

Gerald Beal, longtime football coach at Kirkpatrick and Terrell high schools, dies at 77



After coaching football for years, Gerald Beal became the Fort Worth school district's first black athletic administrator in 1972. He retired from the district in 1996.

FORT WORTH -- Gerald Beal was to his players at Kirkpatrick and I.M. Terrell high schools what a devoted father is to his sons.

Mentor, guardian and friend to the very end.

"He taught us to be winners," said Milton Pace, pastor of the Saintsville Cathedral of Fort Worth who played for Mr. Beal at Terrell in the early 1970s.

"It's not just winning the game. Winning in character and sportsmanship and the classroom. Winning as a person.

"He was an awesome example for young men."

Mr. Beal, a longtime football coach during the last years of segregation and later an athletic department official for the Fort Worth school district, died April 15 in his sleep, family members said. He was 77.

Gerald Kenneth Beal was born Aug. 18, 1933, in Marshall to Henry and Mattie Beal. Kenneth Beal, as he was known to family and friends in East Texas, attended Bishop College, where he played quarterback and studied physical education.

At Bishop College, he met Harlean Berry, whom he married on Sept. 10, 1955, in Corsicana. Harlean Berry Beal, too, was an accomplished educator. Fort Worth's Harlean Berry Beal Elementary School is named in her honor. Mrs. Beal died in 2009.

In college, Mr. Beal also established a lasting friendship that spanned more than 60 years. Mr. Beal and Lester Beene, a football teammate at Bishop, met in August 1950.

Beene said Mr. Beal's mother and father made him part of the family, giving him opportunities to earn some money and providing him transportation and food. "We just hit it off and were like brothers ever since," Beene said. "It's hard to believe that he's gone."

Beene and another teammate, Burton Williams, followed Mr. Beal to Fort Worth.

After the Supreme Court's decision in Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954, Fort Worth school administrators added grades to the city's three black junior highs -- Como, Dunbar and Kirkpatrick -- until those schools also were full high schools.

Mr. Beal, Beene and Williams worked together at Kirkpatrick Junior-Senior School, which served the small African-American community in north Fort Worth near Meacham Field.

After graduating from Bishop that same year, Mr. Beal said in an interview in August, he wasn't quite sure what he wanted to do with his life except that he really didn't want to teach and coach.

But the then-20-year-old found his calling and a new home when he was given the opportunity to become the football coach at Kirkpatrick.

Former players said he was tough but fair; demanded they be accountable for their actions; and that they be respectful and committed to their work.

He also said that he didn't tolerate complaining, despite the disparate quality of segregated schools.

"We were going to do the best with what we had," Mr. Beal said in August.

The best is what they became. Kirkpatrick won back-to-back Class 3A state championships in the Prairie View Interscholastic League in 1962-63.

Then-Texas Christian University football coach Abe Martin called the '62 Wildcats the best high school football team he had ever seen, regardless of classification, black or white.

Mr. Beal, who became the Fort Worth schools' first black athletic administrator in 1972, said he was most pleased with the opportunities football gave his players, from simple things like eating in a restaurant or staying in a hotel to going to college. He retired from the school district in 1996.

"He was my best friend," Ronald Beal, his son, said this week. "I went to O.D. Wyatt, but I wanted to go where he coached [I.M. Terrell]. He said, 'Nah, nah, nah, nah. You go there. It'll be better for you. Whatever you do there, nobody will say it's because you're my son.'"

All of "his boys" at Kirkpatrick and Terrell will be honorary pallbearers at his funeral, said Ronald Beal. The funeral will be at East St. Paul Baptist Church, where Mr. Beal was a member for more than 40 years.

"He sneaked away from us," Pace said before thinking aloud about what he thought was an appropriate verse from the book of Proverbs. "'He that walketh with wise men shall become wise.' We all walked with a wise man."

Other survivors include a daughter, Dr. Cheryl Beal Anderson of Carmel, Ind., and two grandchildren.