

Ernestine Faienza

2022 Spotlight Recipient

Ernestine Faienza is a talented woman in basketball, and in all life roles. Yet basketball is her defining passion. She excelled as a player throughout college. She moved into AAU coaching, but her most rewarding accomplishment was to create a program for young girls. Until this league, young female players had no choice but co-ed play.

Ernestine is a former Division One player. She started at Syracuse University in 1997 and finished in 2002 at University of Hartford under Jennifer Rizzoti. In her last home game she helped the team win the America East Championship which led to the NCAA tournament for the first time in school history.

Born in 1979, Ernestine was introduced to basketball at an early age by her mother. As a child Ernestine sat on the sideline hoping to play, yet all she heard was 'when you get older'. At twelve she got her chance and just like her mother, loved it. Faienza was well known at the state and national level. She received All-State honors, became a 1,200 point scorer, and earned Street & Smith's All-American honorable mention in 1996. In 1997, USA Today listed her on the All-American honorable mention list.

Following college she became an AAU coach. The mother of four, three of whom are girls, created an all girls basketball program in New Britain. Prior to the Midstate Lady Raiders, girls only had co-ed programs. She grew up playing among boys, yet understood the need for girls to play together. As many as 100 girls, from 1st to 8th grades, were enrolled in what is a premier AAU program in Connecticut.

As a coach she won hundreds of games, but creating the program for young people with limited funds, or with no strong female role models has been far more rewarding. Two young women from her program are off to college this fall. One will continue to play basketball and the other will major in actuary science. Being someone they look up to while teaching a game she loves is better than any accolades she ever achieved.