



## Michael Sarkesian

February 23, 1930 - May 11, 2019

It is with sadness we announce the passing of Mike Sarkesian, of Topeka, Kansas, on May 11, 2019, at the age of 89. He died peacefully with family at his side.

Mike is survived by his wife, Nancy, just shy of 65 years married, four children, eight grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Mike was born February 23, 1930, to parents Harry and Sarah Sarkesian in Providence, Rhode Island. Mike's brother, Haig passed many years ago but is well remembered.

Mike graduated from Hope High School in Providence, where his passion for team sport and coaching was formed. Like so many of the era, he was undersized and hungry for success. Mike graduated from the University of Rhode Island in 1953, earning a dual degree in Physical Education and Biology. Excelling in sports, Mike lettered throughout his years at University and was awarded All Conference and All New England Awards as a defensive back and later inducted into the Rhode Island Sports Hall of Fame. Mike was very active in athletics as well as being a member of the Phi Mu Delta Fraternity. He received a Master's Degree in 1962 from Rhode Island College in Administration.

While commencing his teaching and coaching career in Saco, Maine, in 1954, Mike met Nancy where the two married. Their children arrived between 1955 and 1964. To this day, both longed for the ocean.

Mike's career in coaching included High School State Championships. He was one of the first coaches having no time for any color barrier in sport, well before the "Glory Road". His Iowa Wesleyan College teams formed of Midwest kids and East Coast kids brought the fast paced style of basketball to the Midwest, having introduced a nonstop fast break basketball game that ran most teams off the floor. Mike's teams were fast, passionate, tough and determined well before modern sports understood where it had to go to evolve. Mike coached many very prominent athletes over the years. His players were always part of his family. Having never played basketball, Mike's passion, determination, and ability to

know each player and get the best out of them showered his teams with success. His fast break became the normal for many professional teams. His players will attest his coaching carried them all far in life.

On the strength of his many team successes and approach to modern sports, Mike was recruited to Washburn in 1966 by then President. On the journey back to Iowa, having accepted the position of Athletic Director and Professor of Education, Mike learned on arrival home, Topeka had just been devastated by the 1966 tornado. Mike however, kept his word, accepted the position and made a huge impact and successful effort to keep sports afloat on a destroyed campus. Much of Washburn's later success in sports was from the roots and recruitment of quality players and staff to Washburn, established by Mike.

Mike eventually retired from Washburn having attained both significant positions in his career including Athletic Director, as well as Chairman of the Department of Physical Education, Health, and Recreation. Additionally, he was part time commissioner of the then Great Plains Athletics conference at its birth. He was fond of telling Nancy, he was a long way from Goddard Street, as a reference of being the son of an Armenian immigrant that worked the steel foundries, lived in a tenement house on Goddard Street, and who saw his two boys go on to graduate University and capture success. Mike's was very much the success story of sons of immigrants from the 1920's.

Mike's love of the game was endless. His impact on so many students he taught and encouraged into teaching positions all over Kansas and indeed the U.S. is without question from a great mentoring gift he shared with his students, who voted him teacher of the year many times. Teaching and students kept him young for a very long time. He attended every Washburn football game for over 200 straight events. His passion and soul for football never left him. One of his fondest memories is attending Super Bowl XLIV with his sons for his 80th Birthday.

A celebration of life will be 11 a.m. Saturday, June 8, 2019, at Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home, 2801 SW Urish Road, Topeka KS 66614. Family friend Al Lopes will do the honor of memorializing Mike. We encourage others to share their fond memories.

Remembrance would be gratefully accepted in the form of a donation to Washburn University Sports department or to Midland Hospice Care, sent in care of the funeral home.

# Comments

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“ We are sorry for the loss of Mike to his family. We'll always remember the times we had with him and Nancy through the nearly 50 years of our "gourmet club" meetings and fun. Great friends.

Billy and Marian Milner

**Billy Milner** - May 15 at 02:27 PM

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“ As a youngster, I shot baskets in Whiting Fieldhouse during the summer. One time, Mike, who was AD at the time, stopped me and asked which was my dominant hand. When I told him it was my right, he told me start using my left as often as possible. That was at least 50 years ago but remember it to this day. I miss seeing him at the Y.

Kent Cornish

**Kent Cornish** - May 15 at 12:32 PM