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BOB FISH 1942-2012

Longtime coach, AD dies of cancer

PREPS: New York personality made Fish a character at Mira Costa.

By Tony Ciniglio Staff Writer

Mira Costa will be quieter and a little sadder this week.

Longtime coach and athletic director Bob Fish died Sunday at his Yorba Linda home after a brief battle with pancreatic cancer. He was 70.

Fish had a larger-than-life persona serving as a gregarious track and field and cross country coach for 23 years while also serving a 10-year stint as athletic director.

His voice often bellowed throughout the Manhattan Beach campus, whether it was his energetic reading of the morning announcements, his coaching or just another spirited Fish conversation.

"He was dynamic, funny, he was just a character," Mira Costa girls cross country coach Renee Williams-Smith said. "He had such a gruff exterior, but he was such a teddy bear on the inside."

Fish was told two weeks ago that the pancreatic cancer was at an advanced stage and that he had only two months to live.

His death was even more sudden, which made Williams-Smith thankful for a chance to see him Thursday with a small group at his Yorba Linda home.

"A lot of people are going to miss him. He touched a lot of people," Williams-Smith said.

Fish was not afraid to share his opinions, right or wrong, and was known for one-liners.

But as passionate as his arguing got, he held no grudges and was almost a celebrity figure at the school.

"I was the heart and soul of this school. Must be my New York personality, that Type-A personality," Fish told the Daily Breeze on July 8, 2009, obviously having fun. "Growing up in New York, you need a sharp wit. If you don't have it, you'll be picked on mercilessly. It's best to go on the offensive."

Fish stepped down as athletic director in 2009, but had returned to coach cross country the last two seasons.

Fish had expressed gratitude for being able to return this season with a lighter workload.

"I think this is a really good deal for me," Fish told the Daily Breeze Aug. 14. "It allows me freedom. And I get to run the program I love and have been successful with. I'm really happy about it."

Fish was college roommates with NBA commissioner David Stern for three years at Rutgers. A third roommate became the treasurer of New Jersey.

Fish had the admiration of his team and his opponents.

The Palos Verdes program, which made joint trips with Mira Costa for summer training in Mammoth, wore white T-shirts at the CIF finals and CIF state finals the last two weeks with green letters "FISH" blazed on their chests to honor Fish.

"He didn't hold back. He said what he thought," Palos Verdes co-coach Brian Shapiro said. "The kids absolutely respected him, even if he sounded angry, which was frequently. At Mammoth, I got to see him interact with his kids up close. It was clear that even when he was being fussy, it was done with love."

Funeral services are pending.

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