



Creighton coaching legends, Jim Flanery and Kirsten Bernthal Booth, honored as 186th Face on the Barroom Floor

By Katie Raine Thomas, Communication Committee

The Omaha Press Club hosted an evening of laughter, reflection and celebration on May 13 honoring Creighton University coaching legends **Jim Flanery and Kirsten Bernthal Booth** as the 186th Faces on the Barroom Floor, while recognizing their combined impact on women's athletics, student-athletes and the Omaha community.

Set against the backdrop of one of Omaha's most enduring traditions, the evening brought together former players, colleagues, family members, university leaders and longtime supporters to celebrate two careers that helped shape the modern era of Creighton athletics.

Emceed by former Creighton Athletic Director **Bruce Rasmussen**, the program balanced lighthearted roasting with heartfelt appreciation, a hallmark of the Face on the Barroom Floor tradition.

Rasmussen opened the evening by reflecting on the importance of local journalism and community institutions before turning his attention to the night's honorees, who together accumulated more than four decades of leadership in women's athletics at Creighton University.

The first roaster, **Brad Bernthal**, Booth's brother, offered both humor and insight into the leadership qualities that have defined her career.

"Coach Booth is a very stable genius," he joked, referencing the detailed list of topics she had instructed him not to mention during his remarks. Beyond the laughs, Bernthal described Booth as a leader who gives clear direction and surrounds herself with talented people.

"She bet on herself," he said, recalling the skepticism that surrounded her hiring at age 27. "She knew she was ready."

As the program unfolded, one theme emerged repeatedly – Booth's youthful appearance when she first arrived at Creighton. Former players and assistants recalled officials frequently mistaking assistant coaches for the head coach, with one speaker joking that referees often had to be directed toward "the small petite lady in the polo shirt who looked like the athletic trainer."

Rasmussen later delivered one of the evening's most memorable lines, telling the audience, "Twenty-two years as a head volleyball coach has aged her dramatically. She now looks like she's 21."

Booth's longtime assistants, **Brian Rosen** and **Angie Oxley Behrens**, shared stories spanning more than two decades of coaching together, poking fun at everything from Booth's technology skills to her insistence on proper pronunciation of her full name.

The crowd also enjoyed stories about her unwavering loyalty to Pickleman's sandwiches, her preference for the Voxer messaging app, and her determination to have "Bernthal" included on every name badge. Beneath the humor, however, their stories painted a picture of a coach who trusted her staff, empowered those around her and built a culture that extended far beyond wins and losses.

Meanwhile, Flanery found himself the target of equally relentless teasing. One of the biggest laughs of the evening came when a roaster turned Flanery's college basketball career into an auction.

“Let's start with how many points Flan scored in his college career at Creighton. Do I hear 350? Do I hear 150? Do I hear 50?... Do I hear zero?” As hands slowly rose around the room, the punchline landed perfectly.

The crowd laughed again when stories resurfaced from Flanery's days portraying Billy Bluejay, Creighton's mascot. “He used to talk to us about the skin rashes he would get from the cheap outfit,” one speaker recalled.

Others joked about Flanery's reputation for being frugal, his unconventional basketball game, and even his decision not to recruit future superstar Caitlin Clark. “He didn't think Caitlin Clark fit his system,” one roaster deadpanned, drawing another wave of laughter from the audience.

As with many Face on the Barroom Floor celebrations, the evening moved effortlessly between humor and reflection. Despite the jokes, speaker after speaker returned to the qualities that earned both coaches the honor.

Omaha Lancers President **Mike West** praised Rasmussen's ability to identify exceptional coaching talent and highlighted the trust Rasmussen placed in both Flanery and Booth early in their careers.

Several speakers reflected on the cultures both coaches built inside their programs – cultures rooted in accountability, teamwork and personal growth.

The tone shifted toward reflection during remarks from Rasmussen, who spoke about what truly distinguished both coaches throughout their careers.

“Regardless of the level of success of their teams in any particular year, it was always obvious when you watched their teams play that the players loved what they were doing and they loved who they were doing it with,” Rasmussen said. “By improving the condition of one, we improve the condition of all.”

The remarks drew attention to what many in attendance viewed as the true legacy of both coaches – not simply championships, but relationships. Rasmussen noted that their players understood every member of a team mattered and that success was built through collective effort, adding, “Think about how much better our families would be, our communities would be, our businesses would be if we approached life that way.”

The highlight of the evening came with the unveiling of the commemorative artwork recognizing Flanery and Booth as the 186th Faces on the Barroom Floor. The illustration depicts both coaches inside Creighton's Ryan Athletic Center and D.J. Sokol Arena, surrounded by symbols of their careers and accomplishments.

Flanery is shown coaching from the sideline with clipboard in hand, while Booth is pictured observing a volleyball match as one of her players attacks the ball at the net. The artwork also highlights their extensive achievements.

Booth, who led Creighton volleyball from 2003 to 2024 and now serves as president of business operations for LOVB Nebraska, captured 12 conference championships, 13 NCAA Tournament appearances, National Coach of the Year honors and induction into the Omaha Sports Hall of Fame.

Flanery, who has guided Creighton women's basketball since 2002, has compiled a career record of 469 victories, eight NCAA Tournament appearances, conference championships in both the Missouri Valley and Big East Conferences, and a WNIT championship.

In their acceptance remarks, both coaches emphasized gratitude rather than accomplishments. Booth thanked her family, former players, assistants and colleagues while jokingly responding to some of the evening's stories.

Flanery reflected on the mentors and friendships that shaped his career, crediting Rasmussen for helping him grow as a coach and leader.

"He didn't always give me what I wanted, but he always gave me what I needed," Flanery said. He also offered one of the night's most meaningful tributes to Booth, saying, "What she does better than anybody I've ever seen is she gets people to believe in themselves."

The evening concluded with a standing ovation and a reminder that while wins and championships may fill record books, the true measure of a coaching career is often found in the people impacted along the way.

For Flanery and Booth, their induction onto the Omaha Press Club's historic wall recognizes not only what they accomplished, but how they accomplished it.

As one speaker noted during the evening: "Championships may define seasons. Relationships define legacies."

And few have built legacies quite like Jim Flanery and Kirsten Bernthal Booth.