

Before the internet, there was Mike Henderson

Written by Mike Condon

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Want to know who the leading scorer is for your favorite Iowa prep team?

That's easy. Look at quikstatsiowa.com.

Back in 2004, the internet was still developing. For those of us who covered high school sports, there was one guy we all turned to for information.

That guy was Mike Henderson.

Ten years ago today - on Dec. 30, 2004 - Henderson was working another of his many long nights past midnight as the information director for the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union when he called 911 saying he couldn't breathe. He died later that day from emphysema combined with sleep apnea at age 63. His untimely death left a void that has never really been filled by another human being.

It took technology to match what we got from Mike on a daily basis.

Mike was the guy who made sure every score was recorded, every point was accounted for and every record was updated. If there was ever a question about any statistic in any sport, all a coach or media member had to do was call Mike and he would have the answer.

More often than not, those answers came off the top of his head. If by chance he didn't know the answer, it didn't take him long to find it and get back to you with what you needed.

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Mike began working for the IGHSAU in 1973. He also helped the Iowa High School Athletic Association gather scores in boys sports and determine football playoff qualifiers in his "free time".

Media members and coaches had a human internet for 31 years.

The knowledge in Henderson's head extended far beyond the high school arena. He was key member of the Drake Relays staff for 40 years, worked on the statistics crew for Drake football and men's and women's basketball games and helped at national and Olympic-level track meets across the country.

Despite all those credentials, Mike's first love was always the high schools. He would spend night after night in his basement office with a radio on, picking up broadcasts from all over the state so he could be informed.

You rarely saw Mike watching an event. He was the guy behind the scenes, getting the stats up to date, picking the brains of coaches and media members for information that could be shared with others.

Mike didn't care if a player was an all-stater or a deep reserve. He wanted to be sure the information was right for every player on every roster in every sport.

He was the same way with the media. It didn't matter if you were from the Des Moines Register or the hometown paper covering the smallest school in the state, Mike was available and willing to help.

It's a good bet none of today's prep athletes in Iowa know about Henderson.

They may not know the man, but they all continue to benefit from his contributions to high

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school athletics for both girls and boys. Never married, the athletes were Mike's "family" until the day he died.

Henderson and longtime IGHS AU Executive Director E. Wayne Cooley treated the "Iowa Girl" like a queen. Girls athletics in Iowa were a big deal long before they were in any other state. Mike made sure of that. He also made sure the boys got their due as well.

I searched the internet hoping to find a picture of Mike to go with this article. It didn't surprise me there wasn't one to be found of the human internet.

The pictures, the stories, the accolades? Those were for the athletes.

Mike Henderson's joy came from making sure the information was available to make those stories as interesting and accurate as possible.