North Kitsap coaching legend dies at age 80

BY MARK KRULISH Kitsap News Group

If you arrived early to a North Kitsap football game in recent years, chances are you weren't the first person there.

You'd have likely found Virgil Taylor, the ubiquitous longtime coach and teacher sitting in the stands, watching volunteers set up yard markers and putting up tents, listening to the band warm up, coffee in one hand, program in the other, ready to watch his beloved Vikings take the field.

As the crowd rolled in, it was common to see former coaches and players approach him at his seat on the 50-yard line, eager to say "hello." It didn't matter if they were once friends or foes on the field, everybody had to stop by to see Virg Taylor.

"He was a super-positive, happy guy," said Brent Stenman, a long time NKHS assistant coach and a Babe Ruth League coach, "someone people just wanted to be around.'

North Kitsap and the community as a whole lost one of its biggest supporters when Taylor passed away at the age of 80 in the early morning hours of Sept. 2.

A devoted North Kitsap coach, fan, supporter and later statistician — after he retired, it was quite common to see him with a notebook or iPad in hand, keeping track of touchdowns and rushing yards, or strikeouts and home runs — health issues had curtailed his presence at games in the months before the COVID-19 pandemic. He could no longer travel to away games and followed the boys basketball team's state championship run from his home in Poulsbo. He had previously beaten prostate cancer, but developed liver cancer along with other complications. He spent what turned out to be his final day surrounded by his family.

A portrait of positivity

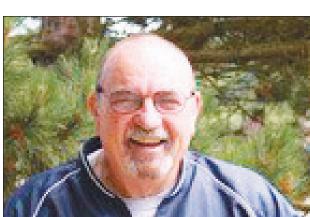
Taylor was raised in Anacortes where he played football and baseball. Though he was best known in the North Kitsap sports community as a baseball coach, Taylor loved football just as much and attended Washington State University where he played for one

He arrived in North Kitsap in the mid-1960s, teaching social studies at the high school and coaching baseball. He got involved with the football team not long after. Taylor was part of a coaching staff, along with head coach Jerry Parrish and assistant Tom Driscoll, that lasted over three decades. He also spent time as North Kitsap's athletic director.



Contributed photo by the Taylor Family

Virgil Taylor celebrates with his son, David, who served as the bat boy for North Kitsap's 1988 state championship team.



Mark Krulish | Bainbridge Island Review North Kitsap coaching legend Virg Taylor recently passed away at the age of 80.

In these roles, he made an impact on an incalculable number of students, always engaged, always empathetic to his kids whether he was in the classroom or on the field.

As Parrish's long-time assistant on the gridiron, his upbeat, positive nature provided the counterbalance to the head coach's more intense personality. Such a situation might have led to personality conflict, but the two men, as well as the rest of the coaching staff, always had enormous respect for each other.

"He was a very good, steadying influence for me and our program," Parrish

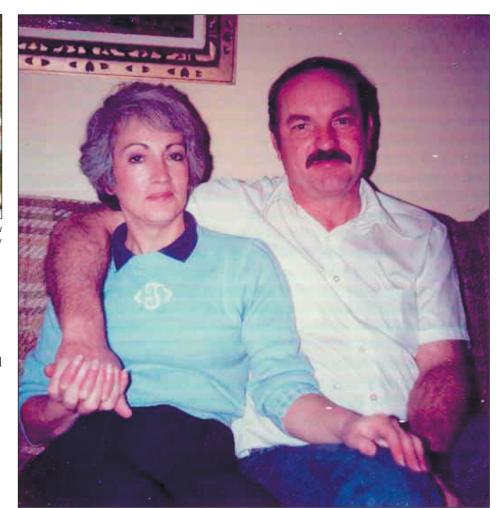
His coaching style didn't change when he was the man in charge, either. Taylor spent 28 seasons at the helm of the North Kitsap baseball team, winning over 380 games, including the 1988 Class AA state championship.

Jeff Weible, the current

football and baseball head coach at North Kitsap, was the team's catcher that legendary season, forming one half of a battery with future Major League Baseball pitcher Aaron Sele, who also starred at WSU.

But before becoming one of the anchors of a championship team, Weible, ever the competitor, was a young underclassmen who was serious about making an impact on the varsity baseball squad.

He recalled that as a sophomore, he didn't know where he'd fit on the team. Taylor sat him down and advised him to simply be flexible and be willing to play multiple positions. An injury on the team opened up a spot and spent the year playing first base, but the time he took to listen to his player made an impact on Weible, who would go on to play at Lower Columbia College and the University of Washington.



Virgil and his wife, DiAnn, who were together for 63 years and married for nearly 58

"He was the kind of coach who would put your mind at ease and knew that he cared about you," Weible said.

Those lessons continued when Weible returned to North Kitsap, first as an assistant coach, then later as head coach. Taylor, who remained a paid football assistant and volunteer baseball coach after retirement, helped calm his more fiery personality. Weible also remembered him as a man full of stories, whether they were related to sports or summers he spent as a fisherman in Alaska or working for the Washington State Ferries.

That was the biggest thing I got from him was to stay even-keeled and sort of just let the water roll off your back and enjoy the ride," Weible said.

"He never wrote a kid off," he added. "He always thought he could get the best out of him."

Devoted at home

Although Taylor's coaching commitments kept him busy and sometimes away from home, his already endless reserves of enthusiasm and interest somehow grew even more for his wife DiAnn and sons Matt, David and Jason.

"He was always a good mentor to me as well," said his son David. "But I was just lucky enough to have him as a dad.'

Taylor's sons have all gone in different directions in life — David is an assistant AD at the University of Portland, Jason is in informa-

tion technology and Matt is

superintendent of a construction company — and it didn't matter whether or not his sons' interests meshed with his own; he was always fascinated by anything that was

going on in their lives. "He made us feel like the most important person ever," David said.

David observed early that his father was well-known around Kitsap. He recalled that there were often times when 30 or more minutes would go by quickly because Virg ran into a former player or student. He always remembered who they were, and he would quickly become engrossed in finding out what they had been up to in their lives.

That's what made the final months of Taylor's life all the more difficult for those closest to him.

Unfortunately, as his health deteriorated, his memory began to fade. He stopped answering the phone, he sometimes failed to recognize close friends and family members, and his physical condition worsened. Taylor was moved from his home in Lofall to the LifeCare Center in Port Townsend.

Family members initially had to visit through a window due to COVID-19 restrictions, but once he went on hospice, they were allowed inside. His wife, sons and grandkids were all able to sit by his side and hold his hand. As they said goodbye, a kiss from DiAnn, his wife of nearly 60 years, provoked the strongest response from

"He knew my mom was there," David said, "maybe

he knew I was there too." David spent the night of Sept. 1 talking, watching baseball, listening to his favorite music (Pink Floydera rock and roll); a final father-son moment before he

passed the next morning. "An icon"

The impact Virg Taylor made on the North Kitsap community is measurable only by the sheer number of people who have been willing and ready to talk about the influence he had on their

John Olson, a longtime friend of Taylor, said sitting at North Kitsap football games with him was "like sitting with the pope" because of how many people stopped to chat with him.

Taylor was also instrumental in helping others get into coaching. Stenman got his start with North Kitsap's Babe Ruth League in 1985 when Taylor's son Matt played for the team. He began coaching at the high school in 1988, also at Taylor's insistence.

"I owe my entire coaching career to Virg," Stenman said. "And he's been not just coaching stuff but he was a really, really great friend and mentor."

Taylor was also as dedicated to his teaching job as he was his coaching duties, remembered as fondly for his history classes as he was his victories on the baseball

"Virg truly was an icon," Olson said.



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