

## ROBERT CZEKAJ



One man is known for being the architect of the famed "Floating Five" full-court press, and he coached for 26 years at his final High School, Berlin Brothersvalley. Legendary coach, Robert "Bob" Czekaj, age 84, passed away on October 6, 2023, at his Fairview, PA home with his wife Jean, Daughter Lori, and Son-in-Law Scott. Originally from Turtle Creek, PA, Bob was a graduate of Turtle

Creek High School class of 1957. Bob married the love of his life, High School sweetheart Mabel Jean Brown on April 28, 1962. He joined the 33 Aeromedical Evac. Squad of the US Airforce in October of 1960 and served for four years as a Medic. On an ROTC scholarship, he went on to earn his Bachelor's and later his master's degree in education from Penn State University, where as an undergrad. he played basketball for one year before a knee injury ended his collegiate career. Bob played basketball, baseball, and football throughout his academic career, and went on to coach all three sports, until his retirement at the age of 65. Throughout his coaching career, he coached boys' baseball, boys' and girls basketball, and football. Bob coached all three of his children throughout their high school careers. Coach Czekaj is a well-known name throughout the Appalachian League, Somerset County, District Five, and a feared nemesis of the WPIAL.

Coach Bob Czekaj was named to the Somerset County Hall of Fame, and won five Somerset County Championship titles in baseball, five District Championships, ten county championships, and seven Appalachian championships in girls basketball: accumulating 365 wins and 82 losses during his coaching career at Berlin Brothersvalley High School. Coach Czekaj also coached at St. Colman Grade School, Penn Hall Academy, Boyce Community College with Herb Sendek Sr. men's basketball, Frostburg State University Football, and finally Berlin Brothersvalley High School. Coach Czekaj touched the lives of more students and players than could ever be named, several of whom went on to Div I-II and III collegiate and professional careers. Coach Czekaj was a PITTSBURGH FAN through and through. In his retirement years, he joined his daughter Lori in volunteer support and fundraising for the Mario Lemieux Foundation and attended the Annual Mel Blount Roast each year to honor the old Steel Curtain players and outstanding players of recent years. He got to "talk shop" with the likes of Mel Blount, Franco Harris, and Terry Bradshaw and was so touched by Mel's dedication to the youth of Pittsburgh and the Mel Blount Youth Program.

Coach also assisted his daughter, Lori, in coaching the A-1 14-year-old AAU girls team in Pittsburgh where several state tournaments were won. He traveled to Virginia to see his son, Bob, coach his boys in basketball, baseball, and football, and was "hands-on" with support and encouragement. Coach was beyond proud of all his student-athletes who went on to make county Hall of Fame status, four-year scholarships, and had jerseys retired at the collegiate level. His players were always sure to credit him for having the most influence in their athletic careers, and even more so, in their life accomplishments. The championship legacy continues for Berlin Brothersvalley High School based on the foundation Coach Czekaj built with his players, who now have children and grandchildren playing with the same fundamentals taught to them by Coach Czekaj, which they in turn pass on to the future generations. His name and coaching accomplishments will live on. A quote from one of his players "He was my mentor in every sense of the word. I sat with Coach and watched every minute of every game during our 1st season together. He taught me how to study every detail and see every play unfold. He was a basketball genius in every sense of the word. I'll miss him deeply. Thank you, Coach Czekaj. I wouldn't be where I am today without you. Rest In Peace." Bob is predeceased by his mother, Viola; and father, Francis Czekaj; brother, Ernie Czekaj; sister, Sandy Czekaj-Miller; and his son, Richard J. Czekaj. He is survived by his wife of 61 years M. Jean Czekaj; son, Robert; and daughter-in-law, Gail Czekaj; daughter, Lori Lynn Czekaj-Thompson; and son-in-law, Scott Thompson; and sister, Donna Czekaj-Cervi; and husband, Larry Cervi. Grandchildren Robert "Bobby" Czekaj, Greg Czekaj, Michael Czekaj, Justice Czekaj-Line, James Czekaj-Line, Will Thomspen and great-grand-daughter, Amelia Czekaj. Bob was a devout Catholic and belonged to St George Catholic Church in Erie, PA at the time of his death. Coach Bob Czekaj, or "Pappy" as many of his players, students and friends have come to call him, loved his fur-grandchildren just as much, and will be greatly missed by Creed AKA Trinity's Calling All Angels, Loki Liu, and Taloula, AKA Tula or "Pappy's pretty girl". Pappy supported several Dog Rescues with his daughter Lori, and asks that in lieu of flowers, a donation be made in his name to Murielle's Place, a senior dog sanctuary in Wapwallopen, PA. Donations can be made at [WWW.mureillesplace.org](http://WWW.mureillesplace.org).

Friends are welcome on Wednesday from 1-3 and 5-7 pm at Patrick T. Lanigan Funeral Home & Crematory, Inc., Turtle Creek / Monroeville Chapel, 1111 Monroeville Ave., Turtle Creek, 412-823-9350. Mass of Christian Burial in St. Colman Church, Turtle Creek (St. Joseph the Worker Parish) on Thursday at 12 noon. Bob will be laid to rest with Military Honors in Good Shepherd Cemetery. [www.slaterfuneral.com](http://www.slaterfuneral.com)

Send condolences [post-gazette.com/gb](http://post-gazette.com/gb)