

Coaching legend Neubauer dies at 80

By Mike Oeffner

Sports Editor

URBANDALE -- Chuck Neubauer, a Harlan Community Schools basketball pioneer and an Iowa high school coaching legend, passed away Monday night after suffering a stroke.

Neubauer, who was instrumental in starting up the Harlan girls' basketball program in the early 1970's, was 80 years old. Services for Neubauer were held Thursday at St. Pius X Catholic Church in Urbandale, where Neubauer had resided since shortly after retiring as the Cyclone head girls coach in 1985.

Neubauer's career coaching record -- 581-155 in 32 years of coaching the six-player game -- speaks for itself. He is also the only coach to lead girls teams to the State Tournament in five separate decades, including back-to-back state titles at Gladbrook in 1959 and 1960.

But Neubauer will be remembered in Harlan as the first-ever girls head basketball coach of the modern era. He arrived on the scene for the Cyclones' inaugural season in 1973-74 and immediately guided HCHS to a 15-5 record. Before his retirement in 1985, he coached the Cyclones to state three times ('79, '82 and '85).

The groundwork for the program had been established starting in the summer of 1972 when current HCHS girls freshman coach John Gilliland began organizing summer camps for girls interested in the sport. Gilliland and

Larry Phillips headed up an intramural program in 1972-73 in anticipation of a new head coach's arrival.

In 1973, Neubauer became the man for the job. Having gotten out of coaching at West Des Moines Valley, he was coaxed back to the sport by former Harlan Superintendent Orville Frazier, who had taught with Neubauer in the past.

Gilliland was the first assistant under Neubauer prior to Sue Fowler's arrival in 1975. Gilliland describes Neubauer as an intense coach who was particular with details. He was quick to correct his players when they erred but equally quick to praise them when they succeeded.

"He was very organized and really worked on defense," Gilliland says. "He worked the girls hard but if they accomplished anything he told them about it."

Fowler, who has been an assistant for all three HCHS girls head coaches -- Neubauer, Randy Platt and now Todd Gordon -- says Neubauer's most valued aspect in a player was hustle. The "Hustle Award" he gave out at team camps was the most important to him.

"He was very intense. He strived on playing hard and hustle," Fowler says. "He was strong with the girls and very strict, but was kind of like a father figure. He would relate to the girl and joke with them. A lot of kids have a lot of good memories about him."

Neubauer's coaching career expanded five different decades starting in the 1940's, and included stops at six different schools. Prior to his final stop in Harlan, coached sports at Lamoni, Seymour, Guthrie Center, Jamaica, Gladbrook and West E

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Chuck Neubauer

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Moines Valley.

Also a history teacher, Neubauer coached the Jamaica boys basketball team to state in 1956 and also led girls golf and tennis teams to state. In addition, he served as a Drake Relays official for 26 years.

Fowler remembers the stories of Neubauer's days at Lamoni, where he served a multitude of roles. He coached the football team, both

basketball teams and was also the band director. Fowler describes Neubauer as a lover of jazz music.

"He would coach the team and then go direct the band at half-time," she says.

According to Gilliland, Neubauer's wife, Celesta, was always close to his teams, riding along on the team bus to nearly every game.

When asked if Neubauer would

have enjoyed coaching today's five-player girls game, Gilliland hesitated. "He really enjoyed coaching six-player. I don't know if he would have (liked five-player) or not, but I'm quite sure he would have done a good job with it."

Neubauer is survived by Celesta, son Glenn of Westminster, Colo., and daughters Roxanne Lewis of Phoenix and Debra Hancock of Des Moines.