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Longtime coach, official Maxwell dies

By Rick Ryan

Assistant Sports Editor

Bob Maxwell, an avid Kanawha Valley sportsman who served as a player, coach, administrator and game official, died Tuesday at the age of 75 after a long battle with cancer.

Maxwell, who lived in Cross Lanes, spent much of his career in athletics at West Virginia State, where over a 30-plus-year span he served as assistant registrar, athletic director, head baseball coach, head men's basketball coach and assistant football coach. He also taught in the school's physical education department.

"He dedicated his life to sports," said Calvin Bailey, West Virginia State's longtime baseball coach. "He was a good man. He was a very, very patient man."

Maxwell was an assistant on the staff of Colin Cameron when the Yellow Jackets won their only West Virginia Conference football championship in 1968 with an 8-1 record.

He's also the answer to a trivia question, having been the last baseball coach at State before Bailey took over in 1978. Maxwell took over as athletic director and men's basketball coach in 1977, giving Bailey the baseball position.

Bailey has since gone on to win more than 900 games and 14 West Virginia Conference baseball championships.

"He gave me my chance to coach," Bailey said, "and I've always been grateful to him. We got all the way to the finals of the conference tournament the year he left. And when he left, he didn't leave the cupboard bare. He left me a bunch of players, including his son Bobby, who was an all-conference outfielder-first baseman. We were able to take it from there."

Bailey said Maxwell helped guide him through his first years on the job.

"He was a mentor," Bailey said. "He was task-oriented. He was thorough. It isn't always easy to be a coach when another coach becomes your superior. But the only [negative] thing he ever said to me was, 'You can't do that. We don't have the money.' He was in my corner the whole time.

"He wasn't flamboyant. He was kind of vanilla in his approach. He and I recruited a few times together. He was honest and straightforward with the recruits."

Maxwell was perhaps best-known to many fans around the Kanawha Valley as a veteran football and basketball official, serving in that capacity for 47 years and working several state basketball tournaments at the Civic Center.

He received a National Federation of Officials Distinguished Service Award for his work in youth sports, and also volunteered his time to coach local teams in his community.

Maxwell was born on Feb. 17, 1934 in Tanner and moved with his family to Dunbar, where he excelled as a three-sport athlete. Maxwell attended Morris Harvey College (which later became the University of Charleston). He played four sports in college, including quarterback for the football team, before graduating in 1956. Maxwell was later elected to the University of Charleston Hall of Fame.

Other places among his coaching stops were Dunbar Junior High and Morris Harvey.

Visitation is from 6-8 p.m. Friday at Keller Funeral Home in Dunbar. Funeral services will be held at 11 a.m. Saturday at Cross Lanes United Methodist Church.

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