



Donald "Dee" Rowe

January 20, 1929 - January 10, 2021

Donald E. (Dee) Rowe, former head coach of Men's Basketball at the University of Connecticut and UConn's iconic Athletics Ambassador for the past 53 years, passed away early Sunday, at his home in Storrs, CT at the age of 91, surrounded by his loving family. Dee was born on January 20, 1929, in Worcester, MA. He was predeceased by his beloved parents Minott and Arlene Rowe and his brother M. Richmond Rowe. At Middlebury College, Dee met the love of his life, Virginia (Ginny) Bradford Reynolds. Dee and Ginny were married for 64 incredible years and shared a deep love and adoration for each other. Completely devoted, they were each other's best friends. Theirs was a love story for the ages. Together they raised a family of seven children, 17 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Dee's family was his pride and joy, yet he and Ginny were the heroes of his family. Ginny predeceased Dee in 2018.

Dee lived life with passion and purpose. He believed each day was a gift. He had a big personality and a bigger heart that drew people in wherever he went. His deep friendships knew no bounds. He was a master storyteller and had a sense of humor that was infectious. He reached out to people and inspired them to chase their dreams and become their best selves. He was genuinely interested in all people as he asked questions, listened with an open mind and heart, and offered a hand to help. He'd often engage a stranger, introduce himself, and ask about their life. Inevitably he'd discover someone in common, and soon he'd have a new friend. His love for people was uncanny as he found joy sharing the world with others. He was a visionary in his faith in humanity and encouraged people to accomplish things they might never have achieved. Dee spent his life in service, offering his support, wisdom, humor, and love.

When he wasn't on the basketball court, Dee's favorite place in the world was Cape Cod. He, Ginny, and their family spent summers and holidays there, creating memories cherished for a lifetime. These times included picnics, walks on the beach, riding the waves, playing pickle, attending summer Cape Cod Baseball games, and visiting with dear friends and family. Dee prided himself on swimming in the ocean every day. He even enjoyed a swim during what was his final visit to the Cape this past fall. Middlebury, VT was also a place close to Dee's heart, where in his "retirement," he taught a course at the College for many years. Dee and Ginny treasured their time there.

Dee "fell in love" with the game of basketball in the third grade. He attended Worcester Academy (Class of '47), captaining the basketball and baseball teams, and played basketball at Middlebury College (A.B. 1952). He also earned an M.Ed. at Boston University in 1953.

Dee was Director of Athletics and Head Coach of men's basketball and baseball at Worcester Academy from 1955 to 1969. He built the school's basketball program into a perennial power in New England prep school ranks. His teams won nine New England Prep School Championships, and he compiled a record of 180-44. Dee also co-created the Worcester Academy sports camps and for nearly 60 years, the camp has served thousands of kids throughout Worcester and surrounding areas. Dee maintained close ties to Worcester Academy for over 70 years as a trustee emeritus and friend.

In March of 1969, Dee was named head coach of men's basketball at UConn and directed the program for the next eight years, winning 120 games. He was named New England Coach of the Year twice (1970, 1976), led UConn to a pair of NIT berths (1974, 1975), and guided the 1975-76 UConn team to the ECAC New England Championship, a berth in the NCAA Tournament and UConn advanced to the NCAA "Sweet 16."

During the 1960s and 1970s, Dee was involved in numerous national and international level coaching clinician activities as well as serving as an assistant coach at the 1975 U.S. National Team Intercontinental Cup Games; coach at the 1976 U.S. Olympic Basketball Trials; and assistant coach for the 1980 Big East Conference All-Star tour of Yugoslavia.

In 1979, Dee was a key "behind the scenes" influence as his close personal relationship with Big East Conference founder Dave Gavitt helped pave the way for UConn to be invited as a charter member into the newly formed collegiate league.

In 1980, Dee experienced what he called "the greatest thrill of my personal basketball life" when he represented his country as Assistant Coach of the United States Men's Basketball Olympic Team. He joined head coach Dave Gavitt and fellow assistant coach Larry Brown as USA Olympic Basketball Coaches.

After concluding his head coaching tenure at UConn, Dee launched the fund-raising arm for UConn Athletics. For the next 13 years, he became a national leader as a collegiate athletics fundraiser and generated millions of dollars for UConn athletics, including donations to support the building of the Harry A. Gampel Pavilion/Sports Center Complex. For the past 30 years, since his official UConn "retirement" in 1991, Dee remained actively involved at the school in his emeritus role as Special Adviser for Athletics and UConn's Athletics Ambassador.

Dee's remarkable professional career included numerous individual honors. This was highlighted in 2017 when he received his greatest recognition, the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame's John W. Bunn Lifetime Achievement Award.

In 2007, Dee was a member of the inaugural class of inductees to the UConn Basketball

"Huskies of Honor." That year, UConn awarded Dee with the "University Medal," one of its most prestigious honors. He received the "Gold Key" from the Connecticut Sports Writers' Alliance, was a member of the inaugural class of honorees in the New England Basketball Hall of Fame, and was honored by the Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference (ECAC) with its "Lifetime Achievement Award." In 2015, the ECAC honored Dee with its highest honor, naming him to the ECAC Hall of Fame. Other honors bestowed upon Dee included: Nutmeg State Games "Living Legend Award", National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC) Merit Award, and Connecticut High School Coaches Association Distinguished Service Award.

Dee is survived by his children and their families, including his daughter Donna Rowe-Korn, her husband Bob Korn of Orleans, MA and their children Tyler and Palmer; Cindy Rowe Pelletier, her husband Rich Pelletier of Bolton, MA and their children Jesse, his fiancé Peri, and Justin; Karen Rowe, her husband Jon Heyman of Northampton, MA and their children Jacob and Leah; Lisa Shafto, her husband Dennis Shafto of Chapel Hill, NC and their children Chris, his wife Hilary and their daughter Kensey, and Ashton, her husband Brent and their son Hudson; Don Rowe, his wife Gail Rowe of Marblehead, MA and their children George, Brendan, Dillon, and Grace; Julie Rowe of Sterling, MA and her sons Aidan and Cormac; Jennifer Havlicek, her husband Desmond Havlicek of Cohasset, MA, and their children Declan, Cass, and Quinn. Dee is also survived by his nieces and nephews Cam Hardy, Andrea Reynolds, Brad Reynolds, Dean Rowe, Brad Rowe, and their spouses and children.

The Rowe family expresses their deepest gratitude to Dee's team of loving, devoted caregivers, Cyndi Smith, Olga Cabrera, Beth Ennis, and Kim Ericson. These incredible women made it possible for Dee to continue to have a rich, full life at his home after losing his beloved wife, Ginny.

A memorial service will be held at a later date when it is safe to gather together to honor Dee's passing. The Carlson Funeral Home, New Britain is assisting with arrangements. Please share a memory or note of sympathy at www.carlsonfuneralhome.com

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Dee's name to the University of Connecticut "Dee Rowe Athletic Scholarship Fund" (<https://www.foundation.uconn.edu/fund/dee-rowe-athletic-scholarship-fund/>); the Worcester Academy "Rowe Family Scholarship" (www.worcesteracademy.org/rowe); or to "The Dee and Ginny Rowe Fund for Patient and Family Programs" at Neag Comprehensive Cancer Center, UConn Health. Please make checks payable to: The UConn Foundation, Inc. and forward to: 2390 Alumni Drive Unit 3206, Storrs, CT 06269. For more information, please contact Peter Lamothe at plamothe@foundation.uconn.edu.

Tribute Wall

AF

“Dee was such an authentic, kind, funny and warm individual. His was the face we would always search for whenever we attended a UConn sporting event because the welcome he gave, was unforgettable. We were so very fortunate to know Dee and Ginny for over 30 years and attended the "Celebrating A UConn Legend" event at the Bushnell Theater in 2017 in his honor. It was a truly wonderful evening honoring all that Dee gave to so many. We will always cherish our memories of Dee. May he rest in love and peace.
Arnold and Norene Foster

Arnold & Norene Foster - February 11, 2021 at 06:17 PM

JS

“During my almost twenty years as a producer director at Channel 3 in Hartford I was fortunate to get to know Dee Rowe while I directed the telecasts that we did on Channel 3 while he coached the team. Later on when he was no longer coaching the team Channel 3 hired Dee to do the color on our telecasts with Dave Smith. I produced and directed all those programs, working closely with Dee. Shortly after we started Dee asked me to coach him on his broadcast work. That began a beautiful relationship with this wonderful man. He would come in to our studios and we would view the games together and I would be able to offer "tips to him", although I told him that he needed no help from me because he knew more about basketball than I would ever know. I cherished every moment we spent together.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to talk about Dee at the 10 AM Mass at Holy Trinity Church in Hartford where I am the Lector. I was able to tell the attendees about this wonderful man! Following the Mass I left the church to drive home on RT 91. Upon entering the highway I encountered something truly beautiful.....a billboard with a large picture of of Dee smiling down at me! It was a special moment as I felt that we had connected.

REST IN PEACE MY FRIEND!

Jim Stewart

James Stewart - January 18, 2021 at 01:11 PM

SH

“Mr Rowe would come to Lunch at The Nathan Hale hotel.He loved the soup .Will be missed .

Sheila Schultz (waitress at The Nathan H - January 18, 2021 at 09:17 AM

BK

“ *God Bless Coach Rowe and Family! Thank you for all your support and advise through the years. I'll miss seeing you around. Thoughts and Prayers always! Go Huskies!*
Bruce Kuczenski

Bruce Kuczenski - January 16, 2021 at 10:50 AM

JA

“ *To the family of Dee Rowe:
I had the privilege of knowing Dee for sixty years. He coached basketball at Worcester Academy and I at Cushing Academy back in the sixties. We were both competitors and friends.
My wife sometimes sat with Ginny when she came to games. In those days Ginny was always expecting. After five girls when little Don was born Ginny told my wife that Dee installed a little basketball hoop on Don's crib. He was so happy to have a boy!
However, his girls all won his heart. Anytime he and I would meet for lunch, which was not too long ago, he would pridefully tell me how wonderful the girls - and all the kids - were to him.*

A most special man whom I miss. May God carry you through your grief and I know you will take heart in all that Dee has left behind.

*Sincerely from an old friend,
Jim Aseltine Canton, CT
jamesaseltine@frontier.com*

jim aseltine - January 14, 2021 at 11:07 AM

SA

“ I was a UConn senior in May of 1969 when I got a call from Athletic Director Bob Ingalls. I was a member of the Student Athletic Advisory Committee and he told me we were to get to an off-campus restaurant to meet the new basketball coach. Pronto. I had to bum a ride. When I got there the other student on the committee wasn't there. As I looked around I seemed to be the only student in the crowded room. I asked where is the new coach? I was pointed in the right direction and went to meet him. He had a very short haircut, said : "Yes sir" and "No sir" and his eyes locked on to mine like radar. "On no, we're getting a Marine," was my first thought. And one from a prep school, no less. I believed that day I was the first UConn student to meet Donald "Dee" Rowe. I had never heard of him and wasn't impressed. Did I miss the boat on that one! As we all know he became the linchpin to much UConn success and his personal touch was a magnet for attracting athletic and coaching talent. More than that he was everybody's friend. Even if he didn't know you, he'd draw you in. And he made time for everyone. I'd be at a sports dinner and ask, Is Dee here? "Yeah. He's in the crowd over there." He talked to everyone in that group. Over the years Kent Carlson and I would scoot over at halftime to where Dee and his wife Ginny were sitting at UConn basketball games, behind the team bench. To get past security we said, "Dee's expecting us." Although he wasn't, when he saw us he treated us like family. "Look it's Kent and Woody." It was the same sincerity he showed to former great UConn players and other sporting well-knowns who routinely dropped by. We would talk through halftime often late getting back to our seats. Back to 1969. When Dee heard I was on the UConn school paper and would be applying for a sportswriting job, he insisted that I apply at the Worcester Telegram, his hometown paper .It didn't matter that he didn't know me then but he thought it important that a UConn guy got a job. Woody Anderson, Hartford Courant, 1970-2005.

Sherwood Anderson - January 13, 2021 at 08:58 PM

JM

“ I am so very sorry to hear of your wonderful Dad's passing. My heart aches for you and all of us. My Dad, Dick Michaels and Dee were good friends.. Dee was a Gentle man. I loved seeing him at all the games and chatting with him. Kind, gentle , handsome, interesting and always that smile. The world has lost a wonderful man from the Best Generation. Rest In Peace. 💔

jyll michaels - January 13, 2021 at 02:21 PM

CW

“ I was lucky enough to meet Coach Rowe back in 2016. I'm a Hartford Police officer and I usually sit behind the Uconn bench during basketball games. I always looked forward to his arrival down that loading dock walkway. I think he would've talked all night if he could have. I will greatly miss him when the games come back. I'm a better person for having known this man and his wife. R.I.P. Coach. Officer Chris VanWey. Hartford Police Dept.

Chris Van Wey - January 13, 2021 at 02:09 PM

JD

“ I am so sorry to hear of the loss of your dad. I am no one he knew at all, but have attended UConn basketball games over the years and a friend who graduated high school with me (1968, Hillhouse, New Haven), Al Vaughn, played on Coach Rowe's team. I only know that any time I passed by him, he was open to making eye contact and smiling and making me feel as if he did know me. He made UConn the special place that it is, absolutely. My thought and prayers are with your family and all who considered him a friend.
Sincerely,
Joan Desmarais

Joan Desmarais - January 13, 2021 at 01:23 PM

RP

“ One of the all time greatest gentlemen and coaches. May God bless him and keep him.

Rich Petriccione - January 12, 2021 at 08:36 PM