By Pete Dufour

There are those who take the main road while some choose a lonely path less travelled. When 22-year-old Peg Speck arrived at Placer High school as a girls basketball coach in 1976, there wasn't a well defined path forward for high school female athletes.

Speck will be enshrined in Placer High School's Athletic Hall of Fame April 25 not only for her coaching success, but also for her vision and tenacity in clearing a better path for future generations of female athletes at Placer and at the collegiate level.

"Placer was one of the leaders in promoting girls sports in our region," Speck said, crediting long-time principal Jug Covich for assisting in the growth and development of girls sports. "We added more practice time, more events in track and field, and more teams."

Title IX had been in place for a few years but it wasn't truly being applied to girls sports at the time. "I had to keep asking for things," said Speck. "To Placer's credit, the answer was never 'No,' but I had did have to ask!"

Speck has made Title IX and equal access to resources a big part of her life's work. She served as Athletic Director at City College of San Francisco for 25 years and as Assistant AD at San Francisco State for 10 years. She distinguished herself serving on several regional and national committees in support of Title IX. Speck recently retired a second time from her position as the athletic director at San Francisco City College, where she also coached women's basketball from 1991-97.

It's hard to imagine in this day and age, but the CIF discouraged girls sports for decades leading up to the 1970s due to misguided theories about what athletics would do to the female reproductive organs, especially in the track and field jumping sports, which Speck coached.

"I used to tell the CIF that if they were interested in protecting reproductive organs, then they should really be concerned about letting the boys triple jump!" Speck said.

"I have a deep respect for what Mr. Covich had to go through to help me," Speck said. "When I wanted to add a freshman girls basketball team, or hold practice time in the main gym, or add the 330 hurdles in track and field, he found a way. The answer was never, 'No, 'but I did have to ask. We were fortunate to have him as our principal."

Speck gives credit to predecessor Jane Helmich for implementing Title IX, along with Vicki Warner and Nancy Frost in the physical education department.

She started the girls track team in 1976, coaching just girls at first. When Ron Hyatt came in the following year he and Speck decided to share coaching duties not by gender, but by their expertise. Hyatt focused more on the running events and Speck spent more time on the jumping disciplines. A multi-sport athlete at Chico, Speck remained a role model for the girls.

"Placer may have been the first school where a female coached the boys," Speck said. "This was unheard of, but Ron was great to work with."

Soon the girls at Placer had taken their place in the weight room, which had been domain of the very successful football program. Speck instituted the "120 Club" for girls to reach the goal of bench pressing 120 lbs. Speck became a student of the art of coaching by collaborating with

other Placer coaches and by attending clinics. “I’d be one of four or five women out of a group of 300 men at some of these clinics!”

It took just three years for Speck to build the basketball team to a place of prominence, winning the school’s first ever CIF Section title in 1980.

“ We were in the same league with Grant and Bella Vista, two much larger schools who were top programs for girls athletics at the time. But we held our own and were always among the last teams standing in the playoffs,” Speck said.

Her hardwood teams won four league titles, and she was named Sierra Foothill League Coach of the Year three times. Placer compiled a 162-58 won-loss record. Her girls track teams won three league championships.

Speck coached notable basketball stars Judy Porter, Gia Albertazzi, Kim Giguiere and Taree Newman, who all earned college scholarships. Her 1980 “mile relay” team in track, consisting of Jocelyn and Joanne Poggi, Diane Duncan and Janene Jarman competed at the state championships, as did Giguiere in the shot put in 1986.

While coaching at Placer, Speck took night classes at Sacramento State University to earn her Master’s degree in Sports Psychology. She had earned her teaching credential at Chico, where she also competed as a pentathlete in track, played basketball, and was a member of the school’s first women’s soccer team.

Not one to rest on her laurels, or shy away from a lonely path forward, Speck recently completed the 2,653-mile Pacific Coast Trail… at age 69.

The Athletic Hall of Fame ceremony will be held in the Earl Crabbe Gym Saturday, April 25. A reception will begin at 6 pm followed by the induction ceremony at 7 pm.

Tickets for the reception cost $25 until April 15, and $35 after, and are available online at placerathletichalloffame.org.

The 7 pm ceremony is free of charge to the public.