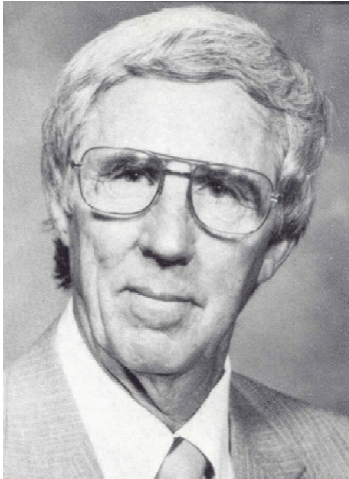


Martin Methodist mourns passing of legendary coach Kermit Smith

Beloved former athletic director and teacher died Sunday night at age of 90



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A legendary figure in the story of Martin Methodist College for more than a half-century and a larger-than-life presence in junior college athletics in this region and beyond passed away Sunday night.

Dr. Kermit Smith, who served as coach and director of athletics from 1950-86 and continued his involvement in Martin Methodist until his final days, passed away on Feb. 12, 2012, at Maury Regional Hospital, where he had been admitted two days earlier.

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Visitation will be held from 2-6 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 16, at Bennett-May-Giles County Funeral Home in Pulaski. The funeral service will follow at 6 p.m. with the Rev. Garie Taylor, the Rev. Whitney Mitchell, former Coach Jimmy Earle and Pat Hendrix of the Pulaski Recreation Department officiating. A graveside service will be held at 10 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 17, at Maplewood Cemetery in Pulaski.

The family suggests that memorial donations be made to the Kermit Smith Scholarship Fund at Martin Methodist College.

"Coach Smith was a fixture on the campus of Martin Methodist College, having served devotedly as coach and athletic director for decades," said Dr. Ted Brown, president of Martin Methodist College. "We will miss his winsome way and his contagious love for this institution."

A native of Estes, Ark., Dr. Smith earned his undergraduate degree in 1949 from the University of the Ozarks in Clarksville, Ark., and his master's degree a year later from Peabody College in Nashville. He had an offer to return to his alma mater in Arkansas for to teach physical education and join the coaching staff, but he heard about an opening in Pulaski, Tenn., only an hour south of Nashville. A small, two-year Methodist school called Martin College needed someone with his qualifications, so he took the job, becoming the basketball, baseball, tennis and golf coach, as well as serving as director of athletics. That was 1950, and he would spend the next 36 years teaching and coaching there, and another 26 years there in retirement as one of the college's most beloved living legends.

"The position was at a Methodist college and having grown up in a small Methodist church in Arkansas, that attracted me," he said during an interview following his 90th birthday celebration. "It was geographically located between Nashville and Birmingham and between Chattanooga and Memphis, and once I came here, I fell in love with the college and the community."

As a teacher, he was an enthusiastic proponent of fitness and advocated running as a daily exercise, years before the jogging craze became all the rage in the late 1970s. As a coach, he guided some of Martin College's most successful teams, including two teams now in the college's Sports Hall of Fame: the 1970-71 men's tennis team that posted a 15-0 record as the only undefeated intercollegiate team in the school's history; and the 1952-53 men's basketball team that went 15-3 and qualified for the Southeastern Regional tournament. Another of his teams, the 1952-53 women's basketball team that finished the season 14-3, will be inducted this Saturday during the 2012 Homecoming festivities. Individually, countless numbers of his former players credit Kermit Smith with guiding them to become better athletes and, more importantly, inspiring them to become better students and citizens.

As if handling almost all things sports-related at Martin College were not enough, Dr. Smith held countless positions of leadership in athletics and beyond. He was one of the founding members of the Tennessee Junior and Community College Athletic Association (TJCCAA), and he held various positions in that organization through the years, as well as the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). He was a longtime board member of the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame, serving as president in 1977. He was a member of the U.S. Olympic Educational Committee in Ancient Greece (1974-75) and was president of the Tennessee College Physical Education Association in 1976. He twice served as director and host of the National Junior College Golf Tournament, in 1978 and 1981. He served as publicity director for the TJCCAA for 43 years.

Outside of higher education athletics, he served as chairman of Water Safety and First Aid for the Giles County chapter of the American Red Cross from 1964-80, director of the Pulaski Recreation Department, and served four four-year terms as an alderman for the city of Pulaski.

Among the many honors bestowed on him during his life were induction into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame in 1978, the TJCAA Sports Hall of Fame in 1982, and a member of the inaugural class of the Martin Methodist College Sports of Fame in 1996, and the Pulaski Little League Hall of Fame. In 1986, the City of Pulaski renamed the stretch of North Sixth Street leading to the Curry Christian Life Center as Kermit Smith Drive, and in 1992 the TJCCAA named its Hall of Fame room in its headquarters in Columbia, Tenn., as the Kermit Smith Hall of Fame Room.

In 1982, he received an honorary degree from his alma mater, the University of the Ozarks.

But, first and foremost, the greatest tribute that Kermit Smith received was the deep affection that the Martin Methodist College family - past and present - had for their living legend.

"Kermit Smith continued to be a very positive influence on the growth of Martin Methodist College throughout his life," said Jeff Bain, director of athletics. "He visited our campus every week, even last week. He was excited about the progress of both our men's and women's basketball teams and the start-up of our spring sports. To say that he was still engaged is a understatement of his passion for Martin Methodist. The successes that we enjoy today are built on the foundation that Coach Smith laid throughout his lifetime. We will sincerely miss him."

Dr. Smith was preceded in death by his parents, Nathaniel Green Smith and Lillian Samuel Smith, and his wife, Jo Nell Smith.

He is survived by: his daughter, Debrah Ann Gallimore of Conway, Ark.; grandchildren Nicholas Burton, Patrick Burton, Rachel Burton and Jeremy Burton; six great-grandchildren; a niece, Gayle Girard of Little Rock, Ark., and special friend Sue Black of Minor Hill, Tenn.