

[Return to Story](#)[Print This Page](#)[Larger text](#) [Smaller text](#)

## Former Valley football coach 'Whizzer' White dies at 78



*Eric Schmadel | For Trib Total Media*

Hempfield football coordinators Joe Naunchik (right) and Ray White watch practice on August 15, 2011 at the high school.

By George Guido

Thursday, April 2, 2015, 11:24 p.m.

Sometimes, the true measure of any local sports figure is when that person can be identified by using just a nickname.

When any local football player or coach heard the name "Whizzer," Ray White immediately came to mind.

White, former head football coach at Valley, assistant for many years at several schools and a minor league professional baseball pitcher in the 1950s, died Thursday morning.

He was 78.

A native of Lackawanna, N.Y., White graduated from the former Vandergrift High School in 1955. He lettered four seasons in football, basketball and baseball while with the Blue Lancers.

The Vikings won three conference titles during his eight-year stint at Valley. His 1996 team posted the first undefeated regular season in school history.

**TRIBLIVE**

White was an assistant coach for nearly a quarter century with stops at Valley, Hempfield, Fox Chapel and Burrell.

Proficient in multiple sports, White experienced the most success in baseball. As a pitcher with the Vandergrift American Legion team, he compiled a 31-0 record over two seasons.

That was enough to catch the attention of the old Washington Senators, who signed White.

In two years with the Senators chain, he made stops in Charlotte, N.C.; Elmira, N.Y.; and Omaha, Neb.

But it was in 1957 when a chance meeting with another local stellar athlete resulted in a friendship that lasted nearly 60 years. White met Joe Naunchik at the Italian-American Club in Tarentum.

"We were introduced by a sports writer," Naunchik said. "I was playing for the Pirates Rookie League team in Salem, Va., while Ray was with the Senators' system."

They became fast friends and played in the local softball ranks for 20 years.

"He was very competitive, and he knew how to motivate his players," Naunchik said. "He was passionate about everything. I tell people I liked coaching, Ray loved coaching. I liked skiing, Ray loved skiing. I like golfing, Ray loved golfing."

One person who had a unique perspective of playing and coaching with White was Frank Whalen.

"Growing up, I played with his son, Mike, and ended up marrying his daughter Colleen," Whalen said.

"Whiz loved football, and he loved young people. He was truly a legend in high school coaching in the Pittsburgh area.

"At Valley, he gave a lot of structure to kids whose lives needed it the most."

White didn't get his first head coaching job until 1994 at age 57. Seven of his first eight Valley teams had winning seasons.

"After the games, he'd gather the kids around and tell them, 'Go out and have fun tonight, but if whatever you do is going to be on the front page of the Valley News Dispatch tomorrow morning, if it's something you'll be proud of — do it,' " Whalen said. "He made a way to humourously get his points across."

White was Valley News Dispatch Coach of the Year in 2000. More recently, he watched his daughter Jennifer's son, Dan Farinelli, play as Knoch's quarterback.

White was inducted into the Alle-Kiski Valley Sports Hall of Fame in 2002.

In his acceptance speech, White said: "The thing I'm most proud of is the players that I coached had the same work ethic and the same ability to reach inside and sacrifice just like their daddies and granddaddies."

Friends will be received at the Gigler Funeral Home in Lower Burrell from 2 to 8 p.m. Monday. A complete obituary will be in Saturday's edition.

---

Copyright © 2015 — Trib Total Media

---