



## 1974-76 Girls' Gymnastics Team

Year of Induction: **2017**

Year of Graduation: **N/A**

Sports clichés abound about teams who experience a rapid change from consistently being defeated to becoming victorious on a regular basis. Worst to first, outhouse to penthouse, reversed the curse...take your pick from any of these catchy phrases, but the Johnson City Girls' Gymnastic teams of 1974-75 and 1975-76 completed an incredible turnaround that is worthy of any description befitting a team that accomplishes what they were able to do.

The 1973-74 gymnastics season was one for the record books for all the wrong reasons. Unfortunately, the Wildcats suffered through an entire season without a single victory throughout that long winter. First-year head coach John Blishak knew that changes were necessary, and he set forth to bring about a shift in the girls' gymnastics program. The Wildcats began the 1974-75 season with a wholly unseasoned roster consisting of two juniors and 22 sophomores and freshmen, and it turned out that their youth would serve them well. After going winless the season before, the '74-'75 squad put together a record of 21 wins (including six wins from outside of the conference) against only two losses. Led by the consistent contributions of Terri Stalker, Renee James, Becky Bellis, Janie Farrell and Laurie Milk, the Wildcats far exceeded everyone's expectations for the season. A definitive moment for the girls and for the gymnastics program as a whole came on February 11, 1975 in a dual meet against Union-Endicott. Leading up to this contest, the U-E gymnasts had won an amazing 32 consecutive meets. The final score of 88.00 for the Wildcats to 87.75 for the Tigers shows just how close this match was, but in one fateful night, the U-E win streak was over and the JC program had its turning point moment. Later in that same season, the team broke the Section IV record for most points in a dual meet with 92.90, and Becky Bellis established a new Section IV record for her score on the uneven parallel bars. With momentum clearly on their side, the Cats entered the Section IV tournament with high hopes in March of 1975. Once again, the gymnasts from U-E were the primary competition as the defending sectional champions, and once again, the JC girls were victorious. Amazingly, in just one season, Coach Blishak and his girls went from not winning a single meet to being the Section IV champions!

The success of the '74-'75 season certainly carried over to the following year. With its entire roster basically intact, including Stalker, James, Bellis, Farrell and Milk, the Wildcats were even more impressive in the '75-'76 regular season. They compiled an undefeated record of 14 wins, 0 losses, highlighted by two victories against their arch rivals from Union-Endicott. They were crowned STAC champions, and their bid for a second consecutive sectional championship fell just short as they were runners-up in March of 1976.

It is quite incredible to consider the accomplishments of the girls gymnastics teams of '74-'75 and '75-'76, especially in light of where they came from. Coach Blishak and his volunteer assistant coach (and

wife), Patty Ann Blishak, led the Wildcats to become a Section IV powerhouse on the beam, bars, floor and vault. The Johnson City Athletic Hall of Fame is proud to welcome a team of ladies who turned around a program, set records, broke streaks, and brought home championships that no one would have predicted, the 1974-75 and 1975-76 varsity girls' gymnastics teams.