Long-Time SUNY Cortland Coach and Educator Peter Cahill Passes Away

Peter J. Cahill, associate professor emeritus of physical education who taught and coached at SUNY Cortland for 30 years until his retirement in 2002, passed away in Cortland on Nov. 17. He was 61.

A native of Watertown, N.Y., Cahill grew up in Malone, N.Y., and attended Franklin Academy. In 1966, he earned a bachelor’s degree in physical education from SUNY Cortland where he competed in swimming and tennis. He earned a master’s degree in physical education from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and a doctorate from Springfield College.

Cahill taught physical education in the Clarkstown (N.Y.) School District from 1967-69 and was an instructor and coached aquatics and tennis at SUNY Plattsburgh from 1969-71. In 1972, Cahill joined the SUNY Cortland faculty and became head coach of both the men’s cross country and men’s swimming and diving teams. He added the women's swimming and diving coaching duties to his resume in 1978 and coached both squads until 1988.

From a last place conference finish in his initial season, Cahill led his Red Dragon men’s swimming and diving squads to become a perennial State University of New York Athletic Conference (SUNYAC) power during the next 15 seasons, winning four league crowns. He was voted SUNYAC Coach of the Year in 1979, 1981 and 1985. On a national scale, he coached 77 qualifiers to the NCAA Division III Swimming and Diving Championships. His Red Dragons placed as high as fifth in the nation in 1981.

Cahill’s women’s swimming and diving teams dominated the New York State collegiate landscape and finished fourth and ninth in the U.S. in the early 1980s. His teams won three of four all-division New York State titles in his first four years, then swept four of the first five SUNYAC Women’s Swimming and Diving crowns. The 1988 Women’s and Swimming Diving Coach of the Year in 1988, he coached more than 50 women’s national qualifiers. In 1985, he became the first coach in SUNYAC history to lead both a men's and women’s program to conference titles in the same season in any sport.

Cahill took over as the head women’s tennis coach in 1998 and remained the head coach after his retirement from teaching. Cortland had won only two SUNYAC tennis titles in the previous 15 years, but under Cahill, the Red Dragons captured five of the next seven league championships while posting an impressive 59-29 win-loss record. In 2005, Cortland placed third in the New York State Women's Collegiate Athletic Association Tournament, its best finish in 21 years. Two Cortland players qualified for the NCAA Division III Championships under Cahill, who was voted the SUNYAC Women’s Tennis Coach of the Year in 2003 and 2005.

Within the Physical Education Department, Cahill served as advisement coordinator and director of racquet activities. An avid tennis competitor and instructor, he was tennis coordinator for the 25th Annual Empire State Games co-hosted by SUNY Cortland in 2002.

He is survived by his wife, Shirley Reome Cahill ’66, a physical education instructor at the College, and his two children, David of Amherst, Mass. and Julie of Asheville, N.C.

Anyone wishing to make a memorial contribution in Peter’s name is asked to consider the Cortland chapter of the American Red Cross, Port Watson St., Cortland, NY 13045, or Caring Community Hospice of Cortland, 11 Kennedy Parkway, Cortland, NY 13045.

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