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Today's Top Stories

Friday July 21, 2006



Photo: [Craig Cunningham](#)

Ken Legg has spent 58 of his 82 years calling the action on local football fields and basketball courts, but the veteran official has decided to hang up his uniform and turn in his whistle. He is retiring after six decades of service.

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Veteran football and basketball official retiring after 58 years
By Tom Aluise

Legg calling it quits

Tom Aluise

Daily Mail sportswriter

Friday July 21, 2006

Considering he's a lifelong bachelor, you wonder why 82-year-old Ken Legg felt a need to listen to a woman now.

In this case, it was a wise move. And Ken Legg is anything, it's wise.

"I think it's time now to cooperate with Mother Nature," Legg said. "I think she's telling me what direction to take."



if

For almost 60 years, Legg has been hustling in the direction of West Virginia's football fields and basketball courts as a game official. The Fayette County native began working football games in 1948 -- the same year Babe Ruth died -- and jumped into basketball the following year.

Now, Legg has decided it's time to call it quits. No more striped shirts. No more whistles. No more unhappy coaches,

although Legg knew exactly how to handle those guys.

"After 58 years, I think it's time," said Legg, who lives in Charleston. "I'm just not enthusiastic about it anymore. There's a lot of preparation. You have to study the rules and go to clinics. And I really don't like to travel anymore."

On Monday, Legg turns 83. Exactly one week later, high school football season officially opens across the state with the start of summer practice.

For Legg's friends in the Kanawha Valley Football Officials Association -- as well as area coaches at all levels -- it's certain to be a strange season without seeing the tall, trim Legg throwing yellow flags on the field and raising red flags in KVFOA meetings.

"He was our icon," said Butch Hughes, a 33-year veteran Kanawha Valley official and football coach, first at East Bank Junior High and now at East Bank Middle.

"Everybody looked up to Ken. I can't think of anybody who didn't like Ken because of his honesty and sincerity. I'm going to miss him just being around."

Legg's roots in the KVFOA run deep. He helped write the association's constitution and served as the organization's parliamentarian.

If there were a question about a rule, protocol or procedure, Legg usually had an answer. And it typically was delivered eloquently and convincingly. A former state legislator, Legg also spent 30-plus years as the executive secretary of the West Virginia School Service Personnel Association, an agency that works on behalf of the non-teaching employees in the state's public schools.

"When Mr. Legg spoke," said KVFOA President Tim Thomas, "people listened. At any business meeting, if we ever got out of line, Mr. Legg put us back in line."

"He was very strong in negotiations," said longtime area football official Bob Maxwell Sr., who retired last season after 47 years of service. "If someone was going off the deep end in the wrong direction, Kenny had the ability to pull them back in line."

A 1941 Oak Hill High graduate, Legg went on to excel in three sports at West Virginia Tech. He was a principal and teacher for nine years in Fayette County and even coached two seasons of high school basketball.

Legg's 1954 Pax High team, featuring the late Stonewall Jackson basketball coach Don Stover, won a Class B state title.

Legg earned universal respect by incorporating all of his talents as a teacher, coach, politician and negotiator into his efforts as a football and basketball official on the middle school, high school and college levels.

Legg even refereed three Harlem Globetrotter games.

"He was quite the diplomat," veteran Riverside football Coach Dick Whitman said. "He would have made a great U.N. ambassador.

"He was really good about explaining a situation -- how he saw it -- which is a good way to diffuse a situation. He was never confrontational. Some officials have a chip on their shoulder. Kenny was never that way."

"His people skills were great," Butch Hughes said. "He could take a coach who was irate and calm the storm. People weren't going to argue with Ken Legg."

"If a coach was frustrated," Maxwell said, "he had the ability to calm him down and discuss it in a professional and gentlemanly manner."

Legg credits his knack for relating to coaches to having walked in their shoes.

"When he's under pressure, a coach is not the same as he would be in normal circumstances and sometimes tempers would flare," Legg said.

"I would just go over and listen to what the coach had to say. Then, I would say, 'Coach, if what you described to me really happened out there, then you are correct. Unfortunately, five officials didn't see what you're describing.' Usually that would take care of it.

"I wasn't confrontational. I got along very well with the coaches and a sense of humor helped in that regard. Sometimes a sense of humor could break up a tense moment."

Legg also was known to stick his head into an occasional huddle to tend to unruly players.

"Usually I could calm them down," Legg said. "They'd be in the huddle and I'd get back there with them and caution them about what they were doing because it might result in a penalty."

In the end, Legg always tried to be courteous and respectful to players and coaches.

"I think America is hungry for some common courtesy," he said.

Hughes remembers Legg's devotion to the Kanawha Valley's younger officials, whom he always was eager to help.

Legg often would turn down marquee football games in the Kanawha Valley Conference to travel to places like Matewan or Crum with a young officiating crew.

And working middle school games never was considered a step down for Legg.

"He always found time for Thursday night," Hughes said. "He treated them (middle school games) as serious as a state championship game."

Legg officiated fewer and fewer games during the final years of his career, but remained in very good health. He still takes daily walks and will have plenty to do this fall without a whistle around his neck.

So, don't expect to see Legg in the stands on football Friday nights.

"Right now, I'm singing in a gospel quartet," he said. "We have a lot of engagements. We're pretty busy."

In case you're wondering, Legg is a baritone.

"It's just another hobby I've done all my life," he said.