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Ron Stillwell, longtime area baseball coach, dies at 76

*By Jim Carlisle of the Ventura County Star**Jan. 26, 2016*

Ron Stillwell, who as a coach helped build the baseball programs at Thousand Oaks High, Cal Lutheran and Moorpark College, and as a player captained a national champion USC team, died Monday after a battle with cancer. He was 76.

Stillwell had lived in Lake Almanor. His son Rod confirmed his father's passing in a Facebook post.

Known for his dry sense of humor and skillful coaching ability, Ron Stillwell played shortstop at USC and captained its national championship team in 1961.

A week after graduating from USC, Stillwell signed a contract with the Washington Senators, but his major league career was limited to only 14 games because of an injury.

"He was playing shortstop," former Oxnard College coach Jerry White recalled Tuesday. "He went out on a fly ball, a pop-up, and the left fielder ran into him and it was an eye injury. He never did fully recover from that well enough to continue his career."

Stillwell took a job in 1964 at Thousand Oaks High when it was still part of the Oxnard Union High School District and taught there 33 years, coaching for 25. In addition to baseball, he also coached cross country and freshman basketball at various times.

George Contreras was just beginning his coaching career just before Stillwell left to coach at Cal Lutheran. While Contreras went on to coach primarily football, he was junior varsity baseball coach in 1971 under Stillwell.

"He combined a great sense of humor with a great professional attitude at all times," Contreras said. "... I just remember that kind of an impish look he'd get on his face when he was cracking a joke or bringing a little more sunshine into your life on a daily basis."

While still teaching at Thousand Oaks High, Stillwell was baseball coach at Cal Lutheran in 1972-1978, where he had a record of 139-100-1 (.581) and was named NAIA Coach of the Year in 1976. He was hired by Bob Shoup, who was then the athletic director.

"Ron was one of those really personable people that seemed to bring out the best in his players," Shoup said from his home in San Marcos, "and we were just privileged to have him at Cal Lutheran because I think he really put the foundation of the program together that some of the (later) coaches have benefited from."

Stillwell was a walk-on coach at Moorpark College in 1985-1989, where he was 91-88 (.508).

"I don't know that you're going to find anybody that's going to say anything but that he was just a nice, nice man," said White, who coached against Stillwell at Oxnard and coached with him at clinics. The two also officiated high school basketball games together.

Stillwell was twice selected to manage a U.S. college all-star team against a Japanese team.

Ronald Roy Stillwell was born Dec. 3, 1939, in Los Angeles and graduated from Burbank-Burroughs High in 1957. He was elected to the Ventura County Sports Hall of Fame in 2011.

"I think I'm proudest of the fact I tried to teach baseball the right way," he told The Star at his induction. "I wanted my kids to learn how to play baseball with the proper fundamentals, but I also wanted them to have fun while they did it."

Stillwell's son Kurt was the second pick of the 1983 amateur draft by the Cincinnati Reds and played in the majors for nine seasons. His younger son Rod — named after former USC baseball coach Rod Dedeaux — played college ball at Arkansas and advanced, like his father, to the College World Series in 1989.

Rod was drafted by the Kansas City Royals and played two seasons of Class A minor league ball. He and his wife Valerie both teach at Thousand Oaks High.

In addition to Kurt and Rod, Stillwell is survived by Jan, his wife of 55 years, and their oldest son Scott.

The Thousand Oaks High Alumni Association said in a Facebook post a memorial will be held in the spring in Lake Almanor.

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