

Hall of Fame coach Joe Kenney dies

Written by Mike Koolbeck

Saturday, 22 January 2011 02:27 - Last Updated Monday, 24 January 2011 00:22



I didn't know Joe Kenney well, but I knew him well enough.

I got to know Joe when he was an assistant baseball coach at Washington during the 1970s. He was the guy who was chalking and talking when you reached the baseball field at Washington, and he always had a kind word.

I was a gangly junior with a permanent spot on the Jefferson bench. I don't think Bopper knew my name.

Joe knew me. He called me Koolbecky, as in "Well, Koolbecky, how are we doing today?"

He always said it with a smile and, even though your jersey may have read J-Hawks instead of Warriors, he always wished you well.

He was a nice guy.

Joe Kenney passed away Friday. He was 86.

His obit says he was a World War II tailgunner on a B-24 bomber in the Army Air Corps. It also says he graduated from the University of Iowa with bachelor's and master's degrees and went on to teach and coach at St. Patrick, LaSalle, Washington and Jefferson High Schools. It says he is a member of the Iowa High School Baseball Coaches Association Hall of Fame, the Jefferson Academic, Baseball and Booster Club Halls of Fame, and the LaSalle, Regis and Xavier Alumni Hall of Fame.

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Those accomplishments are duly noted, as are his 753 career victories as a high school baseball coach that rank 11th all time in the state of Iowa.

But what is more important is the imprint he left on the players he coached and the coaches he mentored.

Jefferson Athletics Director Scott Kibby filled the bill in both categories. He played baseball at Jefferson in the 1981-82 seasons when Kenney was coach, then served as Kenney's assistant from 1986 until Kenney's retirement in 1997.

"I am a better man for knowing and working with Coach Kenney," Kibby said in an email he sent notifying us about Kenney's passing.

Services for Joe are Monday at 10 a.m. at St. Patrick. If a small fraction of the people whose lives he touched show up, it will be an overflow crowd.