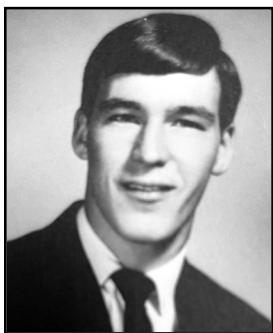


ST. MARY HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME 2023 INDUCTEES



Dennis Letsche – 1968

The 60s were a time of change for America and for St. Mary High School. Dennis Letsche entered St. Mary High School in the fall of 1964. During his years at St Mary, Dennis received 4 letters in track, 3 letters in basketball, and 1 in football.

In football, Dennis was the starting split end on the 1967 team that finished with an 8-1 record. That team featured several Hall of Famers. From his split end position on the Jack Jones-led offense, he caught 10 passes as the Gaels crushed opponents week after week.

In Basketball, after backup roles during his Sophomore and Junior years, Dennis established himself in his senior year with his best games coming against arch-rivals Rutherford Bulldogs with 19 points and the Dick Vitale-led East Rutherford Wildcats with 21 points where, after the game, he was accused by Vitale of being an illegal transfer.

Dennis was an outstanding track star at St. Mary. In his freshman year, he ran a remarkable 52 flat in the 440 leg of the medley relay. He was a mainstay in the 440 with many top finishes over the year. In his Junior Year he had a 12-1 record in the mile with a best time of 4:32:05. That year, he finished in 2nd place in the Catholic Conference meet. His Senior year he was undefeated going into the States but unfortunately suffered a serious injury which finished his season. Dennis's best time was 4:28:08, just a little off the school record held by Hall of Famer, Charlie Yosco. Earlier in the season Dennis beat milers' who went on to win their own State titles. Dennis also excelled in the High Jump and had the honor of being Tri-Captain his Junior and Senior year.

After high school, Dennis attended St. Mary of The Plains College in Dodge City, Kansas for one year before joining the army. He served from 1970-1972 in Darmstadt, Germany. Upon discharge, he completed his degree in accounting from Montclair State College.

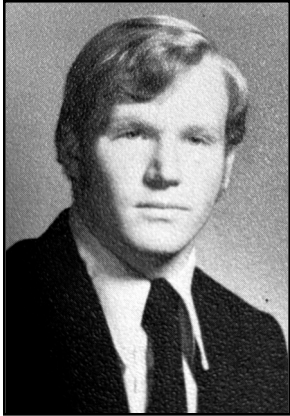
Dennis is married to SM Alum Peggy Merli Letsche '69 and they just celebrated their 51st Wedding Anniversary.

After losing their two children, Dawn and Brian, to Cystic Fibrosis in 1984, Dennis became involved with the NJ Chapter (NJSOCF) and was the recipient of many awards for his dedication and devotion to the organization.

After living in Morris County for 16 years, Dennis and Peggy returned to their roots in Rutherford with their daughter, Danielle where Dennis quickly became active in the community. He helped start the Lindsey Meyer Memorial Foundation and organized the LMMF Pumpkin Run which provided thousands of dollars in scholarships to St. Mary's and other local high schools. In 2007 he was named Person of the Year by the Foundation for his work in raising funds and awareness of CF.

Dennis served on the Rutherford Zoning Board, the Friends of the Rutherford Library, the SMH Hall of Fame Committee, and in 2008 he served as Alumni Chairman of the "Recapture the Dream" Capital Campaign for St. Mary Parish.

After a long and successful career in sales, Dennis retired in January 2023 and is enjoying his free time playing golf, travelling and spending time with family and friends.



Jeff Kelly – 1972

Jeff Kelly is the youngest in a long line of distinguished Kelly family athletes. The Kelly tradition dates back to the 1930s. Jeff's father, Joe, was a famed athlete as were his brothers Jim, John, and Joe Jr. All have left their marks on the football fields, basketball courts, baseball diamonds, and track and field ovals over the years. Jeff of course was no exception in this lineage. During his time at St. Mary, Jeff starred in track and field but is of course most noted for his achievements on the football field. During his four years of football Jeff was a 2-time All-League selection in the Catholic

school's conference, a 1st Team All-County NNJCF-Century Division player, an Honorable Mention Herald News All-Star and a 2-time Honorable Mention All-Bergen County player.

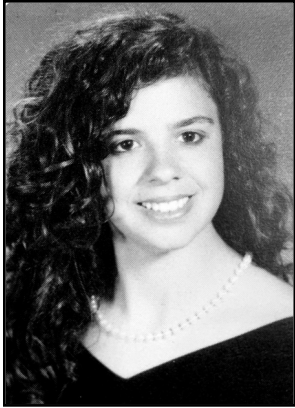
As a starting fullback and linebacker at St. Mary, Jeff was a star in many games on those fun Sunday afternoons. Of the nearly 30 games Jeff started in during his high school career several come to mind that were truly in a league by themselves - outstanding is not even a strong enough word. Jeff was asked to carry the load many times during his career and was willing to take the entire team on his back and lead with an unrelenting fervor.

For three years it was determined that the Pope Pius game would honor the memory of Tom Holden of St Mary and Bill Sipos of Pope Pius, two graduates who were killed in action in Vietnam. After three straight SM victories, the Trophy was retired and awarded to SM. In 1971, SM moved forward by dedicating the Pope Pius game each year to the Memory of Tom Holden, and Jeff was the proud winner of the first-ever Tom Holden Trophy as MVP of the game. In that memorable game Jeff led a punishing rushing attack of 278 yards and tallied two touchdowns and two, two-point conversions. In another memorable game and one of the finest in SM history, Jeff led the Gaels to a 7-6 stunning victory over DePaul HS who at the time had an 18-game state winning streak. And as if that wasn't enough, on the opening kickoff Jeff caught a helmet in the chin and with blood continuing to pour throughout the game he rushed for over 100 yards and had 2 interceptions to secure the victory which led him to being named the Bergen Record Defensive Player of The Week.

Jeff went to the hospital after the game and needed 8 stitches to close the wound. Ironically he saw three DePaul players there! A Great win for SM.

Jeff also starred in track as a shot putter, but is always quick to note, that he gave Hall of Famer Rich Mariano a run for his money finishing second to him in many of their races. Jeff went on to Tilton Prep and was named to the All-New England Prep team while starring there. He rushed for over 850 yards and was awarded a full scholarship to the University of Maryland.

Jeff is married his high school Sweetheart Janet and has worked in the television and broadcast industry for the last 30 years.



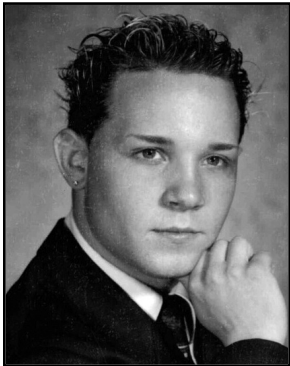
Susan Cunha Villegas – 1994

Susan Cunha was a great athlete for St. Mary during the school's resurgence to athletic prowess during the early 1990s. Susan entered St. Mary High School in 1990 as a freshman and graduated in 1994 as a team leader, student council member, and National Honor Society inductee, and All-County Softball player.

Susan starred in volleyball and softball during her time at St. Mary. Susan was part of the girls' volleyball team for four years, and although they didn't win a lot over that period of time, team building, and a strong sense of competition were apparent for all the girls on that team. Unbreakable bonds were formed in those seasons that lasted throughout the year. They operated with the saying "Winners are not the ones who come home with the 'W' but the ones who realize their mistakes and work hard not to make them again, so just do it or else it won't get done."

This leads us to Susan's true love – Softball. To call her an excellent catcher is not nearly enough. She was a team leader who led by example with dozens of outstanding games played with many future SM Hall of Famers. The years of 1991-1994 were prolific for SM Softball. HOF coaches Frank Venezia and Jim McDonald were blessed with many fine players over those years. Susan Cunha was one of the best to play the position at SM and has the stats to prove it. But above all else, she was a team player who knew the team came first. She was named captain her senior year and was named 1st team All-County Catcher for Bergen County. That season Susan Batted .405 with 10 doubles, 24 RBI, and scored 26 runs. She was a beast behind the plate gunning down 17 runners. She had a fielding percentage of .968 with 168 putouts. As Coach Jim McDonald said of Susan, she calls an excellent game and is a terrific catcher.

Susan was the Recipient of the school's Scholar-Athlete Award in 1994. She was voted Team MVP and Coaches Award winner. Among her post-secondary honors, Susan received a scholarship to Dartmouth College for Softball, but chose to attend West Virginia University where she earned her Doctor of Pharmacy Degree. She is currently working as an Associate Professor of Pharmacy Practice at Long Island University. She is blessed with three children, Charles, Isabell, and RoseMarie. Susan currently lives in Fair Lawn.



Michael Marotta – 2003

To say Mike Marotta was a great wrestler is almost an understatement. Mike's record and honors read like a list of outstanding achievements in the wrestling world. Becoming a high school wrestler is a challenging and rewarding endeavor that requires a combination of physical fitness, mental toughness, dedication, and discipline. You must put your outside life on hold to compete in a sport that is not a stand-by sport.

Mike came to St. Mary to wrestle on Coach Scot Weaver's highly competitive squad from Wood-Ridge High School where he was already an accomplished All-County wrestler. Mike wrestled for SM at 119lbs in the 2002 and 2003 seasons. For his hard work and dedication to a physically and psychologically challenging sport, Mike achieved:

- 2002 – First Team All-County
- 2002 – 2nd Team All-North Jersey
- 2002 – 1st Team All-North Jersey Parochial
- 2002 – District Champion, Region Champion, County Champion
- 2003 – 1st Team All-North Jersey
- 2003 – 1st Team All-North Jersey Parochial
- 2003 – District Champion, Region Champion, County Champion
- 2003 – Placed in State

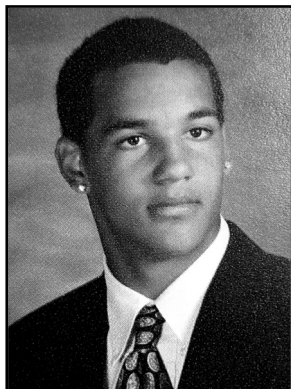
Continued on next page

Michael Marotta – 2003, continued

Mike was also recognized as an All-Decade wrestler, and finished with a career record of 119-11

Mike was always the happiest when he was on the mat competing with his teammates and coaches at a high level and especially being with his friends and family.

Mike sadly left us in 2018 and is represented today by his parents, Joe and Lillian Marotta along with his teammates and coaches from the 2003 Championship Team. He will be forever be remembered as a wrestler who changed the landscape of wrestling here at St. Mary and a proud St. Mary Hall of Famer. Michael had a heart of gold and was one of the most compassionate and loyal people you could ever meet. Loyalty meant everything to Michael, and he would give the shirt off his back for a friend in need. We have lost a special person who left this world a better place, and the people that knew him, better people. His void could never be filled, and he will be missed dearly by many. As he quoted under his yearbook photo, *"I would rather be hated for who I am, than be loved for who I am not"* - Rocco Joseph



Louis W. Saunders – 2007

Louis excelled in football, basketball, and baseball here at St. Mary High School. As a quarterback on the football team, he was named All-County 3rd team, 2nd Team All-Area, and 1st Team All-North Jersey for the 2006 Football season. That year he helped Coach Mike Sheridan and the Gael squad win a state title and who can forget that memorable last-minute touchdown pass he threw to friend and fellow teammate Da'mon Merkerson to secure the victory.

As leader of that State Championship Team Louis was featured in a newspaper article along with Hall of Famers Donald Lee and Josh Richmond calling them "The Triple Threat." There was truly a bond on that team as Josh Richmond gave up the signal-calling duties to Louis stating that, "we just want to keep the chemistry going during this magical season." All three lost their fathers in the years prior and came together as brothers for this Championship season by defeating archrival Paterson Catholic.

As an All-League basketball player, Louis excelled for coach Matt Stone's crew leading them to an undefeated season in the BCSL division. He was a tenacious player on both sides of the court and kept the team's intensity at a high level all season long.

And as if that wasn't enough, Louis found time to be an all-league baseball player his senior year after running track for three years.

Louis went on to American International College to play football and baseball. He is proud dad of "Future Gael" Benjamin Saunders and bride-to-be Michelle Diamond.

Louis is a successful salesperson and if that wasn't enough, he coaches baseball for his son's Iron Travel squad.



Afreyea Tolbert – 2009

Afreyea Tolbert played many big-time basketball games for the Lady Gaels during her time at St. Mary High School. As a 5'10" Guard she was in a word, "dominating" on the basketball court. During her junior year "Frey" averaged 16.5 points, 5.6 rebounds and 3.7 steals a game leading the her team to the Bergen County finals vs. Ramapo. She scored 16 points in that game, however, a late surge by Ramapo overtook the Lady Gaels, dropping their hopes of a county championship by two points.

A dominant inside presence with her rebounding and scoring Frey had a quick step to the basket and could split the defense and create space for herself.

Defending Tolbert was no easy task. You would be hard-pressed to find a player who was willing to take a charge from her. The hustling and physical Afreyea always wanted to be around the ball. Frey was always one of the hardest-working players at practice and served as an emotional leader as well as a physical one, unifying a team that fought so hard all those seasons ago.

Afreyea was named 1st Team All-County in both her junior and senior years. More impressive is the fact that Afreyea carried a 3.5 grade point average. These accolades helped pave the way for college scholarship offers from some of the most highly reputable academic institutions in the country, including Columbia, Dartmouth, James Madison, and Hofstra. She scored an amazing 1,284 points in a little less than three seasons at St. Mary and earned All-State Second Team and All-Catholic Second Team honors

Afreyea credits her father Harun, who coached her throughout her elementary school years with helping her attain her goals. He instilled in her a work ethic that has made Afreyea the person she is today.

Frey has always said that coming to St. Mary High School from Teaneck was a great experience. She was challenged both academically and athletically.

Afreyea took her basketball skills to the next level where she starred at Northeastern University and College of Charleston. Her post-collegiate talents have taken her around the world helping foundations and corporations develop programming for effective race equity and social impact.



Martina Ellerbe – 2010

Martina Ellerbe was born and raised in Teaneck, NJ, Martina's basketball journey commenced at St. Mary's in 2006. Over the course of four years, she left a mark on the high school's basketball program. Her statistics were impressive – she scored 1,437 points and secured over 1,000 rebounds during her high school career. The team was ranked for the first time ever in the state of New Jersey and her excellence on the court was consistently recognized with awards such as Player of the Week, All-County distinctions, and more.

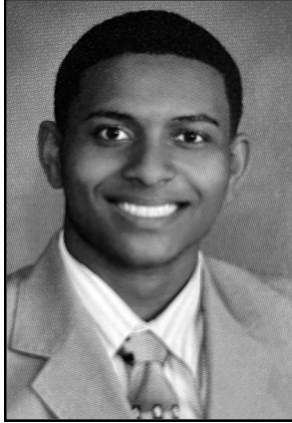
Martina's talent and hard work caught the attention of college scouts nationwide. She played for a well-respected AAU team, the Gauchos, and during the off-seasons she received scholarship offers from numerous Division I schools. They would come to practices and games, providing a competitive and fun environment for everyone. During

her Junior year, she decided to officially commit to take her skills to the #3 ranked school in the country—The Ohio State University—where she played on the women's basketball team.

Not only a standout athlete, but Martina was also a dedicated student. She majored in communications during her undergraduate years, demonstrating her commitment to personal and academic growth. She then went on to graduate from The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law and landed a prestigious role as an Associate at a big law firm in Columbus, Ohio. The Schottenstein Center, which is the gym at Ohio State, has her photo on the wall to honor her post-career achievements.

Throughout her legal career, Martina specialized in labor and employment law, handling management-side matters. However, she discovered her passion for attorney recruiting and has since left the law firm to pursue this work.

Martina truly enjoyed her time at St. Mary's and is grateful to everyone who supported her. She is honored to be receiving this award tonight.



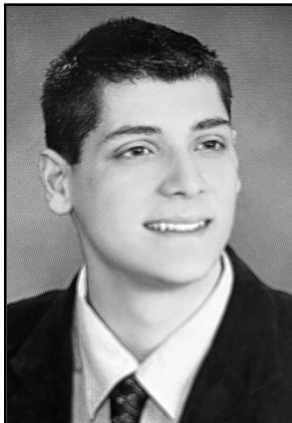
Michael Amaro – 2011

Mike Amaro was a great two-sport athlete for the SM Gaels. Mike was an all-league and all-county performer in both football and the sport he truly embodied - wrestling.

In football, Mike starred on both sides of the ball anchoring the “D-line” at defensive end and on offense kept that “Gael Sweep” going as a tight end. He was recognized in football as a 1st team All-County defensive end in his senior year. He led the team as a captain and set a school record with 16.5 sacks. He was selected to play in 2011 North vs. South New Jersey All-Star Football Game.

In wrestling, Mike had an outstanding career. His senior year his record was 37-4, qualifying him for the New Jersey state championships at 215 lbs. He not only performed on the mat but he dominated as he pinned a remarkable 76 career opponents, a school record. He was a two-time 1st team All-League selection and was named First team All-County as a senior, he won the District 16 championship and finished third at Region 4 Tournament

Mike’s overall record was 85-18 in 3 years of varsity competition. He continued his wrestling career at Edinboro University and Rutgers University.



Kyle Dadika – 2011

Many talented athletes come through the doors at St. Mary High School in the 2010s. When Kyle Dadika entered the building everyone involved in the basketball program at St. Mary knew we were in for something special. Kyle was a 3-year varsity starter on the Gaels basketball team, during that time he proved to be almost a one-man wrecking crew on the hardwood. Kyle comes from a long-line of terrific basketball players, so when it came time for him to show what he had on the court, he did not disappoint. Playing for coach Matt Stone’s team during a time of high-level competition in the league, he helped lead the Gaels to three BCSL league titles with his outstanding style of play.

During his tenure at St. Mary, Kyle scored 1,070 career points, along with 784 rebounds. He had the honor of being celebrated by Hall of Famer Joe Tyburczy on the occasion of scoring his 1,000th point during that game in 2011.

Kyle averaged 15.8 points a game and 12 rebounds in 2011. The talented center also recorded 22 “double-doubles” in 2011 while pacing the Gaels to another league champion season.

He was named 1st Team All-County in 2010 and 2nd Team All-County in 2011. He was also chosen 3rd Team All-State Parochial in his senior year.

Kyle had 42 career games where he scored double-digit figures in points and rebounds.

He also has the distinction of becoming one of seven Dadika family members to score 1,000 points during his career. Others include his dad, Scott Dadika 1,123 in 1984, Rick Dadika in 1967, Craig Dadika 1,107 in 2001, then of course Kyle Dadika 1,070 in 2011, Jake Dadika 1,653 in 2014, Eric Dadika 1,191 in 2016 and Marc Dadika 1,724 in 2018.



Charlie Giachetti – Coach Award

Charlie Giachetti became the SM baseball coach in 2003. He inherited a team that was rebuilding but after a few weeks of getting to know the players and starting the season, he did what very few people expected him to do – lead the Gaels to the 2003 Non-Public B Sectional Championship.

Charlie coached the Gaels for 8 seasons and during that time, proved himself to be a teacher, mentor, counselor, and a great developer of talent. As head coach, he guided the Gaels to 5 Non-Public North Sectional Final appearances which include the 2006 and 2008 State Sectional Championships to go along with the 2003 title. His teams at St. Mary fared quite well in league competition. Playing in the competitive BCSL National Division the Gaels were Co-Champions in 2007 and 2009 and won the league in 2010. The Gaels were also voted the 2006 Herald News Team of the Year and in 2010 Charlie was named the BCSL National Division Coach of the Year.

Charlie moved on to Northern Valley/Demarest in 2011, but has repeatedly said the times he coached the student-athletes at St. Mary were the best of his coaching career. He enjoyed the players and the amount of dedication they showed, along with their drive to get the most out of themselves on a daily basis and reach a goal. Charlie amassed a career record at St. Mary in coaching of 148-73

Charlie is a man of many talents, he currently co-owns Complete Performance Baseball, a baseball academy, where he serves as coordinator of baseball operations and player development. He is also the Principal of Belleville Elementary School #8. Charlie lives in Nutley, NJ with his wife Lisa and their two children, CJ and Kayla.



Edward J. Ryan, Jr. '75 – Contributor Award

Ed Ryan was a great athlete in high school competing in football, baseball and track. The highlight of his athletic career was being named 3rd Team All-State Parochial at the Tackle position in 1974. Since his graduation from Providence College in 1979, he has dedicated himself to the preservation of his favorite institution, St. Mary High School.

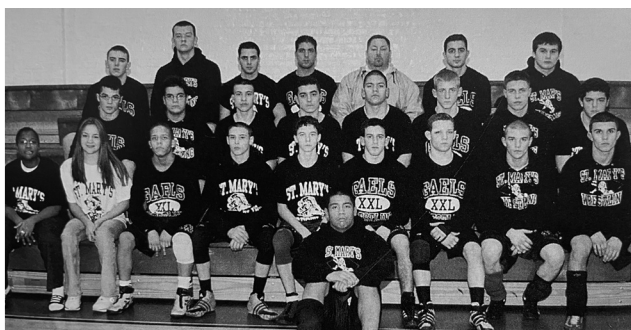
Ed comes from a proud SM family. His parents were part of the Fathers and Alumni Club which was established in the 1970s to support St. Mary's athletic programs. They taught their 4 sons the value of volunteering and helping those in need.

In the late 1980s Ed, played a pivotal role in straightening out the high school's finances, which ultimately led to financial self-sufficiency for the high school in 1990, and preventing its closing. Ed worked on numerous alumni fundraising committees and has helped to establish scholarships for the school. Most notably, Ed and his family have established the Ryan Family Scholarship Fund which has provided financial assistance to students at St. Mary for over 20 years.

Ed proudly enrolled all four of his children in both SM elementary School and high school and all are proud alumni of SM. Ed's children were all involved in many clubs and activities ranging from the drama club to student council to varsity sports. Ed of course was at the forefront during all this helping to push forward the SM legacy and make it a thriving school once again.

Ed was honored by the SM family in 2015 as a Distinguished Person and is a member of two Hall of Fame State Championship teams, 1973 Football and 1974 Baseball.

Ed has owned Ryan Financial in Rutherford for many years. He provides wealth management services for his clients and is always at the ready to help out the Community of St. Mary. Ed resides in Rutherford, NJ along with his wife, Lisa. They are the proud parents of four grown children. Ed is very active in his community, serving as a Trustee of the William Carlos William Center, a non-profit corporation of the Arts. He is also a member of the St. Mary Parish Finance Committee, St. Mary High School Alumni Board, and the Rutherford Downtown Partnership. Ed has also been a Director of the New Jersey Society of Enrolled Agents since 2012. and can be seen regularly at SM activities and events and lending his support throughout the year.



2003 Softball, Baseball & Wrestling Teams

The 2003 WRESTLING, BASEBALL, and SOFTBALL TEAMS had the unique distinction of being the only time in school history with three championship teams in one year. When you think about it, the number of students in the High School at the time, the hours of time spent practicing, and the number of hours spent on academics it's almost mind-boggling. Not to mention students traveling from other towns and playing multiple sports.

The 2003 wrestling team boasts several Hall of Famers, one of whom is being inducted this evening, Mike Marotta. The 2003 wrestling season kicked off competing against the best teams in the state. Head coach Scott Weaver booked top-notch competition to get the best possible results out of his wrestlers and along with assistant coach Dan Guido, the team returned destined to win the state championship for a second consecutive year. Mike DeLuca and Tony DiMaggio stepped into the practice room to join the coaching staff bringing good attributes to the program. Defending a state title the Gaels fell to top-ranked teams in the state but progressed to a convincing record of 14-11-1 winning in the state final for the 2003 season. Entering the postseason the Gaels advanced 5 wrestlers out of the district tournament to move on to the regions. Freshman Dave Greenwald (112), Sophomore Jim Grant (125), Junior Ed Dolan, and Senior captain Mike Marotta (119) clinched District championships. The Regional tournament leads the path into Atlantic City where the State final is held. Dave Greenwald and Mike Marotta won regional titles back to back and represented the Gaels to the highest degree in the finals..

Softball here at St. Mary isn't a sport, but a way of life. Coached by Hall of Famers Frank Venezia and Jim McDonald, the lady Gaels had been winning constantly since 1990 with the mantra "We don't re-build, we just re-load." Following up on the successful season of 2002, the Lady Gaels returned in 2003 led once again by a group of dedicated and talented young ladies. Seniors Meghan Moran, Jenna Junio, Jen Raido, and Ellen Triantafilos, juniors Stephanie Brodo, Joella Pounds, Monica Penalba, and Vanessa Nicolich and sophomore pitcher Andrea DeLucrezia. In a late-season playoff game in rain the Lady Gaels secured their spot in the State Finals with a great 5 to 2 win over Eastern Christian.

The SM Baseball team, led by first-year coach and inductee Charlie Giachetti, posted an impressive 23-7 record season during the 2003 baseball season. Coach Giachetti along with veteran coach Phil Facendola formed a team for the ages. Coming into the State final game against Gloucester Catholic. Led by Captains Lucas Diaz and Jim Spanarkel, the Gaels put up one heck of a fight and came up a little short against a formidable opponent. Along with outstanding players Chris Innis and Ken Hernandez as well as Joe Applegate the 2003 baseball team ushered in a new era of continued winning tradition for St. Mary's baseball. The baseball team finished 7th in the county in 2003 and 4th in the area.

The 2003 wrestling, softball and baseball teams, now take their rightful place among the elite of St. Mary High School.