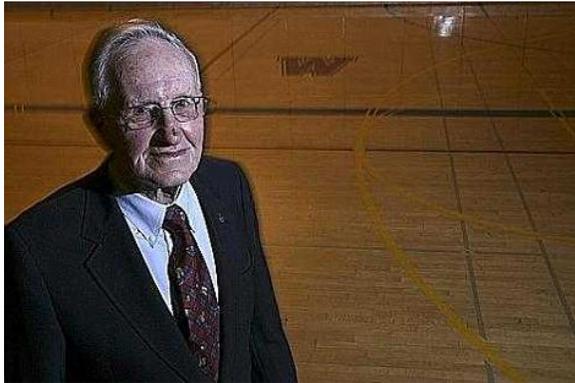


Former coach's legacy all class

November 15, 2008

The Beacon-News

By RICK ARMSTRONG Staff Writer



Dick Dorsey

When he coached basketball at West High in the late 1950s, Dick Dorsey was court-side calm in the middle of a storm, his former players will tell you.

Above all, the former coach and administrator who lost his battle with cancer earlier this week was the epitome of class.

"He was very, very intense, but he wasn't a hollerer or a screamer," said John Tull, a player on Dorsey's 1958 team, which finished fourth in the state.

Tull can't remember Dorsey ever getting whistled for a technical foul.

Grayal Gilkey, who played three seasons (1955-58) for Dorsey, agreed.

"He was very quiet. You knew he was the boss, but he didn't have to assert it," Gilkey said. "He just had a way and let you know what was expected.

"I certainly couldn't duplicate his calmness on the bench when I coached."

Fifty years later, Dorsey, would tell this reporter what people saw on the outside was far different from what he was feeling on the inside.

"Emotionally, I wasn't suited to be in it for the long haul," he said. "I was quiet on the bench but it turned me inside out."

He was head coach at West for five years, preceded by three as the sophomore coach and four heading up Serena's varsity squad.

Maybe the Lifesavers helped him last that long.

"He was very, very competitive, but he disguised it well. He loved those Lifesavers and always had some during the game," remembered Gilkey, fondly recalling the Bill Small-powered Blackhawks teams Dorsey coached to fourth in state in 1957-58 and second in 1958-59.

Small, a future University of Illinois star, came to West when his dad was transferred to Aurora by Caterpillar.

"Small and a couple guys really put us over the top talentwise," said Tull, who now lives in Florida. "I don't think much was expected of us in 1958, but we came together."

That was typical of Dorsey teams.

"He was more concerned with how you were playing going into the end of the season," Gilkey said. "As far as development, he wanted to see a team get better as it progressed.

"And it showed with his teams. He took his first team to the sectional, the second to the sectional final, the third was fourth in state and the fourth was second."

Tull went on to play at Aurora College. Years later, when he was inducted into the school's Hall of Fame, he asked Dorsey to be one of his presenters.

"Not that he would have asked, but I probably would have run through a wall for him," Tull said. "I've always felt he was very influential in my life. The fundamentals he taught me were not only about basketball."

Colleagues noticed, too.

"I watched his teams play at state when I was in southern Illinois and always admired them," said John McDougal, who coached at West for 11 years, two coaches after Dorsey.

"I think he was a paradigm for all coaches and a great role model for everybody. It really did bother me people don't recognize him for being a great coach. He never got his due because of the brevity of his career."

McDougal's admiration more after getting to know Dorsey the administrator.

"He became the dean of discipline (at West), which is not a very popular job," McDougal said. "But irrespective of where he was at, he always did a great job. He was a good one, very humble, very honest and just a unique individual."