

ORANGE COAST COLLEGE ATHLETICS

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Dennis Harkins, Ph.D., President • Andrew Jones, Ed.D., Chancellor • Board of Trustees: David A. Grant, Mary L. Hornbuckle, Jim Moreno, Jerry Patterson, Lorraine Prinsky, Ph.D., Student Trustee

PIRATES COACHING LEGEND LOSES FIGHT WITH CANCER

COSTA MESA – Don Watson, longtime swimming and water polo coach, who helped lead the Pirates to 19 state championships over his 30-year career at Orange Coast College, passed away Monday evening following a nine-year bout with stomach cancer. He was 59.



Watson began his OCC coaching career in 1980 as a part-time instructor and eventually became a full-time coach for the Pirates in 1989. As head coach of the women's swim team, he helped guide the Pirates to 15 state championships since 1983.

In dual-meet competition, Watson's Pirates compiled an astounding 168-8 record, winning 23 conference titles. From 1983-1998, the Pirates had won 126 consecutive dual meets before finally falling to Riverside on March 6, 1998.

As the men's swim coach, Watson guided the Pirates to eight conference titles (eight straight from 1987-1994), three state championships (1991, 1992, 1994) and was an assistant coach to three more state titles in 2006, 2007, 2009. Much like the women's team, the OCC men's team was nearly unbeatable during the late 1980s and early 90s as the Pirates won 49 straight dual-meet contests from 1989-1994.

During the fall, Watson was the men's water polo coach from 1985-1994 and again in 2006, compiling a 224-90 record (.713 win percentage). In conference play, Watson helped lead the Pirates to a 95-21 record (.819 win percentage), five conference titles and five second-place finishes.

As the women's water polo coach, Watson helped lead the Pirates to their lone state title in 2001 with a 36-1 record. He won 132 games in five seasons as head coach.

Watson earned his Bachelor's degree in history from Long Beach State, earned his JC teaching credential from UCLA and his Master's degree at United States International University.

Prior to his coaching career, Watson was an All-CIF swimmer and water polo player during his prep career. At Long Beach State, Watson was named the team's Most Valuable Player in 1971.

In addition to his coaching legacy, Watson left a lasting impression throughout the community with his many youth swim programs he developed throughout the years. In fact, for over 30 years, Watson helped run summer swim programs at OCC as well as the Balboa Bay Club and other aquatic venues in the area. The number of kids that have been taught proper water techniques through Watson's tutelage are too many to count and his impact on this community will last for generations to come.

Don is survived by his wife, Teri, his mother, Tamara and his four step-grandchildren Amriel, Adelyn, Alec and Cade.

The Watson family is establishing a scholarship and in lieu of gifts, a monetary donation should be directed to the following:

**Watson Family Scholarship
C/O Orange Coast College Foundation
2701 Fairview Road
Costa Mesa, CA 92626**

Also, online gifts can be presented by logging onto:

http://www.orangecoastcollege.edu/about_occ/foundation/

Here are some comments from some of Don's longtime co-workers and friends ...



“Don was one of the people at Coast in the athletic department that always would stop me and talk to me about basketball and how my team was doing. He always genuinely cared about our team and was one of the people who always went out of his way to talk to our recruits when we were walking them around campus. He would always stop and really help promote OCC in general and our program specifically. In my early years he would come into practice about once or twice a month and watch us practice for about a half an hour. The next day he would make it a point to stop by my office and make some positive comments about what he had observed. He was never afraid of voicing his opinion about almost any topic you wanted to talk about. We are losing a great ambassador for OCC athletics who will be badly missed.” – **Mike Thornton, OCC women’s basketball head coach**

“Don was a dedicated colleague and coach. His numerous conference and state championships significantly contributed to the outstanding accomplishments of OCC athletics and will forever be etched in the history of community college athletics. He will be sorely missed.” – **Barbara Bond, retired coach and Athletic Director at OCC**

“I’ve had the chance to know Don since 1986, and I always admired him for his dedication to Orange Coast College and all its athletes. He would always like to inquire about the previous game win or lose and truly lived for all Pirate athletes. He was a great coach and compassionate leader at Orange Coast College.” – **Mike Taylor, OCC football head coach**

“I first met Don Watson when he was the coach for West Newport Swim Team. They competed against Harbor View Swim team, when my two daughters competed for Harbor View. This was before Don was hired at Coast. He was immediately likeable. Don was extremely competitive in nature, but in a very good way. His sense of humor was great, and he was always willing to help others, even though they competed against him. He many times offered to help my daughters with their swim strokes, even though they were on another team. The last time that I worked with Don was last Spring in the Fitness Complex. He was always so concerned about my granddaughter and what she has been going through. He never focused on himself. He was so thankful for his wife, Teri, their family, and everyone he worked with at Coast. He was a classy person and a good friend.” – **Leon Skeie, longtime OCC athletics professor and director of the Fitness Specialist Program**

“Don was my rock through coaching and my personal life. He was always there to lend a hand, give me some advice or to borrow a few bucks from. He was the greatest host for a party or to hang out with after a graduation in his VW Bus. Don was a person that I looked up to as a man and as a coach. Myself and my family were honored to call Don Watson

our friend. He was all three of my kids' swim instructor. We will all miss Don, but his impact on our lives will always be remembered." – **John Altobelli, OCC baseball head coach**

"Don Watson was an incredible force in Newport-Mesa. Not only did he touch the many students who took his courses or those he coached, but he also improved the lives of so many families by creating and organizing "THE" children's swim teams across the Bay Club, Newport Shores, Mesa Verde and at Orange Coast College. Both of my sons were on the OCC "TEAM" and what they learned in this program went beyond stroke techniques. For the lessons Don taught them, I am eternally grateful he chose to share his time, his talents and efforts with us all. Thousands of young adults have been changed for the better because of Don's work in our community." – **Liz Parker, President, Orange County Board of Education**