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Friday, November 30, 2007

Former Cal Poly Coach Tom Lee Passes Away at Age 90

SAN LUIS OBISPO, Calif. -- Tom Lee, who coached boxing, baseball, football and basketball and even served as athletic trainer at Cal Poly, passed away at his home in San Luis Obispo Nov. 29, 2007, surrounded by family members.

A memorial service in his honor is scheduled for Friday, Dec. 7, at 10 a.m. at the Old Mission Church in San Luis Obispo.

He celebrated his 90th birthday with family members on Nov. 6.

Lee was inducted into the Cal Poly Athletics Hall of Fame in 1990.

He was perhaps best known for coaching the Mustang boxing team from 1952-61, producing one national champion, five Pacific Coast Intercollegiate champions and 25 NCAA Boxing Coaches Association champions.

Lee was considered one of the top coaches in the nation and held boxing clinics internationally as well. Among his former boxers are Cal Poly Athletics Hall of Fame members Donald Adams, Vic Buccola, Eduardo Ochoa (a 1957 national champion) and Frank Loduca.

Lee came to Cal Poly in 1952 and coached the Mustang freshman football team from 1952-62 and the varsity baseball squad in 1953 and 1955. He also was an assistant varsity football coach from 1963-69 under head coaches Sheldon Harden and Joe Harper, an assistant varsity basketball coach for the 1963-64 and 1964-65 seasons under head coach Ed Jorgensen and served as athletic trainer from 1952-64.

Lee also was an assistant football coach at Cuesta College from 1972-77 and served as a scout for the Dallas Cowboys for 14 years from the late 1960s to the early 1980s.

Lee guided the 1959 Mustang freshman football team to an undefeated season and, in 1960, upset the highly favored UCLA Bruin. He is a past president of the National Intercollegiate Boxing Association and served the U.S. State Department on a summer coaching tour of the Orient, preparing Japanese and South Korean boxers for the 1960 Olympics.

Born in Miles City, Montana, on Nov. 6, 1917, Lee graduated from Bismarck, North Dakota, High School in 1935, where he lettered three times each in football, basketball and baseball. He played with Satchel Paige on the inaugural NBC Semi-Pro World Series championship team in 1935, played professional baseball in the Cincinnati Reds organization and was a Golden Gloves boxing champion in the mid-1930s.



The second of three boys, Lee moved his family to the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1930s. He was a player-coach of a traveling semi-pro basketball team known as the Bismarck Phantoms, playing exhibitions against the Harlem Globetrotters, among other teams, and Lee also was an instructor at a private Oakland gym.

Lee was drafted in the early 1940s and served for the U.S. Army's artillery unit in the European Theatre from 1941-45 under General George Patton, operating a 155mm howitzer.

Lee returned to North Dakota following World War II and attended the University of North Dakota for two years, lettering twice each in football as a halfback and basketball. He transferred to San Jose State, graduating in 1949 with a bachelor's degree in physical education, and earned his master's in physical education at Stanford in 1950.

Lee married his wife, Anne Mikulich, following World War II and they had four children: Renee Dugan, 64; Mike Lee, 56; Terry Lee, who turns 52 on Sunday; and Larry Lee, who turns 48 on Dec. 12. Larry is preparing for his sixth season as head baseball coach at Cal Poly. Tom's wife passed away in 1990.

Lee, who headed the initial push for creation of the recreation department at Cal Poly in 1973, one year after earning another master's degree in recreation from Cal State Los Angeles, retired in 1988 after 36 years of service as a coach and as an instructor in the physical education and recreation departments.

During his retirement years, Lee placed his family first, spending countless hours with his nine grandchildren. He attended numerous sporting events and oversaw the teaching of private swimming lessons by family members.

Lee taught swimming lessons from 1955 to the mid-1990s and he and his wife started a program of community youth and adult swimming lessons at Nuss Pool. In conjunction with the San Luis Obispo Recreation Department, Lee organized the biddy basketball and flag football programs, using students from Cal Poly's recreation department. Lee also was involved in Junior Olympics and Special Olympics.

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