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Former B-W coach Packard dead at 64

Jeffrey Zupanic
October 23, 2007

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"My fondest memory was watching great players become great alumni and great citizens of this country. There were thousands of young men who gave everything they had to be successful and there is not one who I didn't really love when it was all said and done." -- Bob Packard upon announcing his retirement as Baldwin-Wallace's head coach in 2001.

By JEFFREY ZUPANIC

The Review

Baldwin-Wallace Sports Information Director Kevin Ruple and former assistant coach Wally Bell knew something was not right when Bob Packard wasn't in attendance during Saturday's contest between Mount Union and Baldwin-Wallace at Mount Union Stadium.

"I don't know if you would call it a second sense or anything but he was supposed to be there helping scout and Wally and I kept looking around and we knew something wasn't right," said Ruple on Monday evening.

Earlier on Monday, Ruple received a phone call from Todd Bell of the American Football Coaches Association asking where to send flowers. Ruple then found out the news of the untimely death of the former Yellow Jacket head coach.

According to the school, Packard died Saturday afternoon of a heart attack. He was 64.

"We were having a birthday celebration in the office when I got the phone call from Todd. I was standing at the time and I had to sit down when I heard the news," said Ruple. "I was flabbergasted."

Former Mount Union head coach Ken Wable was equally as stunned to hear of the news. Wable, who coached the Purple Raiders from 1962-85 considered Packard a friend and one of his closest colleagues.

"Bob was a great guy, a nice person. He was a gentleman and very honest," said Wable. "He and I were from the same mold and we saw eye-to-eye on a lot of matters concerning the conference and how it was run back then."

Wable and Packard also shared ideas on the golf course as opposing coaches.

"Bob coached their golf team and I coached at Mount for 27 years so we spent a great deal of time sharing ideas on offense and defense on the golf course," said Wable. "We were very close as two opposing coaches could be."

Packard was a 1965 graduate of Baldwin-Wallace, he played for and was an assistant coach under college football Hall of Famer Lee Tressel before taking over for Tressel as his hand-picked successor in 1981.

"I think that was a great honor for him to be chosen to take over for coach Tressel. They had a lot of great coaches back then and a complete coaching staff," said Wable. "Bob did a wonderful job keeping up the program to the standards of Coach Tressel."

As a head coach, Packard compiled a 156-54-2 mark with a .741 winning percentage. His 156 wins trails only current Mount Union head coach Larry Kehres for most all-time in OAC history.

He guided the Yellow Jackets to six Ohio Athletic Conference titles in his 21 seasons as head coach. In 1978, Packard was an assistant coach on the Yellow Jackets' national championship team after defeating Wittenberg 24-10 in the Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl.

Against Mount Union, Packard went 7-13-1 and was on the sidelines the last time the Yellow Jackets defeated the Purple Raiders on Oct. 15, 1994. Packard's last win came against Otterbein on Oct. 27, 2001.

"Bob handled his losses equally as well as he handled his wins," said Wable. "He ran a good, clean program that was the standard in the OAC for a long time. He was a great guy and coach."

Packard's death on the very day his beloved Yellow Jackets were facing the Purple Raiders parallels the eerie coincidence of former Michigan head coach Bo Schembechler passing away the same week the Wolverines were scheduled to play Ohio State.

"If you look at this rivalry, you will see that we have had a great deal of close games," said Kehres during Saturday's press conference following Mount Union's 35-0 win. "The rivalry is very unique because it has been dominated by the defenses for many of the meetings."

Among the many players Packard coached at B-W was current Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel. Packard spent more than 37 years at Baldwin-Wallace as a player, assistant and head coach.

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"He touched many, many lives in his illustrious coaching career and will be dearly missed," Tressel said in a statement. "The Tressel family, specifically, lost a much loved friend who had an important impact on our lives."

Packard is survived by his wife, Ann Marie, of Berea, and daughters Jennifer of Atlanta, and Beth, of Toronto.

According to Baldwin-Wallace's athletic Web site, calling hours are scheduled from 2-4 and 7-9 p.m. on Friday at Baker Funeral Home in Berea.

"In the 30 years I have been involved with this as a student assistant and the SID, he was easily the best person I have ever had to work with," said Ruple. "He is so far ahead that I couldn't even tell you who is No. 2. He was all about tremendous leadership, character and integrity."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.



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