

PREP SPORTS

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Bob Maxwell was one of my sports heroes

by Frank Giardina
For the Daily Mail

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When I was young, I had many sports heroes. For example, I wanted to be Mickey Mantle or Roger Maris of the New York Yankees.

I loved baseball and I thought it would be a blast to live in the excitement of New York City, eat steak, and play in Yankee Stadium every day. OK, I assumed they ate steak every day.

I also wondered what it would be like to be Lew Alcindor and win three straight NCAA basketball titles at UCLA, or Joe Namath and lead a team to the biggest upset win in pro football. Having a chance to date Ann-Margret or Raquel Welch would not have been all bad either.

Now, I have to admit I envy the life of Bob Maxwell. What a life he led. What an incredible life he led.

Sadly, the man they used to call "Coach Max" when I was broadcasting games at West Virginia State from 1973-76, died last week at the age of 75 after battling cancer.

I was never much of an athlete. I loved sports, and it has been my life and vocation. But, I was never much of an athlete. And, I would have loved to have been a young Bob Maxwell. The man played everything.

"Coach Max" was born in Gilmer County, but he grew up in Dunbar. He was an outstanding three-sport athlete at Dunbar High from 1949-52. That is an accomplishment in itself, but many good athletes of that era played multiple sports.

Still, they don't continue to play multiple sports in college.

Bob Maxwell did!

He went on to Morris Harvey, where he lettered in four sports for four years from 1953-56. He played football on a Morris Harvey team in 1954 that went 8-2, beat East Carolina and played against Tampa in the Cigar Bowl.

He played basketball on a Golden Eagles' team that won the West Virginia Conference tournament by beating Alderson-Broaddus 97-82 in 1953. Two of his Golden Eagle teammates, Denver Garrett and Dave Rosen, earned all-tournament honors.

Maxwell also was part of the '55 Morris Harvey team that lost 89-86 to A-B in one of the classic tournament final games in WVC history.

After graduation from Morris Harvey, Maxwell continued to be involved in all sports. Eventually he would end up at State, where he coached for more than 30 years. Just as he did when he played, he did not just coach one sport. He coached them all.

He was an assistant football coach under Colin Cameron when the Yellow Jackets won its only WVC title in 1968. He also served later as the baseball coach, men's basketball coach and athletic director.

Maxwell also served as a high school football and basketball official for more than 40 years. From his incredible playing career, his coaching career and his officiating career, the lives on which he made an impact are numerous.

Last Friday night, many of those lives were there to say thank you and goodbye. Among them were long time Winfield Coach Leon McCoy, former Dunbar football Coach Delmer Good, former State quarterback Jim Charley and former Stonewall Jackson coach and an All-WVC quarterback at West Virginia Tech, Jerry "Moe" Towson.

While noting the large turnout in the Keller Funeral Home that night, McCoy made the comment, "I'm not surprised. In your lifetime, you don't meet too many men like Bobby Maxwell."

Yes, I had a lot of sports heroes when I was young. Most of us did. I wanted to be like them. Now, as I look back on it, I have changed my mind. Who needs Mickey Mantle, Jim Brown and Roger Maris?

I would love to have been Bob Maxwell. He played it all. He did it all. He was one of the best athletes to come out of the Kanawha Valley.

In every way as an athlete, coach and official, Bob Maxwell loved the local sports scene ... and it loved him back.

Frank Giardina is a contributing columnist to the Daily Mail and Sunday Gazette-Mail. Contact him fl...@hotmail.com.

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Good work Frank, a tribute to an outstanding man. I was one year behind Bobby at Dunbar. His leadership ability and future success was obvious to us even then. He will be missed.