



COLLEGE SPORTS

Miami-Dade coaching legend, Bill Alheim, dies at 86

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South Florida lost one of its most beloved basketball figures last week. Bill Alheim, the Miami-Dade North College legendary coach and community leader, died on Sept. 17 at age 86 of natural causes.

Anybody who followed the local basketball scene in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s surely knew of Alheim, who was referred to as “The Godfather of Dade County basketball,” said former player and assistant coach, David Zimroth, who went on to be an assistant at Florida State University and University of South Florida.

Alheim, a native of Schenectady, N.Y. who played at Wake Forest, inherited a three-year-old men's basketball program at Dade-North in 1963, and by the time he retired in 1989, had led the team to a national championship game, three regional championships, four state championships, and 560 victories.

The Falcons won 33 games in a row and reached the No. 1 national ranking in 1982 with All-American Emery Atkinson and 6-10 Yvon Joseph, a Haitian volleyball player-turned-center. They lost the national title game in Hutchinson, Kan., 93-88 in double-overtime, to a Midland, Tex., team that featured future NBA player Spud Webb.

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Alheim had just one losing season over three decades, and 20 of his 25 teams won at least 20 games. Among his many accolades, he was named National Junior College Coach of the Year in 1984 and was inducted into the junior college basketball Hall of Fame.

“It’s hard to put into words what Bill Alheim did for this community,” said Zimroth. “He brought people together for 30-plus years, gave inner-city young men opportunities nobody else did, and provided through his Dade North Summer League a safe haven for people of all races, creeds, and religions.

“People would come from all over and gather in that un-airconditioned gym in Opa-Locka to play ball and socialize. They’d get there at 6, leave at 10. Lifelong friendships were made there. Never a problem. With all that’s going on today, I look back at those days in that gym and that was glorious. It was all because of Coach Alheim. He was revered.”

Over his tenure, 85 players went on to play on scholarship at senior colleges. Among his former players of note, in addition to Atkinson and Joseph, were John Haslem (father of Heat star Udonis), Jerry Bisbano, Willie Wilcox, Clarence Strong, Tony Fairley, and Leroy Wilson.

“In a sense, (Alheim) developed basketball in South Florida,” former Dade-North athletic director and baseball coach Demie Mainieri told the Miami Herald in a story about Alheim’s retirement in 1989. “We started running the summer league and, for the first time, kids were playing basketball year-round. During the Liberty City riots, we were one of the only places that stayed open. Bill felt such an allegiance to the inner city that we kept it open. Instead of being out rioting, we had people in the stands watching basketball.”

Alheim is survived by his sons Billy Jr., Kenny; granddaughter Michelle; great grandson Isiah and step granddaughter Nicole. He was predeceased by his wife Helen.

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