

Widgeon

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The University of North Carolina has designated the day as the 24th annual NCHSAA Day. The new class will officially be inducted at the special Hall of Fame banquet in the spring at the George Watts Hill Alumni Center at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Widgeon carved out a special career as a high school athlete, collegiate athlete and outstanding coach in several sports. He played on the 1953 NCHSAA state 1-A basketball championship team at Newport High School and then was a two-sport standout at Atlantic Christian College. Widgeon was a teacher and coach at Bailey High School from 1957-1964, where he coached three sports, most notably the women's basketball team that won a phenomenal 107 games in a row.

From 1964-1991 he served at West, winning 342 games in 23 years as head basketball coach and also coaching men's golf for 27 seasons, winning eight regular-season championships in that sport. He also served as the athletic director at West for 10 years.

The most notable season Widgeon had at West came in 1984-1985 when he piloted the boys basketball team to a 25-5 record and the NCHSAA 3A state championship with a 66-59 victory over Statesville.

Despite those numerous impressive accolades, Widgeon is humble and quick to point to others for his accomplishments.

"Oh, there's no doubt that I was fortunate to have some really good teams," he said. "Yes, I had a lot of really good teams, but you have to have a lot of luck and a lot of talented players. Those teams that won 107 games in a row, the girls were pretty terrific ballplayers."

Widgeon is also quite self-

deprecating when presented with his impressive resume.

"I had some success, but one year I helped coach the junior varsity football team at West, and I think the football program is still trying to recover from that."

Mark Mansfield, who was recently named head basketball coach of the lady Patriots, was a senior on the 1984-1985 championship team and credits Widgeon for his present coaching career.

"He was a very good teacher, and he expected success from his team," explained Mansfield. "He was an excellent motivator. He could do it with a few choice words or a pat on the back. He told you what you needed to hear, like a father, and that is what parents are supposed to do. He was like a father to a lot of us. A lot of my coaching style comes from him and Rodney Kemp. They are both class individuals. You won't find any better than the two of them."

According to Mansfield, that fatherly influence included a healthy dose of discipline.

"He was a coach from that era," said Mansfield. "He was old school. Some of the things he did wouldn't work today, because the world is a different place. I mean, parents knew better than to come up and talk to him after games about their kids' playing time. And as a player, you didn't talk to him about playing time either. He wasn't ugly about it, that was just the way it was then. All those guys were like that back then, coach (Gordon) Patrick was like that, too."

And Widgeon never demonstrated that firm hand of discipline more than in Mansfield's freshman season.

"My freshman year, I was playing on the junior varsity, and one of my fellow freshman, Daryl Parmley, was on the varsity," said Mansfield. "One

night, Daryl skipped practice to go watch the East Carteret game. So, (East coach) Cecil Lilley calls coach (Widgeon) after the game to ask him if we had practice that night, because he saw Daryl at the game.

"Coach kicked Daryl off the team for that, and he was the best player on the team. In fact, he's one of the best players to ever come out of this county. He (Widgeon) didn't take any disrespect from players, and he wouldn't sacrifice wins for the respect he demanded from his players."

Widgeon routinely took the Patriots to the state championship tournament, including Mansfield's junior season when West went 25-4 and lost in the semifinals to the eventual champion by just three points.

Jay Kennedy, Mansfield's brother-in-law, also experienced successful basketball seasons as a Patriot as West made the state championship tournament three out of four years during his time at the school. Kennedy, too, remembers Widgeon's disciplinarian style.

"I remember one of the things he would do when we weren't playing up to his standards was to make us run suicides," explained Kennedy. "He would turn on the clock for 10 or 20 minutes and instruct us to start, and he would go in his office and come out when the buzzer went off. He was definitely an authority figure. He had our respect."

"The greatest thing you can probably say about him is that he didn't care if you were his best player or worst player. He treated you the same, and he didn't play favorites. He demanded the best from everyone."

However, Widgeon's greatest impact on Kennedy's life came on the golf course where Kennedy made all-conference each of his four seasons at West before going on to become a two-

time All-American at Guilford College. Kennedy is a member of both the West and Guilford College Hall of Fame.

"He deserves every honor that he receives," added Kennedy. "He has had a tremendous impact on the lives of numerous young people in this county. I know me and Mark sit around and tell Billy Widgeon stories all of the time."

Another former pupil who thinks back often to his time as a pupil under Widgeon's tutelage is West boys basketball coach for the past 10 years, Craig McClanahan. Widgeon had an impact on McClanahan before he ever suited up for the Patriots.

"When I was in the eighth grade, I would watch their practices, and I knew that one day I wanted to play for Widgeon," said McClanahan. "Even at that time, he was a legend on the state level."

McClanahan, like Mansfield and Kennedy, also benefited from Widgeon's successful tenure at West with a trip to the state championship tournament his senior year. There, the Patriots lost to an undefeated Thomasville team by three points. And like Mansfield, McClanahan attributes much of his coaching philosophy and style to his time with Widgeon.

"I'm coaching today because of him," said McClanahan. "Him and men like Rodney Kemp, Donnie Leatherman, Jimmy Swan, Gordie Patrick, those are the men that I want to emulate. We never questioned him. What he said was gospel. He was the type of coach every high school player would love to play for and was one of the best coaches that I ever had a chance to play for. He was a great motivator, and we had a lot of respect for him. You just wanted to please him. Widgeon was one of the best."