

Former players, peers pay tribute to Al McGuire

by Bill Jauss
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CHICAGO - Al McGuire's fame as a broadcaster overshadowed his accomplishments as a basketball coach, even though he won an NCAA championship, took another team to the Final Four, won two national coach of the year awards and had a .787 winning percentage in 13 seasons at Marquette University.

McGuire fueled the perception with his disdain for X's and O's - those he left to assistant Hank Raymonds, while Rick Majerus did most of his recruiting.

But come game time there was no question who was in charge.

"He was the best bench coach I ever coached against - the best I ever saw," former DePaul coach Ray Meyer said Friday.

Meyer recalled an early '70s example of McGuire's unorthodox, seat-of-the-pants coaching. The Blue Demons were having their way with Marquette's trademark man-to-man defense in a game at Alumni Hall and McGuire called a timeout to switch his Warriors into a zone.

"We killed zones," Meyer said. "Hank Raymonds was arguing with Al, trying to talk him out of it. I was sure we'd kill the zone. But we couldn't hit against it. It shouldn't have worked, but it did."

"Al was unorthodox, but he was usually right."

Or at least he thought he was when it came to game officials.

"Al had a great sense of working

the refs," Meyer said. "He was the biggest showman, but he wasn't obnoxious. He was funny."

"The one time I remember him speechless was when he went to the middle of the floor in Milwaukee to complain that Marquette had been called for five fouls and we hadn't been called once. The ref said, 'Al, I only call them. I don't count 'em.'" McGuire believed teams reflected

New York recruits from the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, saw his coach's more serious side as "a visionary, a pioneer in race relations. He told us, 'We're going to respect one another, we're not going to have a checkerboard problem.'" McGuire's message to all his players never changed: Use basketball, don't let basketball use you.

this opportunity to go to college and graduate. He told us we had been given this chance and we could not let it get away from us.

"Not only was he a tremendous motivator and teacher, he was a street fighter, and he showed us these last three months how strong and tough he was."

Meyer was deeply saddened to hear of McGuire's passing - they were fierce but friendly rivals throughout McGuire's career.

"He was my friend, and I loved him," Meyer said. "Our friendship transcended basketball."

Indeed, McGuire was in the second year of his second career as a TV analyst when Meyer celebrated one of his brightest moments at DePaul.

"Al was doing the game on TV when we beat UCLA on our way to the Final Four in '79," Meyer recalled.

"He came down on the floor and hugged me. He was as happy as I was."

Digger Phelps, a longtime friend and coaching rival from Fordham and Notre Dame, said McGuire had his sense of humor to the end.

During one recent phone call, Phelps said, he asked McGuire what he was doing and McGuire said he was "planning the party for after his funeral - cash bar."

During another conversation McGuire told him, "I'm on my third undertaker. I've had two guys die waiting for me to die."

Tribune staff writer Andrew Bagnato contributed to this report.



Al McGuire, the colorful coach who led Marquette University to the 1977 NCAA championship and then became a highly popular television broadcaster, died of a blood disease Friday, nine months after the illness forced him to retire as a college basketball analyst. He was 72, and he lived a remarkably full life.

their coaches, and his certainly did. "My teams are arrogant and obnoxious," he almost boasted. George Thompson, McGuire's first star player at Marquette, remembers the coach as fearless.

"Once in unfriendly territory he told us, 'I'll take care of the crowd and the officials. You play the game,'" Thompson said. "Then he drop-kicked the water bucket and threw towels. Nobody watched us while we won the game."

Thompson, one of McGuire's first

"He told me I could do whatever I wanted to do if I paid the price," said Thompson, a Milwaukee businessman who broadcasts Marquette games over radio and TV.

Bo Ellis, the coach at Chicago State, was one of McGuire's best players, senior captain of Marquette's 1977 NCAA champions. Ellis recalled that McGuire rarely discussed basketball with his players.

"Al stressed opportunity," Ellis said. "He told us that we had to grab

The Los Angeles Times' tennis rankings:

WOMEN

1. Jennifer Capriati. Slam has us talking about her Jen-eration.
2. Martina Hingis. Weary at 20. Skipping doubles at Slams?
3. Lindsay Davenport. Slower court, erratic play hindered her.
4. Serena Williams. Shot-making in quarters bright as her dress.
5. Venus Williams. A-student barely gets passing grade.
6. Monica Seles. Has lost only twice in Melbourne in six trips.
7. Amanda Coetzer. Lost opportunity vs. Venus Williams.
8. Justine Henin. Winning streak - 13 matches - ends in quarters.
9. Kim Clijsters. Rough fortnight for her and look-alike Hewitt.
10. Anna Kournikova. Took advantage of weaker part of draw.

MEN

1. Andre Agassi. Plunges into the Yarra River. Seine, next?
2. Patrick Rafter. Possible farewell ended in cramps and sweat.
3. Marat Safin. Caught in post-Slam malaise after U.S. Open.
4. Pete Sampras. Slam-less outside of Wimbledon since 1997.
5. Gustavo Kuerten. Not past Aussie second round in five tries.
6. Arnaud Clement. Charming speech a highlight of men's final.
7. Lleyton Hewitt. Still hearing him yell, "C'mon!"
8. Yevgeny Kafelnikov. How much is the Aussie dollar worth?
9. Sebastien Grosjean. Two match points from first Slam final.
10. Carlos Moya. Spanish reclamation project on schedule.

NHL keeping wary eye on attendance figures

by Paul Doyle
The Hartford Courant
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BOSTON - As the story goes, the most loquacious player in the NHL eyed a fan snoozing in the stands before a game two weeks ago at the National Car Rental Center in Sunrise, Fla.

Brett Hull couldn't pass on the obvious punch line.

"There's another satisfied NHL customer," Hull said to other Dallas Stars.

Give the napping fan credit, though: At least he showed up. This season, the Florida Panthers have given South Florida fans little incentive to watch hockey. The team is among the worst in the NHL (10-26-8-7) and already has fired its coach and general manager.

The chaos has resulted in the Panthers drawing about 1,300 fewer fans a game compared to last season. Af-

ter all, why would fans leave the sun of South Florida to sit indoors and watch bad hockey?

That's the quandary facing other teams in the league's untapped markets. With commissioner Gary Bettman committed to selling the sport to warm-weather sports fans, teams have little margin for error in markets with little or no hockey heritage.

In Atlanta, where a franchise failed in the 1970s, the Thrashers have seen a drop in attendance while on a free fall through the standings. Through Friday, the Thrashers are 0-10-3 since Dec. 28, when they were above .500 and considered a playoff contender.

"We've taken a step back," Coach Curt Fraser said last week.

Fans in Atlanta already knew that. In their inaugural season, the Thrashers averaged 17,205 in the 18,545-seat Phillips Arena. This year, they are averaging 15,025 in 24 home games. In Tampa, the 9-year-old Lightning

lost eight in a row through Friday and are 1-9 after replacing Coach Steve Ludzick with assistant John Tortorella. The awful record has resulted in empty seats - while Tampa is averaging 15,389 through 22 games, they recently had announced crowds of 11,854 and 12,774 in the 19,758-seat Ice Palace.

"We're in a little bit of a slide here and if we keep going ... boy, you can't get much lower," Tortorella told the St. Petersburg Times.

In Nashville, the Predators averaged 16,600 while finishing in last place last season. This year, the Predators are in third place in the Central Division, but attendance is down. Through 26 home games, Nashville is averaging 15,461 at the 17,298-seat Nashville Arena.

But the Southern spot with the biggest attendance concerns remains Raleigh, N.C. Since leaving Hartford in 1997, the Hurricanes have struggled to attract fans. Now in their

second season in the Raleigh Entertainment and Sports Arena, the 'Canes were expecting to see their fan base increase.

This season, though, has been uneven. In 23 home games, Carolina averaged 12,741 in its 18,730-seat building - up an average of 340 a game over last season. But while they have had four sellouts, there have been some disturbingly low attendance figures: 7,517 for a Jan. 3 game against Tampa, 8,627 Jan. 7 against the Islanders, 8,732 Jan. 9 against the Panthers. And the recent crowds can't be blamed on poor play. The 'Canes were unbeaten in nine games before losing two in a row last weekend. GM Jim Rutherford recently said he was encouraged despite the sporadic turnout, mainly because the team is generating interest in the community.

Still, the struggles of the Hurricanes and other teams in the South must be a concern for the NHL. Bettman has said the league relies heavily on at-

tendance, perhaps more than any other professional league.

"What is important to us is continuing to grow the game off of the foundation that it is on," Bettman said before the season. "Making sure that our arenas stay at least 90 percent full (during) the regular season."

Speaking at the Sports Summit in New York earlier this month, Bettman dismissed the notion that franchises could be moving. He pointed to the success of the league's two expansion franchises - the Columbus Blue Jackets have sold 95 percent of their seats and the Minnesota Wild have sold out all of their games - and said the league remains financially strong.

Bettman said the league's primary concern is the health of the Canadian franchises. The teams in the 22 U.S. markets, Bettman said, are the fuel that drives the league.

"We've created a footprint that enables our brand to get exposure," Bettman said.

But what happens when fans are exposed to a poor product? In the hockey capital of the world, fans still watch - the listless Canadiens are among the league leaders in attendance, averaging 19,707 through 26 home games. The Rangers, despite their disappointing record (20-26-3-1), still sell out Madison Square Garden. The Bruins have seen a dip in attendance (14,823), partly due to high ticket prices (up to \$77).

When did the Bruins sell out the FleetCenter? When Mario Lemieux was visiting. Proof fans will pay to see the best: Lemieux has sold out every building he has visited (Washington, Boston, New York, Phoenix, Dallas and Chicago).

But when fans are handed mediocrity, cost is an issue. The average NHL ticket is \$47, a factor in markets where fans have no emotional attachment to the sport.

Fox interviews for the last NFL job Stanford set for Washington

by Neil Best
Newsday
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EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. - John Fox was walking from the bus into the Giants' locker room Monday after returning from Tampa when someone delivered the surprising news: The Browns were about to hire the University of Miami's Butch Davis as their new head coach.

The Giants' defensive coordinator immediately grasped the implications. "Obviously, that threw a cog into it, with only one job left," he said Tuesday before leaving Giants Stadium to interview for that one remaining opening, with the Bills.

Until the Browns hired Davis, it appeared that Fox and Ravens defensive coordinator Marvin Lewis would split the two openings. But it now looks as if one will get the Buffalo job and the other will remain in his current job for 2001. Lewis interviewed Monday, and Fox was set to meet Bills President Tom Donahoe Tuesday.

"Like I've said, I have a great job here," Fox said. "Things have a way of working out for the best.

We'll see what happens."

The Giants' 34-7 loss in Super Bowl XXXV didn't help Fox' cause, even though the defense allowed only 20 of those points, 10 in garbage time. The Ravens' victory was the crowning achievement for Lewis' brilliant defense.

Coach Jim Fassel admitted he has mixed emotions about the possibility of losing Fox. "It makes it a lot easier on me if we have continuity on the coaching staff - a lot easier," he said. "On the other hand, I'm a coach. I was given my opportunity. If John Fox is able to get hired as a head coach, I'll be most happy for him. John deserves that shot."

Defensive backs coach Johnnie Lynn could replace Fox if he leaves. Fassel said he expects all of his assistants to return next season, pending Fox' status.

Quarterback Kerry Collins is looking forward to marking a significant milestone Thursday on his road back from alcohol abuse. It is the expiration date for the suspension of his driver's license that resulted from driving under the influence Nov. 1, 1998, in Charlotte.

Collins plans to get a ride from his girlfriend to the nearest motor

vehicle office across the border to his native Pennsylvania, renew his license, then take the wheel for the drive back home to New Jersey.

Collins, who plans to travel to Hawaii this weekend, said he would not throw for several weeks because of the slight shoulder separation he suffered in the Super Bowl.

Although the Giants did not lose any starters to long-term injuries, several potentially valuable young role players sat out all or most of 2000, including running back Sean Bennett, linebacker Dhani Jones, cornerbacks Ralph Brown and Andre Weathers and offensive tackle Chris Ziemann.

The team is particularly excited about adding Bennett and Jones to the mix. Both believe they will be fully recovered from major knee surgeries by the start of training camp.

"After getting a taste of what they had in store for me, then sitting out, if I'm not hungry next year to get back, I don't belong here," said Bennett, who estimated that he is 95 percent of normal.

by Jon Wilner
Knight-Ridder Newspapers
January 25, 2001

STANFORD, Calif. - Stanford is conducting a two-pronged pursuit of a high seed in the NCAA tournament. Not only is the Cardinal steamrolling all opponents, its vanquished foes are lending a hand, as well.

If the Cardinal finishes 29-1 or 28-2, it will be a slam-dunk No. 1 seed and probably play in San Diego, one of two sub-regional sites in the West. (Boise is the other.)

But if Stanford loses three or four games, then its resume will be matched against other teams competing for a No. 1 seed, such as Duke, Michigan State, North Carolina, Kansas, Illinois, even resurgent Arizona.

In that case, the Cardinal's power rating becomes crucial, and few things bolster a team's power rating like tough schedules and victories over good teams, what the NCAA selection committee refers to as "quality wins."

Each time one of Stanford's opponents records a quality win, it improves the Cardinal's power rating incrementally. Conversely, each bad loss by an opponent hurts Stanford's rating.

"I watch SportsCenter every night to see the scores," point guard Michael McDonald said. "We always hope the

teams we play end up doing well, because when the tournament rolls around, we'll need those quality wins. It makes the schedule look that much better."

For instance, Georgia (12-7) has won five consecutive games after a slow start. Its victories over Utah, Georgia Tech, North Carolina State, Villanova, Mississippi and Florida reflect well on Stanford, which beat the Bulldogs by 13 points.

Georgia Tech (11-7) is also helping the Cardinal. The Yellow Jackets have defeated Kentucky, UCLA, Wake Forest and Virginia.

Memphis (11-8) has won seven in a row. Duke (18-1) keeps rolling. And if New Mexico and Long Beach State win the Mountain West and Big West conferences, respectively, Stanford's schedule will look that much better when the selection committee convenes in early March.

"Before the season, people were talking about how bad the schedule was," said McDonald, who leads Stanford against Washington on Thursday night in Seattle. "But now it looks pretty good."

The Seattle Connection Several Stanford players have roots or relatives in the Seattle area.

Reserve center Curtis Borchardt, who is from Redmond, Wash., expects to have 100 friends and acquaintances in Washington's Hec Edmundson Pavilion on Thursday night. He is friendly with

Huskies guard Bryan Brown, the son of former Seattle Sonics guard "Downtown" Freddie Brown.

"I'm really looking forward to the game," said Borchardt, who did not play in Seattle last season, because of a stress fracture in his right foot.

Reserve forward Teyo Johnson, who played at Mariner High School before moving to San Diego, said 30 relatives will attend the game.

Reserve guard Tony Giovacchini's uncle and cousins live in Kirkland, outside Seattle.

Reserve forward Tyler Besecker is from Bellevue. His parents are expected to attend, but Besecker won't be there. He is recovering from a severe case of food poisoning - "It wasn't E-coli, but it was like it," he said. It necessitated intravenous feeding and several nights in the hospital.

Odds and ends Stanford has won its four road games (Long Beach State, Santa Clara, Arizona, Arizona State) by an average of 16 points.

McDonald leads the Pacific 10 Conference in assist-to-turnover ratio with a sensational plus-3.8. (A 2-to-1 ratio is considered good.)

The Cardinal averages 21.4 points per game from the foul line; its opponents average 10.8.

Stanford has held all 17 opponents under 50 percent shooting from the field.