

## Hall of Fame

# He's an all-American boy

## Ray Michanczyk is a big man with a big heart

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SPORTS WRITER

Ray Michanczyk leafed through a stack of newspaper clippings, and pointed at faded photos of teammates and statistics. A list of line-men from the 1949 Lewis High team just rolls off his tongue without missing a beat. He lists bench players and role player, running backs and assistant coaches.

When asked about being named to the high school all-American football team in 1951, he stops what he's saying and whips out a copy of the release. Like a wide-eyed kid, he skips over his name and points to the others on the list.

### Athlete

"When I went out to the University of Washington, Sandy Lederman was quarterback," he said. "He was from California. You can see who the quarterbacks were—Bart Starr and Earl Mauro. I played with [Ronald] Latronica at Stauton Military Academy. They all made the list."

It's not what you would expect from the town's first all-American—a humble bigman happier to be on the sidelines than standing in the spotlight. "How would he like to be remembered?" he's asked, and a puzzled look appears. He almost seems surprised to be among the first to be inducted in the town's hall of fame.

"I want to be remembered as only being as good as the people I played with," he said. "The rest comes. It just takes hard work. The value is not always in how many points you scored yourself, but how hard you played the game. If a kid went out there and played hard the whole time but only scored five points while I scored 25, how much of those passes came from him? Wasn't he a part of my accomplishments?"

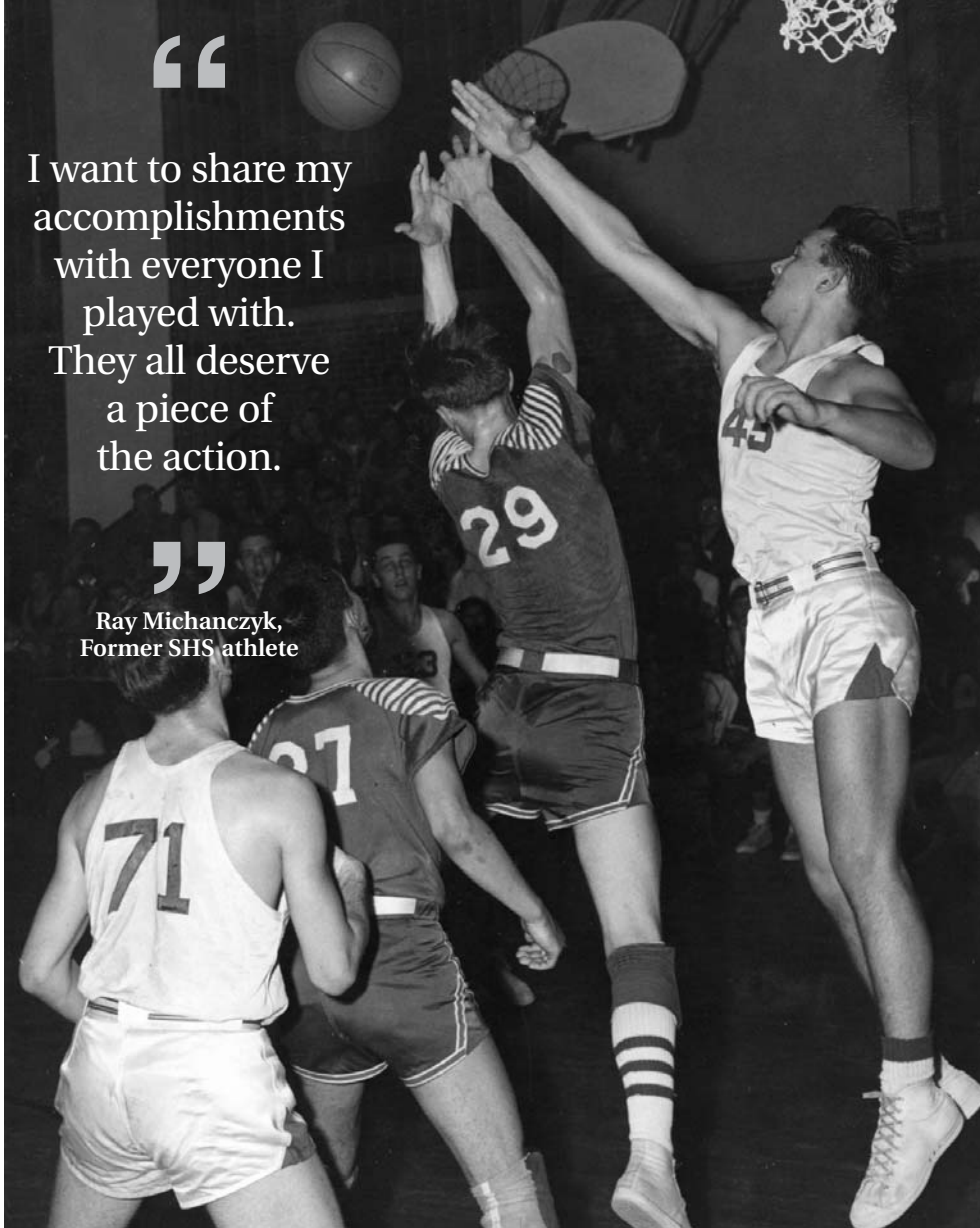
In today's world of statistics and headlines, Michanczyk might sound too good to be true. But statistics never were the measure for his career. If you're looking for a true team player, you have to look no further than Michanczyk's storied career.

He was a sophomore on the 1949 Lewis High School football team, an underclassmen, a tight end, and a kicker. He scored just a pair of extra points during that storied season and just 12 touchdowns throughout his career. Yet Michanczyk was the one that made the all-American list in 1951.

"We were in the single

I want to share my accomplishments with everyone I played with. They all deserve a piece of the action.

Ray Michanczyk,  
Former SHS athlete



SUBMITTED

Ray Michanczyk (No. 45) swats an opponents shot during a Southington High School varsity game in the early 1950s.

wing, and primarily that single wing was a running formation," he said. "The only time that you'd pass out of that formation was a reverse pass going either left or right and a lot of button hook passes, which is just a simple seven, eight, or nine yard hook into the middle or out to the flats. In desperation, if you were behind, you'd go a little deeper in a pattern."

Still the 200-pound underclassman was at the center of the action. Bill Albrecht set a state scoring record with 155 points in 1949, but he credits the line-men and his tight end for paving the way.

"If I didn't have that line, I wouldn't have done as well as I did," said Albrecht. "I only saw him play in high school one year, and that was when he was a sophomore. He played left end, and he was good. He played hard. He was a good blocker. He was a good pass receiver. He was a basketball player, so you know he had a good pair of hands on him. He was a great football player."

Once again, Michanczyk credits others for his success. He honed his skills in sandlot games, studied semi-pro players on the Southington Gems. He'd

travel to Meriden and New Britain to watch basketball games and he'd practice those moves in pick-up games whenever he could.

"They used to have to kick me out of the YMCA because I just loved sports," he said. "There weren't many fields, so you'd go behind churches and play. We'd play in a ditch 20 yards long just to run the ball. If you didn't have a ball, you'd just take a potato sack and roll it up. It was a lot of fun."

With no Little League or midget football to develop his skills, Michanczyk had to wait for high school to play an organized game. But he didn't have to wait long. He played four years of varsity football, four years of varsity basketball, and started two years on the baseball team.

He was a true three-sport athlete. He scored 1,015 points as a "rebounder" in the winter. He hit .398 as an infielder and relief pitcher. Michanczyk seemed to be attracted to support roles but always seemed to rise to the top. The six-foot-two center was usually out-sized as a big man in basketball, but even that didn't stop him.

"I was always playing against guys 6'5" or 6'6", but

the best thing was getting by them with quick feet," he said. "If you were athletic and in good shape, you could always get by a big guy with quickness and speed. If you were small, you had to be fast, and you moved the ball around."

During this time, he perfected his game. On the basketball court, Walt Lozoski stressed fundamentals, refusing to let Michanczyk shoot hook shots because it would hurt his rebounding. On the gridiron, Jay Fontana recruited C. Edwin Creed who would go on to coach at Central CT State University. Creed would work with Michanczyk in practice to develop his receiving skills.

"He'd teach you that it wasn't just running out and going five yards. He'd teach you about feinting, faking, and pivoting. He'd show you how to use your body to break loose and how to use your speed—when to speed it up and when to slow it down," Michanczyk said. "They taught me how to be a good receiver."

Soon Michanczyk's skills drew the attention of college coaches and major league scouts. He was heavily recruited in football. He was

Southington Sports  
Hall of Fame



### Inside the Numbers

#### Football (109 points)

- 1949—Scored 2 points (0 TDs, 2 PATs)
- 1950—Scored 70 points (8 TDs, 22 PATs)
- 1951—Scored 37 points (4 TDs, 13 PATs)
  - All-state (1950, 51)
  - All-American (1951)
- Southington's first all-American athlete (1951)
- Member of the Class B Champions (1949)
- Won Eastern States Championship with Staunton Academy (1953)
- Played at Olympic Junior College (1954)
- Tight end for University of Washington (1955)
- Signed letter of intent with GB Packers (1957)

#### Basketball (1,015 points)

- 1948-49—19 games, 37 points, 1.9 avg.
- 1949-50—14 games, 230 points, 16.4 avg.
- 1950-51—20 games, 384 points, 19.2 avg.
- 1951-52—21 games, 364 points, 17.3 avg.
- Won Eastern States Championship with Staunton Academy (1953)

#### Baseball

- Hit over .398 for his career (1951-1952)
- Invited for tryout with Brooklyn Dodgers (1951)
- Inducted into SHS baseball hall of fame (1996)

#### Coaching

- Class B champions (Asst Coach Choate Rosemary Hall, 1993)
- Part owner, manager, coach for Hartford Crusaders, Mustangs (1989-1995).

highly prized for basketball and even earned a major league baseball tryout with the Brooklyn Dodgers. But coaches pushed him toward prep school, so Michanczyk packed his bags for Staunton Military Academy in Virginia. This was a big turning point in his career.

"You had to forget what you did in high school, and you got to see what you were really made of," he said. "Was high school just easy? They had the cream of the crop. They had five guys that were going to Michigan State. The coaching was very good. We played in the Military League and we scrimmaged against top-notch football teams."

Michanczyk made the Staunton football squad in 1953, and his team earned the military championship with an 8-1 record. His basketball team averaged 95 points per game to become the highest scoring in school history, and Michanczyk scored 283 points (15.7 ppg). That team won the eastern states championship in Glen Falls, NY.

Because of his success, Michanczyk landed a spot on the Olympic Junior College team in Washington State in 1954. That west coast trip earned him a

starting spot at the University of Washington. Michanczyk received letters of intent from the Los Angeles Rams, the San Francisco 49ers, and the Green Bay Packers, but a car accident ended that dream before he got a chance to play.

Michanczyk settled down, got married, and watched his sons and grandsons pass through the Southington High School varsity lineups.

On Wednesday, Nov. 10, he will be honored by the Southington Sports Hall of Fame at an induction ceremony at the Aqua Turf. Once again, Michanczyk credits his teammates.

"I want to share my accomplishments with everyone I played with," he said. "They all deserve a piece of the action. We're all partners in crime... They practiced as long as me. How do you think they felt when I was getting my picture taken and they were getting banged around? They deserve recognition, too."

To comment on this story or to contact sports writer John Goraliski, email him at [jgoralski@southingtonobserver.com](mailto:jgoralski@southingtonobserver.com).