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Legendary coach dies: Jim Liggett, much loved at Carlmont, had impact on entire Peninsula

By Nathan Mollat Daily Journal Staff Jun 7, 2017



Jim Liggett, a former teacher and coach at Carlmont High School, died Sunday at age 76. Liggett retired from coaching softball in 2016. He previously coached football, wrestling, girlsâ soccer, frosh-soph girlsâ basketball and baseball, and also served as the schoolâs athletic director for six years.

Jim Liggett, who coached the Carlmont softball team to more than 1,000 wins during a 40-plus year career, died Sunday.

His daughter Susan said in a Facebook post he died from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as ALS or Lou Gerhig’s disease. He was 76.

Terry Stogner, current Peninsula Athletic League commissioner who was Carlmont’s athletic director for 28 years and longtime varsity boys’ basketball coach, first began teaching and coaching with Liggett in 1967 and was a longtime friend who was aware of Liggett’s condition.

“That ALS was just eating him up,” Stogner said.

There is no word yet on pending funeral and memorial services.

From the time Liggett took over the Carlmont program in 1976, the Scots have been a softball powerhouse. During a career that saw him compile a record of 1,009-216-4, a state record, he led the Scots to 28 South Peninsula and Peninsula Athletic League titles, including 10 straight SPAL crowns from 1976 to 1985. He qualified the Scots for the Central Coast Section playoffs in every 41 years of his tenure, appeared in 14 CCS championship games and won eight section titles.

But Liggett was more than just a softball coach.

“Everyone thinks of him as just softball, but ... our locker room used to have old team photos. There’s a picture of him with the girls’ JV or frosh-soph basketball team,” said current Carlmont athletic director Patrick Smith. “He was a PE teacher, math department head, worked with the booster club for years and years. He didn’t just show up and coach.

“He was the face of Carlmont. An icon. He knew so much history of the school. When a guy like that passes on, he’s going to take a lot with him, unfortunately.”

Stogner said Liggett’s coaching career spanned the breadth of high school sports. He went 114-42 in 14 years as the Scots’ head football coach, winning seven SPAL titles and the 1990 CCS championship. He won a league title as the baseball coach in 1972, while also serving as a wrestling coach, girls’ frosh-soph basketball and soccer and even served as the school’s athletic director for six years.

“Because he could,” Stogner said when asked why Liggett took on so many coaching duties. “An ability to do it. A command of the room. The one thing I think was so strong with him was his consistency. He was the same guy in 1972 as he was in 2007.”

As good a coach as Liggett was, no coach can be successful without having talent and the names that played for Liggett are a who’s who of county softball royalty: Deanna Earsley, Tori Nyberg, Jerrica Castagno and Ashley Chinn are just a few of Liggett’s former players who went on to play college ball at the Division I level.



Chinn, who was an all-league selection from 2004 to 2007 and went on to pitch for Stanford, was a member of the Scots for Liggett’s 700th and 800th wins.

“[Liggett] will say it’s all because of his players,” Chinn told the Daily Journal after Carlmont beat Capuchino for his 1,000 win April 12, 2016. “But you can’t bring out that talent without a good coach and he has a way of doing that.”

Not only did Liggett mold the lives of hundreds of players, he also impacted the coaching ranks around the PAL and CCS.

“As far as I’m concerned, he forced me to be a much better coach,” said an emotional Randy Metheany, who coached against Liggett as Hillsdale’s coach for 21 years. “To get to the top of the mountain was set by him and his teams. ... You couldn’t set the bar any higher than he set it. ... He made me a better coach. ... He was the one program who gave the PAL the ultimate respect in CCS. Our league is so well respected in CCS and the coaching world and you can’t attribute that to anything more than the way Jim set up his program.”

Liggett was a 1959 graduate of Mt. Diablo High School in Concord, where he was all-county football, basketball and baseball player. He was inducted into the school’s athletic hall of fame in 2007. He was inducted into the Peninsula Sports Hall of Fame in 1999 and the California Coaches’ Association Hall of Fame in 2006.

He earned a baseball scholarship to Cal, but only spent one season with the Golden Bears before being drafted by the Baltimore Orioles in 1960 at the age of 19. He spent the next seven seasons in the Orioles’ farm system, reaching as high as Triple-A with Vancouver of the Pacific Coast League and Rochester of the International League in 1965 at the age of 24. An outfielder, he appeared in 775 minor-league games and was a lifetime .293 hitter, with 32 home runs and 77 RBIs.

“It’s just sad,” Metheany said. “He did so many wonderful things for the players and students at Carlmont.”



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