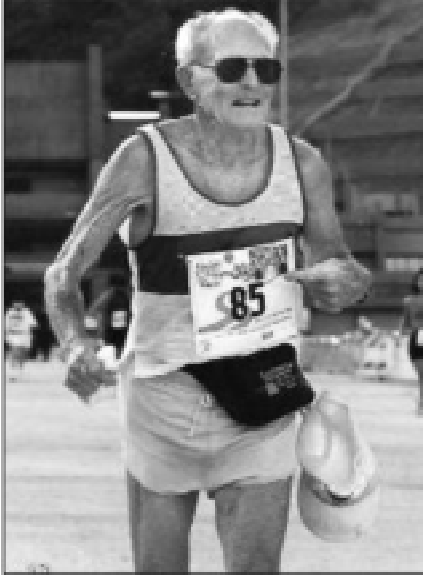


(Ed. Note: The following piece by Bruce Evans appeared in the Edmonds Tribune Review, where he moonlighted as a columnist in 1966. Fringies, you may recall, were precursors to the hippies, hanging out in Seattle's University District.)

THE "FRINGIE"

by Bruce Evans



Coach Rowe in Hawaii, prior to his death on January 12, 2008, at age 96.

A whimsical visitor at an Edmonds basketball game elbowed his neighbor and pointed across the court to the timekeeper at the official scorer's table.


"Who is that?" he asked. "That man with his shoes off. Is he a fringie?"

Seated there, his shoes indeed off, his feet crossed, big floppy sweat socks climbing high up his legs, was Rich Rowe, Edmonds coach and teacher who, though no fringie, generally goes his own way.

That way leads, in winter, to the basketball games where for years the coach has squinted out through his wire-rimmed eyeglasses with his fingers resting lightly on the buttons of the clock-scoreboard to blow the horn to signal the time. He gets paid modestly for this work, but that is irrelevant: the coach is there because he simply loves a good game. Splitting an Almond Joy with the little jackknife he always carries, he hands a visitor half and then leans forward to munch and watch and work that clock. "You can't enjoy a ball game without a goodie," he says.

Sometimes he comments to his neighbors as the game takes shape. The essence of his talk is that sports are an absolute good that brings out whatever is pure in men and boys, and an unending source of pleasure and humor.

It is fitting that he is the timekeeper, for a timekeeper is a man who gives order and direction, and the coach has been giving order and direction several hours a day to Edmonds boys since World War II. Older Edmonds residents can remember how in the 40s and 50s the coach took rag-tag bunches of big country boys grown strong from outdoor work or horsing around, not from indoor weight-lifting, and loosely channeled their power in a single-wing formation. Those teams were not fancy, but they were orderly and to the point, and they won. Hundreds of boys were proud of the team and wanted to play for the coach.

Times have changed. The big country boys are now big city boys, probably stronger and better than ever before. The coach has changed his way some, too. He has abandoned the crude power of the single-wing for the subtler power of the T-formation and its variations. But he still keeps it as simple and orderly and to-the-point as he can. "Run 'Right-Buck'," he used to say in the days of the single wing, "and if it works, run it again. And if it works again, run it again." He still calls lazy or wrong-headed players "fatheads," and when he uses the word it carries a moral connotation. Some players think that the coach's definition of "fathead" is far too broad, but the coach holds tight to his principles. "You fathead," he used to shout, "you fathead," and he would drive his shoulder into a six-footer's belly and lift him into the air. "There. That's how you tackle. You need a haircut, too." And the boy would come down. The coach would straighten his baseball cap, which had gotten twisted in the demonstration, the only sign of exertion on his part. The next day, the player's head would be shaved, and it would stay shaved until the season ended. 

Although times have changed, the coach will be around for several more years. He's committed to coaching, to making order out of the big and small, smart and dumb, otherwise aimless boys who report for glory each year. Some time ago he was pressured by school officials to become an administrator, but the work tired and bored and depressed him. He wanted to make order in another way. "A man is fortunate indeed when he has work that he likes," the coach said when he stepped away from the job of vice-principal at Edmonds.

And a man's community is fortunate indeed when he does that work so well.

Coach Rowe ~ Obituary

Richard Rowe died at his home on the Big Island of Hawaii on January 12, 2008, at the age of 96.

Richard grew up in Ballard, WA, where he learned his love of fishing with his sister and two brothers. After graduating from Ballard High School he attended UPS where he earned a degree in education/coaching. He also met and married the love of his life, Carol Cavanaugh.

Rich started his teaching and coaching career in Montesano, Chehalis, and Elma before moving to Edmonds in 1943. At Edmonds High School he coached football, baseball and track and taught a variety of subjects until he retired in 1973. His unique coaching style was driven by his philosophy that the purpose of high school sports was enjoyment and character development. During his retirement he and Carol spent winters in Hawaii and summers in Edmonds, WA, returning to fish in Puget Sound. After his wife's death in 1981 Rich moved to the Big Island permanently.

Richard kept very busy with gardening, ham radio, writing, woodworking and especially running. He competed regularly in 10k's and half marathons well into his late 80's.

Coach Rowe will be remembered as a mentor, teacher, philosopher and remarkable father. His influence will live on in all who knew him.

He is survived by his three children; two grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

A "Rich Rowe Celebration" will be held at 1 p.m., on February 17, at Edmonds-Woodway High School, Great Hall (south entrance). Please bring photos and stories.

If desired, donations may be made to the Carol Rowe Memorial Food Bank, 828 Caspers St. Edmonds, WA 98020.



Richard Rowe
Athletics