

Caldwell leaves lasting Mac Legacy

At Coach Don Caldwell's funeral service on Jan. 19, Caldwell's wife, Dorothy thanked the McCallum community for being behind her husband throughout his career. They were all behind him because as multiple generations of McCallum players can attest, he was always behind them. His former players remember him as the man who not only taught them about basketball, football, PE, or drivers ed, but also about life. His colleagues remember his personality, jokes and the way he cared about each and every person in his life.

Assistant basketball Coach Carlin Shaw was one of those able to see him as both a coach and a colleague. A former McCallum student and basketball player, Shaw rejoined the Knights five years ago and coached alongside Coach Caldwell for two years. As a student, Shaw says he learned a lot more than just basketball from his former coach.

"He taught us life lessons even more so than basketball. [He taught me] how to be a man." Shaw said. "It's incorporated into who I am now."

Current varsity coach Daniel Fuentes agreed that Caldwell's teaching transcended basketball.



Courtesy of Spradling

Coach Caldwell, left, was an assistant coach in 1976 when David Spradling, No. 24, was a senior. Spradling's son Emerson played for Caldwell's last team in 2016. Hudson Spradling is a sophomore on the JV team this year.

"He would use the court as his classroom to teach them about life. He was a big influence on the students, and I'm just trying to carry the torch the best I can."

Fuentes began working alongside Coach Caldwell in the summer of 1998, coaching the freshman football team. By the winter and spring, they began coaching basketball together.

"He taught me to become better, to be a student of the game," Fuentes said. "[He taught me to] go listen to other coaches, visit other programs and see what they do because you can't do the same thing with next year's team."

Many of his former players spoke of Caldwell's competitive

spirit. David Spradling, who was a sophomore when Caldwell came to McCallum in 1973, recalled the following story playing in a tournament at the Doris Miller Rec Center alongside Caldwell in 1976, the summer after Spradling graduated.

“

He taught us life lessons even more so than basketball. [He taught me] how to be a man. It’s incorporated into who I am now.”

– Coach Carlin Shaw

“There was a lot of competition,” Spradling said. “We had to play a team with several University of Texas players including the starting center, 6-foot-7 Gary Goodner. Coach played tough defense against him. He played like a train coming down the court with his speed and power. He was making shots from way outside and battled the bigger guys inside. I was a little in awe of our opponent but playing with Coach made me relax and play. He was so competitive and didn’t want to lose. He took it to them and outplayed those UT players. We played them tough but lost in overtime. He and I always talked about that game.”

While his competitive spirit was legendary, his former players agreed that it never got in the way of his humble and kind heart.

“If you were to ask Coach Caldwell how many wins he had, he couldn’t tell you,” Fuentes said. “Very humble.”

Coach Caldwell’s humility did not interfere with his ability to coach well and coach tough.

“His way of showing you that he cared was being hard on you and pushing you,” Shaw said.

Fuentes agreed. “I always say that we coach hard but we love hard, and the kids know that.”

Coach Caldwell's height and reputation made him somewhat intimidating to those who did not know him. Even some of his colleagues even jokingly nicknamed him "the bear."

But Shaw said Caldwell was also a teddy bear.

"He was kind of tough and intimidating, but when you actually spent time around him it was nothing like this," Shaw said. "He was the nicest, sweetest man. He would do anything for you."

"Coach didn't hide who he was, and I think that's what kids loved about him," Fuentes said. "There was an honesty when you talked to him. He was the same person off the court; he wasn't a different guy."



Jacqueline McLellan

Coach Caldwell, far right, talks to his 2015-2016 varsity team after a tough loss to Del Valle Nov. 17. The Cardinals clipped the varsity Knights 73-55, but the JV squad won its game over Del Valle, 57-55, in the final second.

Coach Caldwell also made sure that he encouraged everyone, whether they were on his team or not. On multiple occasions, he would stay behind after games to talk to players and coaches from opposing teams.

“Nowadays people just worry about their team; they don’t worry about the other team,” Fuentes said.

On Nov. 17, 2017, the basketball program named the main McCallum gym the Don Caldwell Gymnasium in his honor. The ceremony, however, came as a complete surprise to Caldwell. To trick him, Fuentes told Coach Caldwell that they were starting up the alumni game tradition again, with Fuentes coaching the varsity and Coach Caldwell coaching the alumni.

“The thing about Coach Caldwell, if he would have known, he wouldn’t have come,” Fuentes said. “He just wanted to retire and nobody make a big deal, but he was such a big deal in our basketball community, and the McCallum community for that matter.”

Coach Caldwell started to realize what was going on when he saw a podium and chairs being set up in the gym. When the banner was unveiled to reveal the real purpose of the event, his reaction was classic Caldwell.

“It wasn’t some big dramatic reaction where people get tears of joy,” Shaw joked. “It was a Coach Caldwell reaction. He looked up. Looked at it, and was like ‘OK.’”

“

Coach didn’t hide who he was, and I think that’s what kids loved about him. There was an honesty when you talked to him. He was the same person off the court; he wasn’t a different guy.”

– Coach Daniel Fuentes

The past two seasons, an alumni game has taken place in that gymnasium to celebrate Coach Caldwell's McCallum legacy. After 45 years of coaching, 43 of which were at McCallum, his legacy has stretched far.

"He's considered to be like the dean of basketball in this area." Fuentes said. "It's hard to gauge how much [of an influence he has had], but we still see it. I'll run into kids, and now the kids of kids, and they keep telling me 'I remember Coach Caldwell when he did this...'. He wasn't just about basketball."

Everyone agreed that Coach Caldwell's legacy is something that will never die.

"With me personally, he inspired me to be a teacher and a coach," Shaw said. "The things that I learned from him I'm teaching my son now. It'll live on forever."

Both Fuentes and Shaw repeated one phrase when asked how to summarize Coach Caldwell's lasting impact on the McCallum community.

"We are his legacy."

More boys basketball coverage



[Boys basketball season ends with loss to Wagner](#)



[Knights win one for Coach Caldwell](#)



Once the young gun, now the old pro