

RUSSELL “SOX” WALSETH

Legendary CU Basketball Coach Was One Of School’s Most Popular Figures

Russell “Sox” Walseth, the legendary University of Colorado basketball coach who was likely the first and one of only a few to have coached both the men’s and women’s basketball teams at the same NCAA school, passed away on Wednesday, Jan. 28, 2004. He was 77.

A player, coach and administrator, his time at CU spanned 38 years, starting as an athlete in the 1940s when he lettered a combined six times in both basketball and baseball.

Taking over the reins of the men’s program for the 1956-57 season, Walseth proceeded to coach the next 20 Buffalo teams. The winningest coach in CU men’s basketball history with a 261-245 record, the Buffs won three Big Eight titles under his direction, in 1961-62, 1962-63 and 1968-69. He was the Big Eight Conference coach of the year on five occasions, and his most prominent players included Ken Charlton, Jim Davis, Cliff Meely, Scott Wedman and Dave Logan.

All three of his Big Eight champion teams represented the conference in the NCAA regional tournaments (in those days, only one school could advance from a conference). Eventual NCAA champion Cincinnati eliminated the Buffs in the first two appearances, while his third tourney team may have represented his best coaching job in his tenure as he piloted a sophomore-dominated team to the league title and an NCAA berth.

He retired from coaching for the first time in the spring of 1976 and remained on in an administrative position with the athletic department. But four years later (1980), and CU hit with budget woes, then athletic director **Eddie Crowder** asked him if he would come out of retirement to help the program to which he had devoted much of

his adult life. Sox answered that call and would coach the CU women’s team between 1980-83, then known as the “Lady Buffs,” compiling an impressive 77-21 record. That mark included an incredible 43-0 record at home, and once again, he earned coach of the year accolades.

The basketball floor at the Coors Events/Conference Center is named after him. In 1998, he was inducted into the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame, and four years later in 2002, he was a member of the fourth class inducted into the University of Colorado Athletic Hall of Fame.



Sox (the origin of that nickname was always unknown to him, but he had it since childhood) was born April 6, 1926 in Aberdeen, S.D. He was an all-state performer in basketball at Pierre High School, where he graduated in 1944.

He spent two years in the Navy’s V-5 and V-12 programs during which he began college, attending Carroll College in Helena, Mont. The Navy moved him to Colorado in the fall of 1945 and he was a regular on the basketball team in his first year at CU while still in the Navy program.

After his discharge, he stayed on at Colorado, playing guard with the reputation as a brilliant floor leader during the 1946-47 and 1947-48 seasons. He lettered three years as a shortstop for coach Frank Prentup on the baseball team, and would also try his hand in the minor leagues, spending two seasons with Victoria (B.C.), a member of the B League.

Perhaps his greatest game as a collegian occurred during his first year at Colorado when the Buffaloes made an early season tour that took them to New York’s Madison Square Garden. Accounts at the time referred to his performance as, “Cool and crafty beyond his years, Walseth was unruffled at playing for the first time in the nation’s top arena against one of the country’s top teams, NYU.” Though CU lost 66-52, Walseth led all scorers in the game with 20 points.



- **CU’s all-time leader in victories with 261**
- **Likely the first and only a few to coach both the men’s and women’s basketball teams at the same school**
- **CU won three Big Eight titles under his direction**
- **Coached 20 different CU teams from 1957-1976**
- **Coached the CU women from 1980-83 and was an impressive 77-21, including 43-0 at home**
- **Coors Events Center basketball floor was named after him in 1996**
- **1998 inductee of the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame**
- **2002 Inductee of the CU Athletic Hall of Fame**



After his graduation from CU in the spring of 1948, he remained with the school as head freshman basketball coach while he worked toward a Master's degree in Education. He spent five seasons in this capacity, three years under his college coach, **Forrest B. "Frosty" Cox**, and two with **H.B. "Bebe" Lee**.

With that experience along with his Master's from Colorado, he left Boulder to become head basketball coach at Arvin High School in Bakersfield, Calif., in 1954. After one year there, he was named head coach at South Dakota State College and quickly reshaped that school's cage fortunes. In his first year there (1954-55), his team forged a 14-11 mark, but the following year the Jackrabbits fashioned a 17-7 record in winning the North Central Conference crown and went on to play in the NAIA national tournament.

Walseth had the combined outstanding qualities of two fine coaches in Cox and Lee, and those along with his excellent background combined with a solid blend of youth and fire made him the easy choice to succeed Lee as CU's coach prior to the 1956-57 season.

Walseth is the fifth CU icon to pass away since the turn of the century, as the Buffalo family also lost long-time athletic staff members Fred Casotti (2001) and Les Fowler and Dan Stavely (both in 2003) and the school's first All-American and former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Byron "Whizzer" White (in 2002).

He was preceded in death by his first wife of more than 40 years, the former Eleanor "Ellie" Hahn, and is survived by his current wife, Joan, sons Joe and Nick, daughter Cynthia and four grandchildren.

Sox Walseth Year-By-Year

CU Men Season	Conference			Rank	Overall		
	W	L	Pct.		W	L	Pct.
1956-57	5	7	.417	t-4th	14	9	.609
1957-58	3	9	.250	t-6th	8	15	.348
1958-59	8	6	.571	t-3rd	14	10	.583
1959-60	8	6	.571	t-4th	14	10	.583
1960-61	7	7	.500	4th	15	10	.600
1961-62	13	1	.929	1st	19	7	.731
1962-63	11	3	.786	t-1st	19	7	.731
1963-64	9	5	.643	2nd	15	10	.600
1964-65	8	6	.571	t-5th	13	12	.520
1965-66	6	8	.429	t-5th	12	13	.480
1966-67	10	4	.714	t-2nd	17	8	.680
1967-68	3	11	.214	t-7th	9	16	.360
1968-69	10	4	.714	1st	21	7	.750
1969-70	7	7	.500	t-3rd	14	12	.538
1970-71	6	8	.429	t-5th	14	12	.538
1971-72	4	10	.286	7th	7	19	.269
1972-73	9	5	.643	t-2nd	13	13	.500
1973-74	4	10	.286	6th	9	17	.346
1974-75	4	10	.286	t-7th	7	19	.269
1975-76	4	10	.286	7th	7	19	.269
Totals	139	137	.504	261	245	.516

CU Women

1980-81	10	0	1.000	1st	28	5	.848
1980-82	8	2	.800	t-1st	28	8	.778
1982-83	7	5	.583	3rd	21	8	.724
Totals	25	7	.781	77	21	.786

Combined

Totals	164	144	.532	338	266	.560
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