ers over the Oilers, who chose him with the 127th pick in the 16th round.

All looked promising until he tragically sustained serious injuries in an automobile accident prior to his rookie season with the 49ers. The injuries prevented him from ever playing in an NFL game.

Hopes were high for Billy Ray after an outstanding college career as a fullback and cornerback at the University of Mississippi. His senior season of 1961 he was a first-team All-American and first-team All-Southeastern Conference fullback, making him one of the most prestigious players in school history.

He starred for legendary Ole Miss coach Johnny Vaught from 1959-61 and played on teams with records of 10-1, 10-0-1 and 9-2, truly the glory years of the program. The 1960 team was crowned the FWAA National Champion and Southeastern Conference Champion.

During his career as a fullback at Ole Miss, he carried the ball 174 times for 1,009 yards for a 5.8 average per attempt and he scored 11 touchdowns. His senior season he averaged 6.3 yards per carry and scored 10 touchdowns to lead the SEC in both categories.

In his entire career (high school and college) he was credited with a loss of yardage only one time. In fact, he didn't even carry the ball when he was credited with the loss. In a game against Tulane he fell on a teammate's fumble and he was marked with a 1-yard loss.

The accolades followed Billy Ray after his Ole Miss career. In 1987 he was inducted into the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame. In 1990 he went into the Ole Miss M Club Hall of Fame. In 2000 the Ole Miss Chapter of the National Football Foundation

and College Hall of Fame honored him with its Distinguished American Award. Then in 2003 he was chosen a Southeastern Conference Legend at the SEC championship game in Atlanta.

Also while at Ole Miss, he was chosen to the Association Student Body Hall of Fame.

Billy Ray, a well groomed young man, first gained notoriety in athletics at Stephen D. Lee High School, where he played football and baseball and competed in track.

Lee High honored him after his prep career by retiring his football jersey.

Samye Johnson

Born: Nov. 9, 1949 in Jackson, Miss.

Parents: Sam and Johnye Johnson.

Marital Status: Single.

Children: None.

Lowndes County Connection: Played four sports and coached three sports at Mississippi University for Women in Columbus, Miss.

Despite hailing from Mendenhall, Miss., and currently residing in Biloxi, Miss., Samye Johnson is comfortable calling Columbus, Miss., home.

Samye called Columbus home for 32 years before moving to Biloxi in 2011.

She first arrived in Columbus in 1967 as a wide-eyed freshman at Mississippi State College for Women.

The college, which later became Mississippi University for Women, is where she quickly set roots and became a popular figure in the athletic department. From 1967 through 1971 as a student-athlete and 1977 through 1994 as a coach she was a mainstay at the school. During that time she played four sports as a student-athlete and later coached three sports, hardly any time for the weary.

She was a versatile athlete who participated in volleyball, basketball, swimming and badminton from 1967-71.

A highlight as an athlete at the W came in 1970 when she led her team to the State MAIAW Volleyball Tournament championship and berth in the National Intercollegiate Volleyball Tournament.

Five years after graduating from MUW she returned and became a successful coach, coaching volleyball, basketball and softball.

She coached the volleyball team for 15 years and posted a 431-185 record. She led squads to the MAIAW Volleyball State Championship in 1979-80, NCAA Volleyball Tournament in 1985 and 1986, and Gulf South Conference Volleyball Championship in 1993-94.

She was rewarded for her volleyball success by being chosen NCAA Division II National Volleyball Coach of the Year in 1984-85, NCAA Division II South Region Volleyball Coach of the Year in 1985 and 1987, and Gulf South Conference Volleyball Coach of the Year in 1993-94.

Samye coached the basketball team from 1982-89 and posted a 106-67 record. She coached the team to back-to-back 20-win campaigns, going 20-6 in 1983-84 and 20-4 in 1984-85. The 1983-84 squad was ranked No. 13 in the NCAA Division II Coaches poll.

As the softball coach, she led the Blues to top three finishes in the state each year from 1979 to 1983 with consecutive state championships the last two years.

While at MUW, she earned the Fast Break All-American Coach Award in 1983-84, 1984-85 and 1988-89.

She has been honored for her accomplishments by being inducted into the Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame in 2002, the W Athletics Hall of Fame in 2025 and now the Lowndes County Sports Hall of Fame.

Samye eventually left MUW and coached the Mississippi State volleyball team from 1994-97, winning 46 matches in three seasons. She was also a women's athletic director at the school.

She prepped at Mendenhall Attendance Center and graduated in 1958. She lettered four years in basketball and track. She earned

All-District 6 and honorable mention All-Little Dixie honors in both sports. She played on District 6 title teams in basketball in 1965 and track in 1966.

Samye also excelled on the golf links. She was associated with the Mississippi Women's Golf Association, serving as a representative from 2007-09, vice president from 2009-10 and president from 2010-11. She was recognized by the MWGA in 2011 as Golfer of the Year for outstanding contributions to the organization.

She demonstrated the ability to strike a golf ball by winning the Green Oaks Lady Scramble Championship in 1994, 1995, 1996 and 2000, and Elm Lake Ladies Club Championship in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006 and 2007.

Thomas Edison (Tommy) Lott, Jr.

Born: April 14, 1936 in Columbus, Miss.

Died: Aug. 23, 2018.

Parents: Thomas E. Lott, Sr. and Ruth Senter Lott.

Marital Status: Married to Patricia Ann Cade Lott.

Children: Toby, Ed and Marion.

Lowndes County Connection: Played golf at Stephen D. Lee High School, where he graduated in 1954.

It can be said that Tommy Lott, Jr. literally grew up on a golf course.

The late Columbus, Miss., native was the son of the founder of the Columbus Country Club and it was there he spent a majority of his time.

Being the son of the founder afforded Tommy ample access to the golf course and it was there he developed a passion for the sport.

It's also where he learned how to play the sport and developed his skill for striking a golf ball.

Tommy attended Stephen D. Lee High School in Columbus and while the Generals were known for producing football, basketball and baseball talent, he showcased his skills on the golf course.

The more he played, it became apparent he had a talent for golf. Throughout his lifetime, he enjoyed success and many memorable moments playing golf.

While a student at Lee, he was a two-time Mississippi high school state champion and won the Mississippi Golf Association Boys Junior Amateur Championship in 1953.

Just two years later, at age 19, he emerged as the winner of the 1955 Mississippi Open at Northwoods Country Club in Meridian. En route to the victory, he recalled hitting a 2-iron out of the woods onto the green and two-putting for a birdie on the par-5 fifth hole as a highlight. He said he played well from that point on.

Because of his familiarity with the course, he won the Columbus Country Club men's championship numerous times, including the first time at age 16.

His familiarity also helped him shoot a record low 64 at Columbus Country Club. He shot 30 on the front side and 34 on the back with the 30 setting a record low for nine holes.

Overall he won more than 30 tournaments, including the Aberdeen (Miss.) Invitational twice, Tupelo (Miss.) Invitational and Mississippi Cup matches.

One of his more memorable moments in golf occurred in 1956 when he played alongside soon-to-be legend Jack Nicklaus in the Sunnehanna Amateur Tournament at Johnstown, Pa. He and Nicklaus were paired in a practice round and the first round of the tournament as well as another round.

Nicklaus, known as the Golden Bear, went on to win a record 18 majors on the PGA Tour.

Lott posed for a picture with Nicklaus during the Sunnehanna Amateur and later got Nicklaus to sign a print. Today framed copies of the picture are on display in the clubhouses of Lion Hills Golf Course (formerly Columbus Country Club) and Old Waverly Country Club in West Point, Miss.

Along the same time frame, Tommy played golf at Mississippi State, where he graduated in 1958. He was the first scholarship golfer in school history.

He was a member of the Bulldog Club and M Club at Mississippi State.

Tommy, who was once recognized as one of Mississippi Magazine's Top 10 golfers, had two sons and both followed in his footsteps at Mississippi State. Toby played from 1978-81 and Ed played from 1984-86.

Tommy paired with Toby in the Mississippi State Father-Son Tournament in Meridian in 1981 and finished in first place.

In addition to playing golf, Tommy served the first two terms as president of the Mississippi Golf Association and he helped start the Mid-South Golf Association.

Oliver Mallory Miller

Born: April 22, 1955 in Columbus, Miss.

Parents: Lucille Miller and George Irby.

Wife: Lucy Weatherspoon Miller.

Children: Takiva Miller Bell, Gabrielle Miller Smith, Kristina Miller, Kenneth O. Miller, Katrina Reed, Shannon Reed, Oliver Reed, Oliver Jackson.

Lowndes County Connection: Born in Columbus, Miss. Played football at Robert S. Caldwell High School, where he graduated in 1973. Owns and operates Columbus business Miller Tae-Kwon-Do, which he founded in 1977.

Oliver Miller is a man who can say he literally knows what it feels like to be on top of the world.

Affectionately referred to as “Big O”, Oliver experienced such a feeling in 1993 when he was crowned the World Kick Boxing Champion by the World Kick Boxing Association.

The Columbus, Miss., native claimed his second championship belt by winning the world title. He won his first in 1988 when he was crowned the North American Kick Boxing Champion by the International Council of Kick Boxing.

“Big O” punched and kicked his way to the North American Super Middleweight title in the 180-pound division in 1989 when he defeated Manson Gibson in an open match in Columbus.

He later lost to Gibson in 1993 in an attempt to win the World Middleweight championship, giving him a career record of 35 wins, five defeats and one draw to go with 15 knockouts.

Oliver also had success in the ring as a boxer. He first gained notoriety when he won the Mississippi Golden Gloves competition in 1979. He fought in the light-heavyweight division and won 25 bouts.

He is also highly skilled in karate, being awarded his first degree black belt in 1977, second degree black belt in 1979, third degree black belt in 1981, fourth degree black belt in 1992, fifth degree black belt in 2000 and eighth degree black belt in 2009.

He was inducted into the Mississippi Black Belt Hall of Fame in 2008.

Oliver was presented the Who's Who Recognition in Mississippi Award in 2004, the Life Achievement Award by Mid-South Martial Arts in 2006 and the BKPTV Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019.

His experience includes being a martial arts instructor, chief examiner, professional boxing manager and trainer at Gilmore Hospital Wellness Center in Amory, Miss., martial arts summer instructor for Math and Science students at Mississippi State, instructor of Union short course in boxing at Mississippi State, instructor of martial arts demonstration for the McDonald's Corporation and instructor for children ages 3-5 at the combined Community Children Development Services.

Oliver currently resides in his hometown of Columbus and owns Miller Tae-Kwon-Do, which he founded in 1977. He offers training and instruction in boxing, karate, Tae-Kwon-Do and jiu-jitsu.

He also founded the United American Karate Association in 1980, introduced Maximum Body Power Workout Fitness Program in 1999 and is co-owner of O1 Productions, LLC.

Aubrey Nichols

Born: Feb. 18, 1942 in Tyronza, Ark. Raised in Columbus, Miss.

Parents: Frank and Ruth Nichols.

Wife: Joy Porter Nichols.

Children: Jeffrey, Jay and Jarret.

Lowndes County Connection: Participated in basketball, football and track New Hope High School, where he graduated in 1960.

February 25, 1963 is a date that will forever live in infamy in Mississippi State basketball history.

It was on that date that legendary coach Babe McCarthy's Bulldogs made national headlines by defying state officials and sneaking out of state in order to play against Loyola of Chicago in the NCAA Tournament in East Lansing, Mich. At the time it was an unwritten law that Mississippi teams could not play against integrated schools.

A member of that Mississippi State team who participated in the famous "Game of Change" was Columbus native and New Hope High School graduate Aubrey Nichols.

Aubrey was one of six MSU players who played in the game, which inspired a movie documentary and two books.

Aubrey played at Mississippi State from 1961-64, playing on two of the most successful teams in school history. The Bulldogs claimed Southeastern Conference championships in 1961-62 and 1962-63, finishing 24-1 overall and 14-1 in the SEC in 1961-62, and 22-6 and 12-2 the next season.

Aubrey, who played guard, played in 67 games at MSU and scored 336 points and shot 46 percent from the field and 76 percent from the free throw line. He averaged 9.3 points and 3.7 rebounds as a senior in 1963-64.

Aubrey was a dual-sport athlete at Mississippi State, also lettering in baseball in 1962, 1963 and 1964. The first game he played in happened to be the first college baseball game he had ever been to.

He played first base and center field and was the lead off hitter, specializing in drag bunting for a hit. In 1964 he set a school record with 13 stolen bases.

Aubrey didn't play baseball at New Hope because the school didn't offer the sport, but he was still a multi-sport athlete. He was a basketball standout and competed in football and track.

He did, however, play baseball for the Columbus Redbirds, a semi-pro team coached by Jerry Durnin. They played their games at historic Redbird Field, which no longer exists.

He graduated from New Hope in 1960. He lettered four years in basketball and averaged 20-plus points as a junior and senior. He led the Trojans to a 28-4 record his final season, earning All-Big Black Conference, North Division State All-Star and All-State honors.

Aubrey also lettered four years in football at New Hope. He was a senior on the 1959 team that won the Big Black Conference

and finished 10-1. He earned All-Big Black Conference honors in 1958 and 1959.

In track, he helped New Hope take first place in the state in the 880 relay. He also competed in the mile relay, 400-yard dash and discus.

Derek Lee Sherrod

Born: April 23, 1989 in Chula Vista, Calif. Raised in Caledonia, Miss.

Parents: Louis and Harritte Sherrod.

Marital Status: Single.

Children: None.

Lowndes County Connection: Participated in football, basketball and track at Caledonia High School, where he graduated in 2007.

At 6-foot-5 and 300-plus pounds, and blessed with raw strength, quickness and agility, Derek Sherrod was the type of athlete a school doesn't come across very often — especially a small school.

Fortunately for Caledonia High School in Lowndes County, such an athlete came along when Derek walked onto the campus.

Derek used his massive size and skills to dominate on the football field and basketball court at Caledonia before becoming

an All-American football player at Mississippi State and a first-round draft choice of the Green Bay Packers.

Derek, who attended Caledonia from 2003-2007, was a boy in a man's body and the school never had an athlete quite like him before his arrival and hasn't since.

The man-child was a decorated football player at Caledonia High. Locally he was chosen to The Columbus Commercial Dispatch preseason Elite Eleven squad in 2005 and 2006, making him the only two-time recipient. Additionally he was rated the No. 26 offensive tackle prospect in the country by ESPN.com, honored as the Mississippi Gatorade Player of the Year in 2006 and selected Class 3A All-State by the Mississippi Association of Coaches in 2006.

After his senior season, he played in the Mississippi/Alabama All-Star Classic in Mobile, Ala., and the Offensive-Defensive All-American Bowl in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

The giant offensive and defensive tackle had 32 pancake blocks and allowed only one sack on offense and had 79 tackles with six quarterback sacks and four fumble recoveries on defense his senior season. His junior season he was second-team All-State and recorded 93 tackles and four sacks.

Derek was also the center and senior captain on the basketball team and heaved the shot put and discus at Caledonia.

He went on to don the maroon and white of Mississippi State from 2007-10. As a senior, he was chosen co-captain and he capped the campaign by being voted first- or second-team All-American by seven different publications. He was also chosen first-team All-Southeastern Conference offensive tackle.

Derek also excelled academically. He had a 3.54 GPA and was a finalist for the William V. Campbell Trophy, which is referred to as the “Academic Heisman”.

Derek was so highly regarded that the Green Bay Packers selected him with the 32nd pick of the first round in the 2011 NFL Draft. He became the first offensive lineman in Mississippi State history to be drafted in the first round.

He played for the Packers from 2011-14 and played in 20 games. Unfortunately he was plagued by injuries that limited his playing time. His most severe injury occurred in a game against Kansas City on Dec. 18, 2011 when he broke his tibia and fibula.

Robert E. Smith, Sr.

Born: April 6, 1953.

Parents: John Smith, Sr. and Rebecca Pippins Smith.

Lowndes County Connection: Played and coached football at Stephen D. Lee High School, where he graduated in 1971.

Robert Smith is perhaps best remembered for being the mayor of Columbus, Miss.

Robert became the mayor in 2006 and served in the role until 2021. In addition to those 15 years, he served five years as a Ward One Councilman and Vice-Mayor.

Prior to becoming the mayor, he was the principal at West Lowndes Middle School from 1992-2006.

But before getting into administration and politics, Robert was involved in athletics as both a player and coach.

He both played and coached football at Stephen D. Lee High School in Columbus.

He coached and taught in the classroom at Lee from 1975-83.

Robert played football as a sophomore and junior at R.E. Hunt High School in Columbus before transferring across town to Lee for his senior season.

He was a Little Six Conference first-team defensive tackle both years at Hunt and Big 8 Conference first-team defensive tackle at Lee.

He was described as the Generals toughest player on the team.

Following his senior season, he was selected to play in the Mississippi High School All-Star game and he was chosen the most valuable defensive player.

One of the players he coached at Lee was 2025 Lowndes County Sports Hall of Fame inductee Leslie Frazier, who is currently assistant head coach of the Seattle Seahawks. At last year's LCSHOF inaugural induction ceremony, Frazier gave Smith a lot of credit for his development as a football player.

After starring at Lee High, Robert played football at Mississippi Valley State University in Itta Bena, Miss.

He started all four seasons at weak outside linebacker at Mississippi Valley, chosen Southwest Athletic Conference first-team linebacker in 1972 and 1973.

Robert was rewarded for his contribution to the football program by being inducted into the Pre 1980 Class of the Mississippi Valley State Athletics Hall of Fame.

He was given a couple of opportunities to play in the National Football League, signing with the Dallas Cowboys in 1975 and trying out with the Cleveland Browns in 1976.

James “T” Thomas

Born: Dec. 18, 1938 in Columbus, Miss.

Died: Oct. 4, 2015.

Parents: Booker T. Thomas, Sr., and Mattie Terrell Thomas.

Marital Status: Married to Lillian Augusta High Thomas.

Children: Shelia, Darryl, James and Audrey.

Lowndes County Connection: Played football at R.E. Hunt School, where he graduated in 1958.

To say James “T” Thomas could run fast on a football field would be an understatement.

“T” as he was affectionately known, had speed to burn and was appropriately nicknamed Jim “Long Gone” Thomas because of his ability to score from anywhere on a football field.

While playing for the Edmonton Eskimos of the Canadian Football League, the Columbus, Miss., native high-tailed it down the field for three of the longest runs in team history. He romped 104 yards against the British Columbia Lions on Oct. 9, 1965, 100 yards against the Winnipeg Blue Bombers on Aug. 2, 1966 and 97 yards against the Ottawa Rough Riders on Sept. 4, 1964.

“T” was a running back for the Eskimos from 1963-71 and amassed 6,161 rushing yards. He was chosen a Canadian Football League All-Star in 1966 and 1967, and West All-Star in 1965, 1966 and 1967. He was voted Edmonton’s Most Valuable Player three times.

James signed a contract with the Los Angeles Rams of the National Football League in 1970, but didn’t play in a game and opted to return to Edmonton. He also had a tryout with the Dallas Cowboys but suffered an injury and never played with the team.

After his playing days, he embarked on a coaching career, both on the college and high school levels.

His longest coaching tenure was at Ole Miss as the tight ends coach from 1983-91, working for his friend Billy Brewer. He was also an assistant for Brewer at Stephen D. Lee High School in Columbus.

He joined the Ole Miss staff full time on Aug. 1, 1983 after being the athletic director at Mary Holmes College in West Point for one year.

After serving six years as an assistant football coach and head track coach at Southwestern Oklahoma State, he was hired as the head football coach at Mississippi Valley State in 1978. As the Delta Devils coach he had a two-year record of 10-8-1, including a 6-3-1 mark in 1978 that earned him Southwestern Athletic Conference Coach of the Year honors.

He also had coaching stints at Noxubee County High School, Houston (Miss.) High School and Treadwell (Tenn.) High School.

“T” started gaining notoriety for romping up and down football fields in Columbus at R.E. Hunt High School, where he graduated in 1958. He also played basketball and averaged 16 points per game.

After high school, he honed his skills at Mississippi Industrial College in Holly Springs, Miss., where he was a standout

running back. He was also a .300-hitting center fielder on the baseball team and ran a 9.6 second 100-yard dash on the track team.

Dan Douglas Moulds

Born: Dec. 25, 1935.

Parents: Dan and Carrie Moulds.

Marital Status: Married to Ann Clay Moulds.

Children: Danny, Mindy and Patricia.

Lowndes County Connection: Worked for radio station WCBI in Columbus, announcing Stephen D. Lee High School football games on Friday nights as well as announcing Mississippi University for Women basketball games.

In a special presentation tonight at the Lowndes County Sports Hall of Fame induction banquet, Doug Moulds will become the first person not named Henry Matuszak to be a recipient of the Henry G. Matuszak Founder's Award.

In a surprise motion by the Lowndes County Sports Hall of Fame board of directors at the inaugural ceremony last April, Henry was presented the award in his name for his role as the "Founding Father."

In presenting the award a year ago, the board declared that the Henry G. Matuszak Award would be given to a recipient at each year's banquet in the future.

The purpose of the award is to recognize individuals who contribute to sports behind the scenes rather than scoring touchdowns in football, making 3-pointers in basketball, hitting home runs in baseball, kicking goals in soccer and hitting golf balls and tennis balls.

The idea is to honor someone like Henry, who was a basketball manager and statistician in high school and college and later a sports writer (most notably at The Commercial Dispatch in Columbus).

Doug certainly fits the bill of being someone who had a major impact on sports in Lowndes County and beyond in a contributing role. His contributions came in the broadcast booth.

He started work at radio station WCBI in Columbus in 1963 right at the time the station moved its headquarters from the Gilmer Hotel to above The Commercial Dispatch building.

While working for WCBI, Doug became a popular and well known figure for reporting sports news and calling

Stephen D. Lee High School football games on Friday nights.

During his Lee broadcasts he became noted for giving thanks to “almighty God” and that made an impression on his listeners.

One of Doug’s faithful listeners recalled him signing off after games by saying “This is Doug Moulds giving thanks to almighty God for giving us the greatest pleasure of living under

the flag of the United States. Good night from the Magnolia Bowl.”

Some listeners claimed it was like they were actually at the games when they listened to Doug describe the action on the radio.

In addition to announcing Lee High football games for 13 years, locally he introduced Mississippi University for Women basketball to the airwaves by becoming the team’s first broadcaster in 1982-83.

Calling the MUW games wasn’t Doug’s only experience broadcasting college sports. He called University of Mississippi men’s basketball and football games in 1974-75, University of Arkansas at Little Rock basketball 1979-82, Memphis State basketball and football 1984-85, Arkansas State basketball and football 1996-98 and East Mississippi Community College basketball and football 1998-2002.

Other media experience included being the weekend sports anchor for TV 7 in Little Rock and managing radio station WLOV in West Point, Miss.

Doug even devoted his free time to coaching Little League baseball at Propst Park and YMCA basketball and football in Columbus from 1966-71 when his son Danny played sports. His 1971 baseball team advanced to the state and regional tournaments.