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OBITUARIES

Carmen Cozza, Hall of Fame Football Coach at Yale, Dies at 87

By FRANK LITSKY JAN. 4, 2018

Carmen Cozza, who won 10 Ivy League championships in his 32 years as Yale's head football coach, died on Thursday in New Haven. He was 87.

His daughter Karen Pollard said the cause was complications of acute leukemia. He died at Smilow Cancer Hospital at Yale.

Cozza, who was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 2002, was named coach of the year seven times by the American Football Coaches Association. From 1965 through 1996, his teams compiled a 179-119-5 record.

In one dominant stretch, from 1974 to 1981, the Bulldogs won seven of eight Ivy League titles, and in almost half his seasons as head coach his teams lost no more than two games.

His most celebrated year was 1968, when his team, led by the future N.F.L. star running back Calvin Hill and the quarterback Brian Dowling, who also went on to play in the National Football League, went undefeated.

But it was the one game Yale did not win that season, against its archrival, Harvard, that proved most memorable.

It was the season finale. Both teams were unbeaten. Yale led, 29-13, with 42 seconds left when Harvard scored on a 15-yard pass. A pass for a 2-point conversion

failed, but Yale was called for pass interference. Harvard then ran successfully for the 2 points and trailed, 29-21.

Harvard then recovered an onside kickoff and, on a play that started with three seconds left and ended with no time left, scored on an 8-yard pass. The rules allowed a conversion attempt even though the clock had run out, and Harvard completed a pass for the 2 yards and a 29-29 tie.

The Harvard Crimson banner headline after the game famously declared, "Harvard Beats Yale 29-29."

Like that of other Ivy coaches, Cozza's success was made difficult by the league's ban on athletic scholarships, enacted in 1945 (though the universities could continue to offer players financial aid).

Still, he turned out 15 players who went on to the N.F.L. Besides Calvin Hill and Brian Dowling, they included Rich Diana, John Spagnola, Dick Jauron, Kenny Hill and Gary Fencik.

Cozza recruited many of his players personally. Dowling had been heavily courted by Ohio State and Michigan but was won over by Cozza's overtures.

Five of Cozza's players became Rhodes scholars. Of his 1,500 or so players, only seven who completed their eligibility failed to graduate.

Dowling said Cozza had understood his players' priorities.

"My freshman year, we had four tackles," he told The Los Angeles Times in 1996. "On Thursdays, they all had labs, so we just lined up without tackles on offense and defense. That wouldn't happen at Ohio State or Michigan."

In Cozza's heyday, his teams were stocked with exceptional players. But after the 1981 season, the talent thinned out, in part because Ivy League universities began using a statistical admissions system that combined high school class rankings and S.A.T. scores, hampering Cozza's success in recruiting top prospects with marginal academic achievements.

Another blow was the Ivy League's demotion by the N.C.A.A. in 1982 to Division I-AA, made up of lesser football powers. That hurt Yale's ability to schedule major teams and was viewed as discouraging the best players from going there.

Robert Barton, a Yale football historian, said in an interview that Cozza's strength "was in building an organization."

"Carm tried to hire lieutenants whose judgment he could trust," he said, "let them do their job, refereed when they had to choose whether a kid played offense or defense, and saw to it that no disagreements went beyond the coaches' conference room."

Carmen Louis Cozza, who was universally known as Carm, was born to Italian immigrants on June 10, 1930, in Parma, Ohio. At Miami University of Ohio he played both football and baseball, winning letters as a quarterback, halfback and safety and as a pitcher and an outfielder. His football coaches were Ara Parseghian, who went on to renown at Notre Dame, and Woody Hayes, who did the same at Ohio State.

After graduation, in 1952, Cozza played minor league baseball for two and a half years, in the Cleveland Indians and Chicago White Sox farm systems, before coaching high school football at Gilmour Academy, a Roman Catholic school in Gates Mills, Ohio.

From 1956 to 1962 he was a Miami of Ohio football assistant under John Pont. He also earned a master's degree in education from Miami in 1959.

When Pont became the Yale coach in 1963, Cozza went along as an assistant. He became head coach in 1965 after Pont was named head coach at Indiana.

Cozza's head-coaching debut at the Yale Bowl was inauspicious, however: a loss to Connecticut. Afterward, Charley Loftus, Yale's sports information director, remarked that Cozza had received a telegram from the alumni association saying: "There's a train leaving for New York at 4 o'clock. Be under it."

In retirement Cozza was a fund-raiser for Yale sports, helping with the renovation of the Yale Bowl in particular, and a radio game analyst for Yale football

games.

Besides his daughter Karen, Cozza, who lived in Orange, Conn., is survived by his wife, Jean Cozza; two other daughters, Kathryn Tutino and Kristen Powell; and five grandchildren.

For all his victories on the playing field, Cozza was equally proud of his players' classroom success. "I always loved to joke with the alumni that I had to be the best pre-med and pre-law coach in the nation," he told The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. "No one had as many doctors and lawyers as I did."

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