As nobody can beat Father Time it always is a sad moment when one loses a dear friend or family member. I have lost a pair of lifelong friends within the past year, first Tom Baker and then Dave Taylor. Tom, Dave, & I began our lifetime friendship as early as our kindergarten year at North Muskegon and we were close right up until the end.

In January of 2016 I also lost a very dear friend, the legendary Gene Young, not only a friend, but for decades Gene was my partner on the radio. Although I did not write a story when Gene passed, I was honored to give a eulogy at his funeral and was so proud to give the speech inducting Gene into our Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame. Many stories were written on Gene’s passing.

Here is my story on Dave Taylor

Moyes Memories remembers legendary coach and dear friend Dave Taylor

I’ve been honored to write several stories over the years for my Moyes’ Memories, but this is one story I have dreaded to write. With the deepest of sadness Muskegon has lost a legend, and I have lost my lifelong friend with the passing of Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame coach Dave Taylor.

The former North Muskegon grad of 1959 passed away after a long illness on November 3, 2024.

I have so many wonderful memories of this dear friend that I hardly know where to begin. Many will remember Dave for resurrecting a Muskegon football program that was in the doldrums in the very early 1980s, highlighted by winning a pair of state championship, first in 1986 and secondly in 1989.

Winning a state title in that era was no easy accomplishment as there were only four divisions prior to 1990. Muskegon competed in the highest of classes and when the dust had settled there was no argument of who had the best football team in the State of Michigan in Dave’s two title winning years, it was indeed the Muskegon Big Reds!

Dave Taylor was a winner far before he became the reluctant leader of the Big Reds. I say reluctant because Dave was hesitant to take a head coaching position as he was content to be an assistant and share his knowledge with his players. Dave always told me he enjoyed the practices more than the games.

I have never meant anybody in my many years on this planet who had less of an ego than Dave Taylor. He never yearned for the limelight and always praised others and not himself over the years. Dave was a late inductee into the Michigan High School Coaches Hall of Fame because he never took the time or thought it important to be a member. However, the Association saw fit to award Taylor’s achievements and Dave was happy to be so honored a few short years ago in the Michigan Football Coaches Hall of Fame.

Dave Taylor was a three-sport star at North Muskegon, and I do mean STAR. Dave was a one-man wrecking crew at North Muskegon in football as a two-way performer as a tackle and linebacker. However, college recruiters in the late 1950s did not travel in masses to tiny North Muskegon to find football players.

Taylor took his football talents to Ferris State whereas an offensive lineman and defensive linebacker he was voted as the team captain and the MVP of the Bulldogs in both his junior and senior years. Dave then was the starting linebacker for the fledging Grand Rapids Blazers before returning to the Port City to begin his career in teaching as well as coaching.

It is no coincidence that Mona Shores most successful year in their football history prior to their recent overwhelming success on the gridiron was in 1968 when Dave was an assistant coach with his friend Don Mosley. The Sailors went 8-1 that season, highlighted by the program’s first ever victory over Muskegon.

Dave’s last public appearance was back in June when he attended the Sports Hall of Fame ceremony that inducted the Muskegon Big Red Football Team of 1971. Muskegon head coach Larry Harp recognized Taylor’s talents and coaxed him to join the Big Red coaching staff as a defensive coach just prior to the start of the 1971 season. With Taylor on the staff the Big Reds went undefeated against the roughest of competition and were proclaimed the mythical Class A state champs. Dave was an assistant coach under his close friend Larry Harp, and it was his defensive genius that helped lead those Big Reds to the mythical state title in 1971.

Taylor remained with the big Reds in the early years until Harp retired to become the AD at his alma mater.

After Harp retired with a sterling 61-20 record before moving upstairs to become the Athletic Director at Muskegon High, he desperately attempted to convince Taylor to succeed him as the football coach. Taylor was hesitant to take the job, but he did say he would take the position only if the Muskegon Administrators agreed to some tough demands. Those demands were not met, and Muskegon then hired a coach who had three very poor years before Harp and Muskegon officials finally coaxed Taylor into taking the position.

So quickly had Taylor turned the Muskegon football program around that it took him only 14 years to win 100 games, this in an era when teams didn’t come close to playing the number of contests as they do today. Eight times Taylor took the Big Reds into the playoffs during a time when a team would never qualify if they dropped more than one game.

The biggest one-day crowd in MHSAA history was on hand at the Pontiac Silverdome in 1986 when the Big Reds defeated heavily favored Sterling Heights Stevenson 10-0. The Muskegon defense that featured a defensive forward wall where their heaviest lineman was 175 pounds, held Stevenson to the fewest total yards allowed in state history.

Taylor’s 1989 state championship was perhaps even more surprising as the Big Reds defeated a Detroit Martin Luther King team that featured a bevy of future Division one players 16-13.

Shortly after the 1989 state title Dave and I took a two-day vacation to Traverse City where we spent a couple of days rekindling our long-ago passion for skiing. Neither of us had skied in many years but Dave took to the slopes like a duck takes to water. Me, I struggled to follow Dave down the hills. I had a much better time later when we visited Traverse City coach Jim Ooley in a watering hole. It was the last time we ever did ski.

Dave wanted to retire following the 1996 season but was urged on by Big Reds administrators to continue as the head mentor until they could find a suitable replacement. And they hit the jackpot when they hired Tony Annese.

Taylor concluded his career with 112 wins with the Big Reds but what I best remember about those Taylor coached teams, perhaps maybe more than the victories was the discipline his teams exhibited on the field. Dave had a simple rule that he rigidly enforced: If you commit a personal foul or were called for an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty Taylor would quickly remove the player from the field and would sit for the rest of the game.

 Because of his team’s discipline, this was rarely enforced. However, there was one incident that did occur that I brought to Dave’s attention following a hard-fought playoff victory over Jenison in 1986. In the second half Muskegon’s standout two-way player Willie Wilson was assessed a 15-yard penalty for arguing a call with an official. When I asked Dave why Willie stayed in the game Dave said: “Willie was right--- it was a bad call.”

Dave Taylor and I go back to 1946 when we started school at North Muskegon. Dave and I were constant companions, from sharing a paper route in grade school, to trapping muskrats on Bear Lake, and playing hundreds of hours as teammates in many sports.

Dave was an unselfish teammate on our West Michigan Conference Basketball championship team in 1959. Just a short time ago Dave and I lost another life-long friend and teammate from that team in Tom Baker.

So talented was Dave that he went out for track in 1959 for the first time and broke the NM shot put record held by the legendary Stan Guy.

Dave and I were the best of friends often much to the consternation of our two mothers. As mothers are often wanton to protect their own, Dave and I often were a tad bit ‘reckless ‘during our childhood years. My mother thought Dave was a bad influence on me while Dave’s mother thought I was a bad influence on Dave. And they were probably both right.

I know our moms would be shocked to see that in the future those two knuckleheads would both be enshrined in the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame.

I can’t begin to tell you how proud I was to give the induction speech to induct Dave into the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame in 2002. Dave was a very humble man who never sought plaudits, but he often told me on grateful he was to be enshrined.

Dave was preceded in death by his wife Shirley in 2013 and is survived by his daughter Mitzi Taylor and son Jeff Taylor.

I know that one never lives forever, but losing my pal Dave Taylor really hurts. RIP dear friend and thanks for the unforgettable memories!