

Legislation Text

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Honoring the life and achievements of Thomas J. “Tom” Gola., a life-long Philadelphian, former City Controller and a Philadelphia basketball hero and legend.

WHEREAS, Tom Gola was born on January 13, 1933, the first of seven children born to Ike and Helen Gola. Ike Gola was a police officer, stationed in the 9th District at 20th and Buttonwood Streets, and the Golas lived in the Olney neighborhood of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Tom first began playing basketball in 5th grade, and by 8th grade he had led his elementary school team, Incarnation of Our Lord to state and national championships. Gola went on to play for La Salle College High School, where by sophomore year he had grown to his full height of 6’5”. Gola set a new Catholic League scoring record with 2,222 points as a senior and won the Markward Award as the league’s best player; and

WHEREAS, After a recruiting war, Gola decided to attend La Salle University, and as a freshman he led the team to a 25-7 record and an NIT title, a highly regarded tournament at the time. As a sophomore, Gola led his team to a 25-2 record, but was injured late in the season and missed post-season play. His junior season, Gola led La Salle to their first and only NCAA Tournament Championship, defeating Bradley University in the championship game. In his Senior season, La Salle University were runners-up to the University of San Francisco, who were led by future hall-of-famer Bill Russell. Gola averaged 20.9 points and 19 rebounds for his college career, and still currently holds the record for most career rebounds with 2,201, quite the feat for someone standing just 6’5”; and

WHEREAS, After a great college career, Gola was drafted by the Philadelphia Warriors as a territorial pick, and helped lead the Warriors to the NBA Championship as a rookie in 1956. Transitioning from a forward to Point Guard, Gola was known as the team’s defensive specialist, and his job routinely was to guard the opponent’s best playmaker. In 1962 when the Warriors moved to San Francisco, Gola was traded to the New York Knicks, and he commuted from his home in Fox Chase to New York so as not to uproot his family. He retired from basketball in 1966; and

WHEREAS, At the urging of Philadelphia’s Republican Party leader William A. Meehan, Gola ran for and won a seat in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in 1966 in the 170th District. Two years later, Gola also agreed to return to basketball as head coach of his alma mater, La Salle University. Gola coached the Explorers for two seasons, earning a career record of 37-13 as head coach; and

WHEREAS, In 1970 Gola resigned from La Salle in order to serve as City Controller, having won election to the office in 1969 by 80,000 votes. During his term as Controller, Gola investigated cost overruns at Veterans Stadium, and filed suit against then Mayor James Tate to lift a hiring freeze on City employment. Gola lost his bid for re-election in 1973, as Republicans nationwide were lifted out of office by the Watergate scandal; and

WHEREAS, After leaving elected office, Gola served in the Reagan administration as regional administrator of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and spent much time running his insurance agency. Gola made one last run for elected office in 1983, but was defeated in the Republican primary for Mayor;

WHEREAS, Gola avoided the limelight for much of the rest of his life, until La Salle University renovated their on-campus basketball facility, Tom Gola Arena; and

WHEREAS, Tom Gola was elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame in 1976, was a 5-time NBA all-star and is one of only two players to ever win an NCAA, NIT and NBA championship in their career; and

WHEREAS, Tom is survived by his wife of 59 years, Caroline, his son Thomas, and two granddaughters; now therefore, be it,

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council does hereby honor the life and achievements of Thomas J. “Tom” Gola., a life-long Philadelphian, former City Controller and a Philadelphia basketball hero and legend.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to Caroline Ann Gola as evidence of the sincere sentiments of this legislative body.