

Longtime Landrum coach Steve Coley dies after battle with cancer

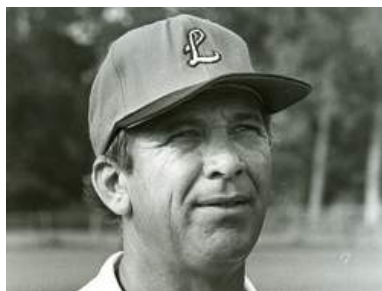
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For the Herald-Journal

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Steve Coley's legacy at Landrum High School is bigger than having his name on the baseball field at the old school.

The longtime coach, educator and administrator died Wednesday at age 71 after a battle with cancer.



Steve Coley

For many years Coley was as synonymous with Landrum as the school's red cardinal logo.

"You cannot mention Landrum High School athletics and not think of Coach Steve Coley," said John Cann, the current athletic director at T.L. Hanna High School who spent 13 years at Landrum as football coach and athletic director.

Coley coached baseball for much of his career, starting the program in 1972 and posting a 377-185 record. He led Landrum to its first state championship three years later and won two more upper state championships.

Coley played four sports as a student at Landrum. He was the quarterback on the school's first football team in 1959 and ran for 14 touchdowns, kicked extra points and intercepted 12 passes (returning three for touchdowns) as a senior in 1960.

When Coley was a Cardinal, the school didn't have a baseball team so he played for the Chapman Panthers. He then played four years at UNC Wilmington on a baseball scholarship and signed with the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1965. He was in the Pirates organization for three years and spent four with the Boston Red Sox.

"It was a lot of bus rides and breakdowns," he said in 2012. "It was a pretty rough life but we didn't think it was rough at the time."

Coley said he got frustrated with professional baseball in the early '70s.

"You look to see where you're going to be in the next five years and I didn't see myself in the big leagues," he said. "So I came home."

He had started working as a coach at Landrum during his offseasons and went into coaching and teaching after he left baseball.

"My main influences in life were my coaches," Coley said in 2012. "It seemed like my niche, my role. I stayed in education for 44 years."

His role became his life.

He coached basketball for 10 years, was football coach from 1976 to 1985 (winning a conference title in 1979), and spent many years as the athletic director. He coached in the North-South all-star football and baseball games.

In 1995 Coley's Cardinals fielded a team in every sport and Landrum was the only 1A school in the state to do so.

"Coach Coley put Landrum on the map regarding high school athletics," Landrum athletic director Mike Gentry said, "and that was a huge feat for a 1A high school."

Petty Funeral Home will announce arrangements.

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