

Mail Tribune

John Frank Kovenz

Sunday

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December 25, 1925 - August 6, 2016

John Frank Kovenz, 90, passed away peacefully August 6, 2016 in Redmond, Ore. He was born December 25, 1925 in Portland, Oregon and was the youngest of eight children raised in old northwest Portland on the corner of 21st and Pettygrove. He spoke often about his youth, especially about St. Patrick's Catholic Church and the adjoining Catholic grade school, which he attended for eight years. He enjoyed hanging out at Vaughn Street Baseball Park where he played and ran the scoreboard, playing ball in old Civic Stadium/Multnomah Park, and playing ice hockey and baseball with his brothers and friends.

John graduated from old Lincoln High School in 1943 where he earned two letters in baseball and four in hockey. After graduating, he served in the U.S. Navy as a Radioman. After the war, he returned to Oregon and attended the University of Oregon from 1946 to 1949 where he was a three-year baseball letterman and was selected as First Team All-Northern Division in 1949. One of his favorite college stories was about living in the basement of MacArthur Court with his best friends, Dick Bartle and Hal Zurcher during their freshman year because there was not enough college housing available. At University of Oregon, he earned his teaching degree in English and History, and he later returned to graduate school to earn his master in Education..

In 1949, he signed with the Cleveland Indian organization and later, the Atlanta Braves. From 1949 to 1953, John played professional baseball in Bakersfield, Tacoma, Tri-Cities, and Wichita. It was during a game in Tri-Cities in 1952 that put John in, "The Official Rules of Baseball." It states that

he is "the lone hitter ever to face three pitchers in a single turn at bat." After professional baseball, he moved to Coos Bay, Ore. where he worked at the Cape Arago Lumber Mill and played semi-pro ball for the Coos Bay Lumberjacks. It was here that he met a school teacher named Alice Smith on a blind date, and they were married six months later.

In 1955, he and Alice moved to Medford upon receiving teaching jobs at Medford High School. John was an Assistant Football Coach and the Head Baseball Coach at Medford for 12 years. In 1960, his baseball team was the third notch in the Triple Crown won by The Black Tornado in 1959-'60: State Champions in football, basketball, and baseball. For many years he coached with or under the "Old Guard" of Medford Athletics, to include: Fred Spiegelberg, Frank Roelandt, Paul Evensen, Tom Marier, Ralph Monroe, and Dean Benson. In September 1967 John became a counselor at Medford Mid High School, and in 1969 he moved to McLoughlin Junior High where he was the Dean of Boys and later the Dean of Students until his retirement in 1984. In 1990 he was inducted into the Medford Sports Hall of Fame, and in 2005 he was inducted into the PIL (Portland Interscholastic League) Athletic Hall of Fame.

John was a very humble person, and although he was always very thankful and appreciative of his achievements, he would never boast about his accomplishments. He would always give the credit to his teams and players. In his later years, he enjoyed golfing, flyfishing, gardening, playing games, watching sports, and spending time with his family and friends.

John is survived by his two daughters, Karin Kovenz-Coombe and her husband Kevin, of Redmond, Ore. and Kristin Kovenz Wilkinson and her husband Jack, of Lincoln City, Ore. He also had two grandchildren who were very special to him, John Wilkinson, U.S. Navy-Oak Harbor Wash. and Kelsey Wilkinson of Lincoln City, Ore. John was preceded in death by his wife of 59 years, Alice Smith Kovenz; his parents; seven siblings, Mary, Andrew, Matthew, Anne, Agnes, Michael, and Frances; and a son.

A service for John and Alice will be held at 1:30 p.m., Friday, September 23, 2016 at Willamette National Cemetery in Portland, Ore. In lieu of flowers, the family wishes that memorial contributions be made to Partners In Care Hospice, 2075 NE Wyatt Court, Bend, Ore. 97701. The family wishes to thank The Hari Homestead and Partners In Care Hospice for John's loving care and comfort.

