

Hall of Fame

Crowley: hard to stop

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duced to soccer as a way to stay conditioned during the warmer weather.

His neighbor, Frank Passarelli, introduced him to the sport, and the hockey player's jaw dropped when he saw the size of the goal.

They worked on passing, trapping, touching, and shooting in the backyard. Crowley would practice kicking with his instep and the outside of his foot. He practiced shooting with his left foot and his right. He learned about fundamentals, and threw himself into both games.

"I worked hard at it," he said. "I always had a ball. I played a lot of hockey, and I played a lot of soccer. I practiced a lot on my own, and I always played with a lot of the same guys. We got to know each other well, and we turned into a pretty nice unit."

The hard work paid off. Crowley burst onto the soccer scene in 1981, scoring six goals in his sophomore season. He was named to the all-conference roster the following year with 14 goals as a junior, but fans will always remember 1983. Crowley scored 26 goals that season, a single-season record that still stands in Southington's record books.

"His willpower, desire, and concentration were just outstanding. He wasn't the fanciest player in the world or the most skilled, but his desire to score was unbelievable," said Murawski. "He had that desire for that ball to go into the net. He wouldn't be stymied, and he knew he was going to win."

Soon, scouts began to pepper the Southington sidelines, but Crowley kept his focus on the game, the ball, and the net.



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Dan Murawski, Former SHS soccer coach

"Once the game started, I didn't care who was on the sidelines. My focus was on the game," he said. "I just wanted to get the ball. A 50-50 ball? In the box, there's no such thing as a 50-50 ball. Not in my mind. There was no defense at any level where I thought they'd shut me down for a whole game. It's not a bragging thing. That was just my attitude. It has to be if you're going to be good."

Crowley collected 50 points in his senior season, and finished with 46 goals in his three-year career with the Knights—a mark that wasn't broken until well after the high school became a four-year program. Crowley became the first Blue Knight to receive national attention. If it hadn't been for a late-season ankle injury that slowed him significantly, his total might have been

even higher.

He was all-conference all-state, and all-New England as a senior. In addition, Crowley became the first Southington soccer player to be named to the American roster.

He earned a scholarship to play soccer and ice hockey at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) with an expectation to continue at the University of Rhode Island (URI). Unfortunately, Crowley delayed his enrollment to URI, and a back injury ended his career too soon.

Crowley fought his way back to the soccer field where he faced his son Jamie in 2008 during an alumni game at the start of his senior season. He said that he's counting the days to this fall's season, so he can watch his daughter, Jordan, compete for the Lady Knights. He lists his children's accomplishments among his greatest moments in sports.

"To see your kids play with that Southington 'S' is the best. It really is," he said. "To play at the high school level is something special. I always let them do their thing, but I always encouraged them. I tell them, 'If you aren't training, somebody else is.' You've got to make yourself better."

Crowley still roots for the Knights as they pursue an elusive state title. In fact, he said that he'd trade all of his personal accomplishments for one state championship.

"I want to throw that



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John Crowley, above right, moves past a defender in 1983. Crowley set a single season scoring record with 26 goals.

out to the guys coming up," he said. "Guys have to play year round. I see other teams do it. I see football players out there every day—not with the coach, obviously, in the off-season—but they're out there training. They're working out with the weights and working hard. I like football, but I love soccer. We need a state championship."

His love for the sport was one reason why Crowley was chosen to represent the program in the first class of the Southington Sports Hall of Fame. On Wednesday, Nov. 10, he will be inducted in a ceremony at the Aqua Turf in Plantsville.

"I was a little surprised, because I didn't play in the big three—baseball, basketball, and football," he said. "There have

been a lot of nice soccer players in our town, and it's an honor to represent them."

For tickets, contact Jim Verderame, (860) 628-7335, or buy them in person at Bonterra Italian Bistro,

Anthony Jacks Wood Fired Grill, or the Southington Chamber of Commerce.

To comment on this story or to contact sports writer John Goralski, email him at jgoralski@southingtonobserver.com.

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