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Coaching Legend Spoonhour Remembered

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By Andrew Cato, ShowMe Times Sports Editor

The relationship between a player and a coach can be a complicated thing to explain. For some, it's love-hate; for others, it can be pure love or pure hate. In the case of Charlie Spoonhour, however, the coach became a 'father-figure' for his players, and was loved by all.

Spoonhour was born in Mulberry, Kansas, on June 23, 1939, and died yesterday (Feb. 2, 2012) in Chapel Hill, North Carolina after a two-year battle with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a condition that causes scarring of lung tissue.

The style of play Spoonhour instilled in his players would eventually come to be known throughout the NCAA as 'Spoonball' featured tenacious defense and guards that could beat opponents down with a barrage of perimeter shots. This unique coaching philosophy led 'the Spoon' to a 373-202 record in the NCAA, including five NCAA D-II Tournament appearances with then-Southwest Missouri State and three D-I Tournament appearances with the St. Louis University Billikens. 'The Spoon' concluded his coaching career with a three-year stint at UNLV.

Spoonhour's coaching career began in a much more humble fashion - he was an assistant coach for the Bloomfield Wildcats, starting in 1963. Longtime Dexter basketball coach Jim Hall, one of Spoonhour's many great coaching friends, recalls his early days with 'the

Spoon’.

“Charlie started out in Rocky Comfort, Mo., before he came to Bloomfield in ’63, the year before I started coaching at Dexter,” Hall recollected. “We were both single and in our early 20’s - we were inseparable for nearly three years. [Charlie] went on from there to ‘bigger and better things’ you could say, but we remained close friends. We actually talked a few weeks ago on the phone; I’m glad I did, I had no idea the end was this close. You could tell from talking to him that he had lung problems.”

Hall described Spoonhour as a down-home Southern boy, and noted that even with his great successes as a coach, his personality never changed.

“He had a down-home Southern personality. You couldn’t keep from liking the guy if you met him; he was always laughing, smiling, joking. He could walk into room of 1000 people and within short time everyone would feel like best friend,” Hall said with a laugh. “[He had a] great personality, related to everyone. Never known of a soul that had anything bad to say about him. There was no ego about him, even after he became a big college coach at SMS and SLU. You’d have never known he was any different than when he was the assistant coach at Bloomfield in the 60’s. He was just as common as the day is long.”

Spoonhour brought his Southern demeanor back home in the summer of 2008, when he was the guest speaker at the annual Ben Kruse 18FORE Life Golf Tournament. Event organizer Scott Kruse also pointed out Spoonhour’s quick wit and great personality, regardless of the occasion.

“About the time I was getting really into coaching, he was up at SLU and was putting on a coaching clinic,” Kruse said. “I’m in a room with a bunch of coaches there, and he’s up there leaning with his elbow on a podium. He goes on for about 20 minutes telling stories, and everyone is just sweating and crying from laughing, like he’s a comedian.”

“He got into basketball, and in a good sense; a [/images/Sports/2012/Misc./spoon \(1\).jpg](/images/Sports/2012/Misc./spoon (1).jpg) lot of times when ‘big-time’ coaches put on clinics, they present you with ideas that you can’t use on high school kids,” Kruse added. “His ideas were all basic, fundamental, down-to-earth stuff that he probably used when he was coaching at Bloomfield.”

Kruse noted that it was, in fact, Coach Hall that suggested getting Spoonhour to speak at the annual golf extravaganza.

“Coach Hall and Spoonhour were always really good friends; when I started 18FORE Life, I was talking to Jim and he said ‘Spoonhour would be great for a speaker’. So I called him in 2006, nervous as could be, and I asked him if he’d be the speaker. He said yes before he even knew what I was doing; he didn’t know me at all, my only ‘in’ was he knew that I was from Dexter,” Kruse recalled. “He said he would love to do it, but that was the weekend he and his wife took vacation every year. It didn’t sound like he was copping out or making an excuse; I legitimately felt it was the reason.”

“I took him at his word, and two years later, when we moved the tournament to the first weekend of June, I called him again. ‘I’d love to do it!’ he said; never asked for a dime, didn’t care if we booked his flight or not, he ended up riding with a buddy from St. Louis down here,” he added. “It was like having your great uncle come and speak; he fit right in. Norm Stewart was one of our previous speakers, and he was good, but Spoonhour was the kind of guy that literally could have talked for two and a half hours and nobody would have said ‘When is he gonna get done?’. He had probably four or five players from Bloomfield when he coached in the ’60’s at the banquet that year.”

Kruse’s fondest memory of Spoonhour, however, came shortly after he spoke at 18FORE Life; when Kruse sent Spoonhour his payment for speaking, he received something back that, to this day, ‘still blows me away.’

“I didn’t know what to pay him [when he spoke],” Kruse recalled. “We flew him down here, and we put him up, but that was nothing. I remember thinking ‘I’ll just send him \$2,000,’ because when you start looking for an entertaining guest speaker, it gets insane. So I sent him \$2,000 and a ‘thank you’ note, and thought that was that. He sent me back a thousand dollar check, basically saying ‘too much’, and he said if we ever needed another guest speaker to call him, because he’d love coming back and he had more stories to tell.”

Both Kruse and Hall recognized Spoonhour’s many great achievements as a coach, as well as the genuinely great person that he was off the floor.

“Missouri State and SLU; he got to the tournament at schools that don’t usually go,” Kruse said, laughing. “When he went to UNLV, he tore it up out there, too. They loved him out there, and they loved him everywhere. I’d like to see what it would have taken to get the guy fired, he’s just so personable.”

“He came out to the course and walked around, hung out with everybody. He was a good ‘ole boy,” Kruse added. “He was the kind of guy that after five minutes, you’ll have a friend and a guy you could look forward to hanging out with; he was the kind of guy

you'd go grab a beer with.”

“The bottom line is this: he was one of a kind. He fit that mold; he had the best personality a person could have,” Hall said. “He made you feel like you were the most important thing around him at the time when you were talking to him. [He was a] great person to be around; if you didn't know him, then you missed out on a lot.”

Photos Above: top photo - Spoonhour delivering his address at the 2008 18FORE Life banquet (photo provided by 18FORE Life); bottom photo - Longtime friends Jim Hall (left) and Charlie Spoonhour (right) pose for a photo in Hall's Dexter home (photo provided by Jim Hall).

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