



Mentor, coach Wyatt remembered

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Willie Wyatt, longtime teacher and coach who died Sunday morning, was very instrumental in helping integrate Maury County schools.

A friend and a mentor to hundreds of students, Wyatt, 78, began his coaching career at Carver-Smith, an all-black high school in Columbia, in 1963. He served as a coach in girls' basketball and baseball, and was an assistant coach in football for head coach Tom Robinson.

When the integration period began in Maury County, Wyatt became a teacher and coach at Whitthorne Middle School where he remained until his retirement. Wyatt played a lead role in building good racial relations during this important era for local schools.

"Willie was a great ambassador for us in building relations and bringing our community together," said retired Central High School principal Glen Stewart, who came to Columbia in 1965. "Willie was one of the finest men I've known. Everyone who met him as a teacher or as a greeter at Maury Regional Hospital, they all felt better for having met him." when away feeling better."

Wyatt's guidance influenced the progress of many students, including Columbia native Bernard Childress, who is the executive director of the Tennessee Secondary Schools Athletic Association.

"I am still devastated. Coach Wyatt was one of my longtime mentors and very close friends," said Childress. "He helped shape my life and the path I am currently on with his advice and examples he set. Coach Wyatt was an outstanding family man and role model. He touched so many lives in a positive way.

"Right now, I cannot visualize not being able to pick up the phone and call him for advice or just talk as friends. He will be truly missed. He has, however, left a wonderful legacy for us to continue building on," Childress said.

Wyatt served as football coach and boys' basketball coach for several years at Whitthorne. The gymnasium at the school is named for him.

"Other than my father (Cecil), Willie was my role model," said Whitthorne Middle School football coach Andra Bullock. "He was like a mentor to me as a student, an athlete and later a teacher and a coach."

Bullock looked to Wyatt for advice event in recent years.

"Even after his retirement, Willie would stop by our football practices. When he came, we would stop our practice, and I would let him talk to our players. Everybody respected him," he said.

John Pointer, owner of the local Sears Hometown Store and one of many local successful student/athletes, reflected on what Wyatt meant to him.

"It's ironic that Coach Wyatt had just called me just a few weeks ago. He stated that he was only calling just to check on me and to see how I was doing," said Pointer. "Upon informing him of what was going on in my world, he

responded with joy and continual encouragement.”

Wyatt’s influence leaves a lasting positive impression on many people. “This is man that I will always miss. He had a genuine way to make you feel good about yourself and to always trust your instincts,” said Pointer.

Scott Gaines, an assistant director for Maury County Schools, said Wyatt was a lifetime mentor for him. Gaines played football in the mid 1970’s for Whitthorne when Wyatt was the coach. .

“He (Wyatt) always kept all of us straight. He was a great coach and a great mentor. Not only did he keep us straight on the football field, he looked after us in school. Even after I left junior high and went on to high school, he still was always a mentor and checking on us.

“When I became a teacher and he retired, he still remained a mentor in the community and church as well,” said Gaines.

After retirement, Wyatt spent several years working for Maury Regional Hospital security as a greeter where he gained many more acquaintances, and also saw many of his former students. He retired in December, 2013.

“Willie was a caring person. He had an infectious smile,” said Pat Troope, former Director of Security at Maury Regional. “Hospital visitors and co-workers always had a positive feeling after being around him.”

Wyatt graduated from Carver-Smith and was recruited by Tennessee State University among several other schools, but chose to continue his academics and athletics at Maryland State University.

In 2011, Wyatt was inducted into the Maryland State University Hall of Fame. He was a quarterback for the school’s football team and a pitcher on the baseball squad. An injury shortened his football career, but he once fanned 18 batters in a no-hit pitching performance.

Wyatt was sought by many professional baseball organizations, but preferred to stay closer to home and signed with the Philadelphia Phillies who placed him with their Johnson City team in East Tennessee. Again, injuries halted his pro career.

Wyatt is survived by his wife, Randolph who is also a retired Maury County teacher, and daughter Kim, who lives in Virginia and a son William, who lives in Minnesota.

Funeral arrangements have not been finalized. V.K. Ryan Funeral Home in Columbia is in charge of the arrangements.

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