



J. Elmer Swanson

Born in Detroit, MI on Oct. 2, 1923
Departed on Aug. 12, 2016 and resided in Portland, CT.

Visitation: Monday, Aug. 15, 2016
5:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Service: Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2016
10:00 am

Cemetery: Swedish Cemetery

Elmer Swanson passed away on August 12, 2016, after a brief illness. He was surrounded by the love and warmth of family and friends in the preceding days. Elmer was born to the late Nettie Mae (Freeman) and John Elmer Swanson on October 2, 1923. He grew up in Detroit, where he began his double sport scholar athlete career hurdling at Northeastern High School. He continued his education at the University of Michigan, where he competed as a catcher and first baseman for the baseball team and as a hurdler on the track team. He won major titles for the Wolverines, including the 1944 Big Ten hurdles and Purdue Relays. His collegiate career was interrupted by a stint with the Marine Corps. Upon his honorable discharge, he finished his degree and earned a Master of Arts. Elmer was drafted in 1946 to play professional baseball with the Detroit Tigers, competing in Williamsport and Hagerstown for three seasons.

He then began his illustrious coaching career as assistant track and field and cross-country coach at Michigan, helping garner nine Big Ten Championships. In 1963, he was named head coach of the track and cross-country teams at Wesleyan University, and he and his family moved to Connecticut. Known for his laidback coaching style, Elmer guided the men's and women's teams to Little Three, NESCAC and New England championships. He coached several All-Americans, Olympians, and nationally prominent runners. Elmer was named 1993 NCAA District I Division III Cross Country Coach of the Year, President of the New England Division III Track and Field Coaches Association, and CT Intercollegiate Conference. He was a field judge, referee, meet director, and member of executive committees for NCAA Division III.

In July of 1993, Elmer was conferred as a Professor Emeritus of Physical Education. He was subsequently recognized for 50 years of continuous coaching and was inducted into the Portland, Wesleyan, and Middletown Sports Hall of Fames. He spent fun-filled summers working at Camp Michigama and was a loyal member of Zion Lutheran Church. Elmer loved to golf and was a fixture of the senior golf league until he was over 90. He enjoyed over 40 years of friendship with the "Friday Night Group," and had an active social life with Wesleyan and local friends. Elmer's quick wit and sharp sense of humor, as well as his effervescent smile, were prominent through his final days.

Elmer was predeceased by his loving wife, Patricia Ann Swanson. They met in college and remained loyal Michigan alums for life. Pat and Elmer celebrated 61 years of marriage before her passing, and he is undoubtedly smiling as they are reunited. Elmer's memory will be cherished by his family: his daughter, Kristen, and husband, Andy Cohen, of Oak Hills, CA; his son, Jay, and wife, Martha, of Portland, CT; his grandson, Dr. Chris Swanson, and wife, Maggie, of Jacksonville, FL; his granddaughter, Ingrid, and husband, William Moss, of Glastonbury, CT; his great-grandson, Callum Elmer Moss; his sister-in-law, Emma Jane Shaner of Bellevue, NE; two nieces – Leslie and husband Bryan Slone of Omaha, NE; Kim and husband Dennis Briggs of Trinity, FL.

Funeral services will be Tuesday, August 16th at 10:00 a.m. at Zion Lutheran Church, 183 Williams Street, Portland. Burial will follow in the Swedish Cemetery.

Friends may call on Monday evening, August 15th, from 5:00 -7:00 p.m. at Doolittle Funeral Home, 14 Old Church Street, Middletown. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Zion Lutheran Church Memorial Fund, P.O. Box 202, Portland, CT 06480, or Wesleyan University Cardinal Fund for Athletics, give2athletics.wesleyan.edu. Messages of condolence may be sent to the family at www.doolittlefuneralservice.com.

This Memorial Obituary provided by [Doolittle Funeral Home](#)