

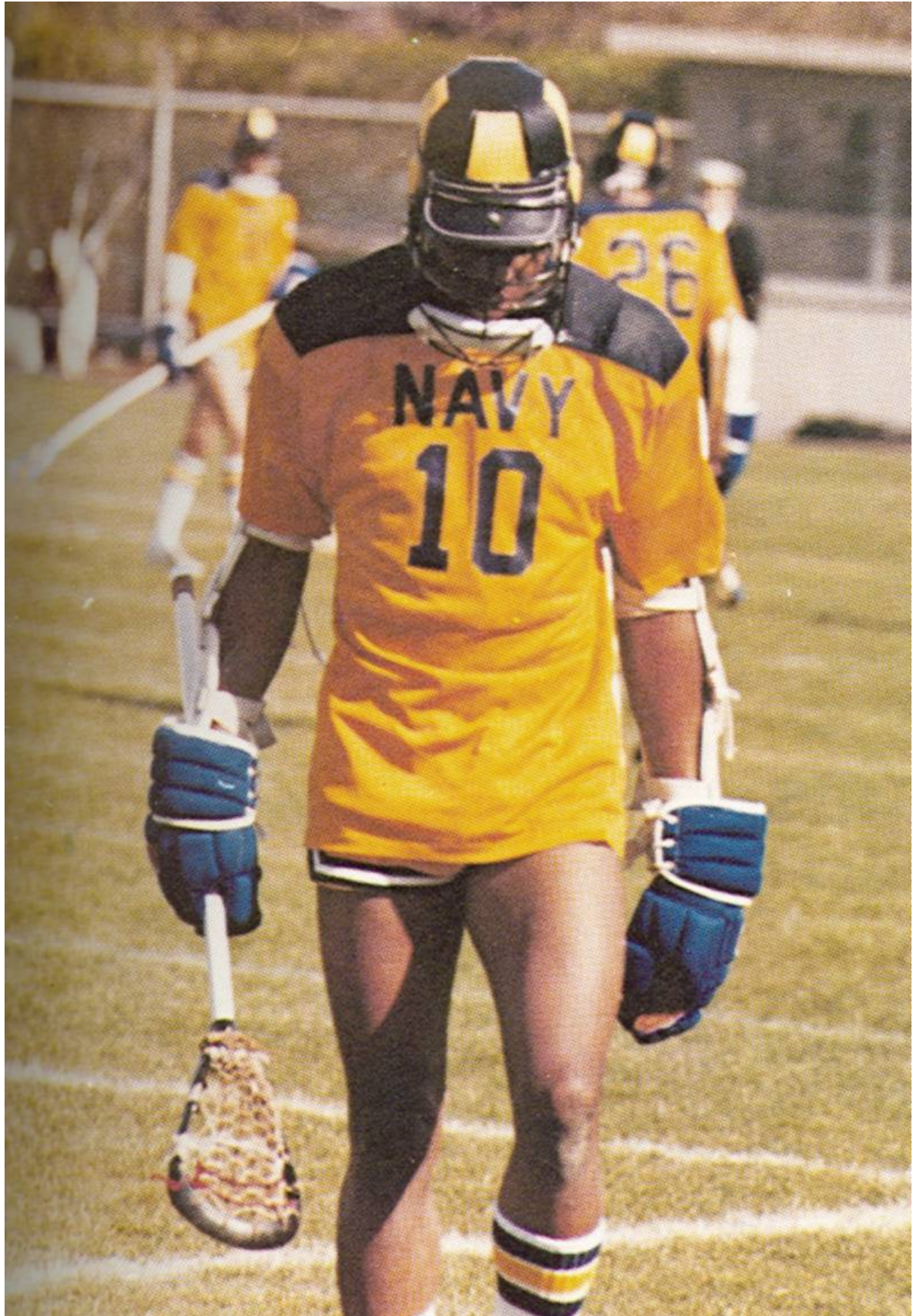
NAVY

Prolific Navy lacrosse attackman Syd Abernethy set for induction into Chesapeake chapter of USA Lacrosse Hall of Fame

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Former Annapolis High and Navy attackman Syd Abernethy will be inducted into the Chesapeake chapter of USA Lacrosse Hall of Fame.
(Courtesy Photo)

As a high-scoring attackman for the Navy lacrosse program back in the late 1970s, Syd Abernethy was a bit miffed when an assistant coach asked why he didn't use his left hand more when driving to the goal and shooting.

“I tell you what, if they figure out how to stop me going right, then I'll start going left,” Abernethy said.

It was an appropriate response considering very few defensemen could contain Abernethy. The Annapolis native, who stood 6-foot-2 and weighed 200 pounds in his prime, brought a dangerous combination of size, strength and power to the position.

Abernethy, who starred at Annapolis High before heading to the Naval Academy, will be inducted into the Chesapeake chapter of USA Lacrosse Hall of Fame on Thursday.

Jeff Johnson, Navy's starting goalkeeper for most of Abernethy's career, provided a scouting report on

the man opposing defensemen dubbed “Mr. Inside Roll.”

“Syd was bigger and taller than the typical attackman back in those days and was also sneaky quick,” Johnson said. “Syd was very strong taking the ball to the cage and was also an outstanding feeder and rider. He was a very complete player as far as the attack position goes.”

Abernethy still ranks 10th on Navy’s all-time list with 87 career goals. He is 12th in program history with 141 career points, also compiling 54 assists. Anyone who played with or against the imposing attacker remembers his signature dodge.

Abernethy was a master of the inside roll, driving from behind the net, then lowering his shoulder into the body of whichever close defender was covering him. He continued pushing forward until the long sticker braced hard to stop the assault, then suddenly reverse course and rolled to the crease for an uncontested one-on-one shot.

“Syd’s inside roll move was devastating and difficult to counteract,” said Johnson, noting that if the defenseman cheated to prevent the inside roll, Abernethy would just continue upfield then turn and shoot from point-blank range out front.

Tom Abernethy played on the Navy lacrosse team for two seasons with his younger brother. Tom was a close defenseman and routinely covered Syd in practice. He always knew the inside roll was coming and could not stop it.

“That was Syd’s trademark move. He was going to keep doing it until it was stopped and most defenders couldn’t,” Tom said. “Syd was just as big, if not bigger, than most of the defensemen he went up against. He had the size and strength to seal the defender and box out while making that inside roll.”

Abernethy was at the absolute peak of his ability as a senior in 1981, amassing 56 points on the strength of 39 goals. He scored six goals in three different games, none sweeter than against in-state rival Maryland.

It was a wild, back-and-forth affair with the Midshipmen prevailing, 16-15, after Abernethy assisted fellow attackman Bobby Bianchi for the game-winner. The Terrapins slid to the driving Abernethy, leaving Bianchi open on the crease.

“I think the key to Syd’s success was an unwavering commitment to his craft,” Tom Abernethy said. “Of course, Syd had the foundational talent and athletic ability, but it was his work ethic and dedication to

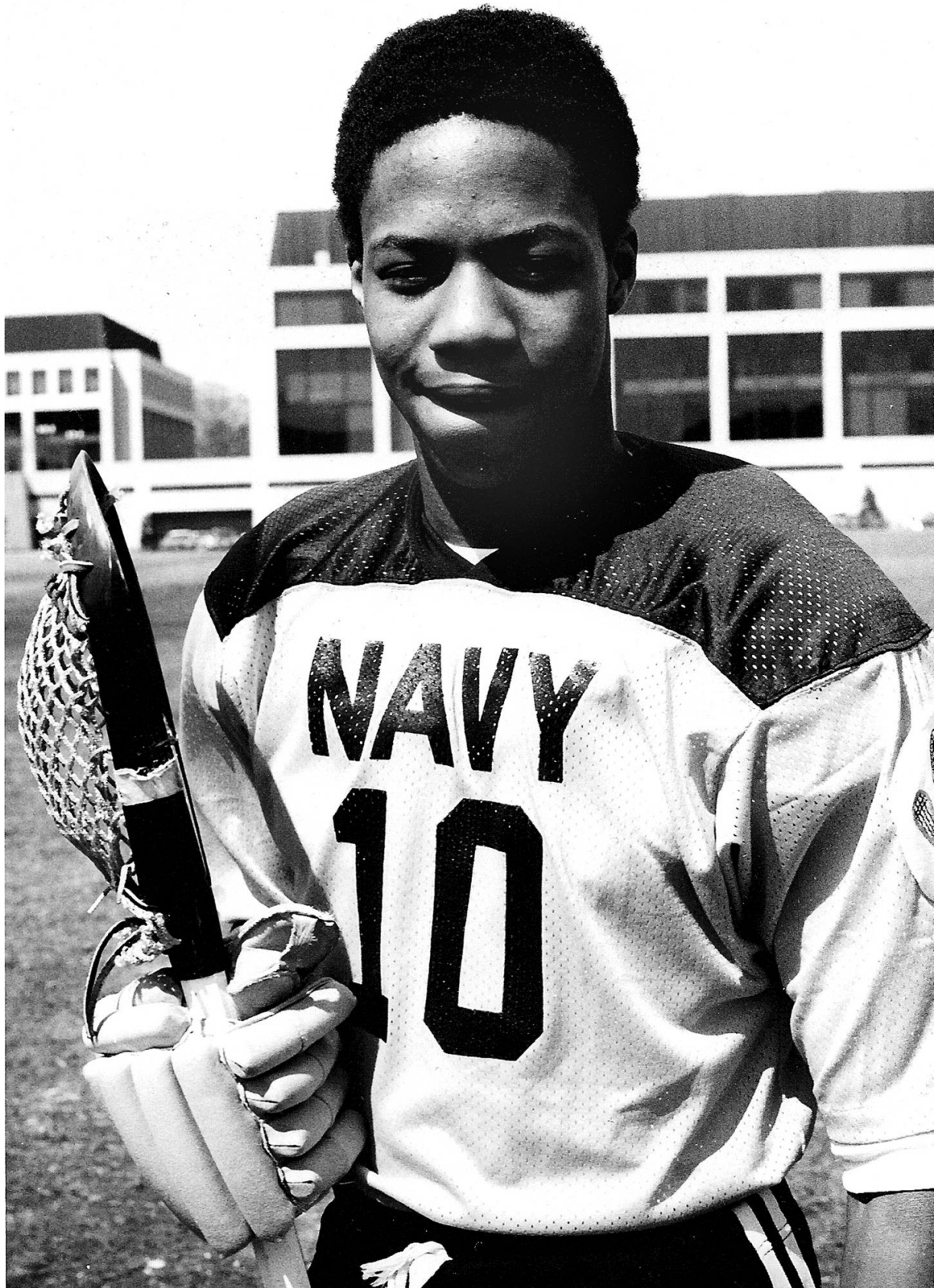
improve that ultimately set him apart. He was relentless in terms of doing things to get better.”

Abernethy felt blessed to play alongside a group of extremely talented attackmen while at Navy. He learned a lot from three-time All-American Mike Buzzell (first team twice) and got a lot of assists from feeding Mike Hannan and Rich Wehman.

Abernethy was a two-time All-American, earning first-team honors from the United States Intercollegiate Lacrosse Association as a senior after being named honorable mention as a junior. Dick Szlasa, who compiled an 85-44 record in 10 seasons as Navy coach, recruited Abernethy out of Annapolis and had no doubt he would blossom into a star.

“Syd came to the academy as a polished player and just got better and better each year,” Szlasa said.

“Syd was a real handful for any defenseman to deal with and had the ability to take over a game. He was a true gentleman and as good a player as we had at Navy during my time.”



Former Annapolis High and Navy attackman Syd Abernethy will be inducted into the Chesapeake Chapter of US Lacrosse Hall of Fame.
(Courtesy Photo)

Early influences

Abernethy grew up in the Arundel on the Bay neighborhood of Annapolis, the son of Anne Arundel County public school teachers. His father and namesake, Rufus Abernethy, was the longtime music teacher at Cape St. Claire Elementary and pastor of Mount Zion United Methodist Church in Eastport. His mother, Agnes, worked as a music teacher at Hillsmere Elementary and Annapolis High.

Syd and Tom learned how to play lacrosse while attending the Key School. Because the tiny private school in Hillsmere had so few students, Syd made the varsity while in seventh grade and was a three-year letterman.

Abernethy has always credited coach Lee Curry, who had been an All-American player at Washington College, for instilling the proper fundamentals and techniques of the game.

“Key’s only other spring sports were tennis and track, so my brother and I decided to play lacrosse,” he recalled. “I remember bringing the old-school

wooden sticks home and my mother thought they were tennis racquets.”

Abernethy transferred to Annapolis and played two seasons under coach Dave Robert. As a senior in 1977, Abernethy fired in eight goals as Annapolis handed private school powerhouse Wroxeter Prep its lone loss. As a junior, he got the better of future Harvard defenseman Haywood Miller as Annapolis knocked off archrival Severna Park. He still regrets not being able to beat city rival St. Mary's.

Army, Navy and Yale of the Ivy League were the only schools that recruited Abernethy, who was a two-time, first-team All-Metro selection by The Baltimore Sun and USA Lacrosse All-American.

Navy, which made 10 consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances under Szlasa, had the highest profile of the three programs. It helped that Tom Abernethy spoke highly of the players and coaching staff.

“What I related to Syd about my Naval Academy lacrosse experience, which was positive in all respects, made him feel comfortable joining the program,” Tom said.

It was an era of lacrosse that featured very few Black players. Georgie Moore (1974-76) is believed to be the first Black player in Navy lacrosse history with Tom and Syd Abernethy following in his footsteps.

“Throughout my career, I was usually the only Black guy on the field. I didn’t let it concern me and don’t recall having any issues,” Syd said. “My focus was always on the game and getting better.”

Abernethy was commissioned as a Naval aviator and flew the Lockheed EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft. He served as commander of a VQ2 squadron out of Rota, Spain, and amassed a total of 4,000-plus hours of flight time.

Captain Abernethy was the first Chief Diversity Officer for the United States Navy (2002-04) and was also the commanding officer of Naval Air Station Whidbey Island.