

THORBURN: Late Buff Pat Frink remembered as great scorer, great father

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

The heartbreak was palpable over the phone from its painful origins in Brazil to the other end of the line in Boulder.

Legendary Colorado basketball player Pat Frink was killed in an automobile accident early Sunday.

And a part of his big brother Mike died with him.

"It's devastating," Mike, retired and living in South America where he coached professional basketball for years, told me while packing up to make the unexpected trip to bury Pat on his ranch near Tucson, Ariz. "These kind of tragedies always blind side you, especially when it's your only brother and your closest friend in life for 67 years."

The report in the Arizona Daily Star about what happened read as follows:

"Patrick Edward Frink, 67, was driving a gray 2007 Ford F-150 south on Hayhook Ranch Road, about one mile south of Arizona 86, when he lost control of the truck.

"It rolled and he was thrown from the vehicle, said Deputy Dawn Barkman, a Pima County Sheriff's Department spokeswoman in a news release.

"Investigators believe speed and alcohol may have been factors in the crash, the release said."

This isn't how the last chapter of the Pat Frink story was supposed to end.

"Right now it's more than you can imagine or understand," Mike said. "Two days later and I continue to deny it."

Mike was born 16 months ahead of Pat, but growing up many people assumed they shared the same birthday.

"That's probably the reason we became so different," Mike said. "We were tired of people saying to our mother that she had twins."

The Fink brothers were raised by their mom, a single parent, in a one-bedroom apartment. The family couldn't afford a car or a television.

Mike didn't want his peers to know where he lived because he was "a little embarrassed." Pat never thought twice about bringing friends home.

"We were very poor," Mike said. "Pat didn't mind wearing brown belts with black shoes. I did."

Mike grew up to be an "ordinary" college player who had a penchant for getting into brawls if an opposing player crossed the line with a teammate, especially his younger brother.

Pat was a brilliant shooter who wasn't quite as tough on the defensive end as Sox Walseth might have liked.

"We played one-on-one a million times. The way I would win was by fouling Pat until he couldn't get his arms up anymore," Mike said. "Basketball was our life."

Walseth recruited Mike when he was a star at Wheat Ridge High School. The CU head coach promised that the scholarship offer wasn't just to get in good with the more physically gifted and skilled younger brother.

During the 1963-64 season, Mike scored 12.1 points per game for the Buffs. Jim Davis, a 6-8 senior center, averaged 18.5 points that year and led the Big Eight in rebounding for the second time.

In 1964-65, Chuck Gardner took over in the post while the Frinks handled most of the offensive production from the guard spots. Pat, a sophomore, led CU in scoring (15.0 ppg) with Mike chipping in 9.4 points and 5.7 rebounds per game.

"He was a hell of a scorer," former long-time Daily Camera sports editor Dan Creedon, who covered Walseth's Buffs, recalled of Pat Frink. "He was a great offensive player."

During a highly entertaining 93-89 non-conference victory over Utah on Dec. 5, 1966, Pat scored 36 points. He averaged a team-high 18.3 points during his junior season after missing the previous year with a serious knee injury.

"Pat Frink, in my opinion and the opinion of many, was one of the greatest shooters we've had from this state," said Irv Brown, the distinguished college basketball referee and former baseball coach at CU.

Creedon remembers taking a train to cover CU's 66-59 victory at Missouri on March 4, 1967. The dramatic road win put the Buffs in the thick of the Big Eight regular-season title chase before Frink and Co. fell short in a 66-59 loss at Kansas two nights later.

The Buffs finished the 1966-67 season 17-8 overall, including 11-0 at Balch Fieldhouse and 10-4 in conference play. Despite a 64-57 victory over Nebraska in the finale, the Cornhuskers were chosen for the National Invitational Tournament at CU's expense.

"Pat was a real gentle soul," said Bob Bauers, who was the second-leading scorer on that memorable squad. "He was a good guy and we always had a good time ... I'll tell you, it's tough to lose a teammate, especially like that."

Pat averaged 18.9 points as a senior but CU finished with a disappointing 9-16 (3-11 in the Big Eight) record in 1967-68.

"Pat's habit was to clap his hands when he was open and he expected the ball. He never missed a chance to shoot and he was a good shooter," said Mike, who once tried to recruit a prospect from Greeley named Tad Boyle over the phone while working as an assistant at Washington. His coaching career also included a stint as an assistant at CU under Ricardo Patton from 2005-06. "I always tried to defend my man and his man. He wasn't a great defender."

Still, Pat's jump shot was pure enough to get the NBA's attention. The 6-4 guard was selected in the third round (27th overall) of the 1968 draft by the Cincinnati Royals.

The professional career was short-lived, but a noteworthy life-long friendship did emerge.

Pat averaged 2.6 points in 48 games during his one-and-done NBA season playing with Oscar Robertson. The "Big O" was known to show up at camps in Boulder and Wheat Ridge at the request of the Frinks.

Mike spent time crying on the phone with Robertson's wife and daughter after delivering the sad news about Pat. He was on the other line with the Tucson medical examiner when his brother's most famous teammate called to express his condolences.

"Oscar's raw emotion in the 40-second voice mail was more than I could imagine," Mike said. "This man, who has had an incredible life and is a legend, felt so strongly about Pat after playing with him for only one year."

At training camp prior to the Royals' 1968-69 season, Robertson said to his roommate Pat: "Hey, go guard somebody you can beat out."

After his playing day came to an abrupt end, Pat focused on caring for his invalid daughter, who was born with Rett syndrome and had a life expectancy of about seven years.

"That became his vocation. He became a father and a nurse because it was a necessity," Mike said. "She couldn't eat, walk or anything. But she lived to be 21. When she passed away (in 2000), he really lost his sense of purpose."

Wherever Pat went, his daughter went. He even ran the steps at Folsom Field with her in a harness.

"You have probably never seen a better dad," Bauers said. "I admired him so much the way he took care of her."

Over the years, Pat also took care of the students he taught at an Indian reservation school, the homeless at the shelter he ran in Denver, and the elderly members of Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Boulder.

"When he was there with them on their death beds he would always say, 'Save me a place up there,'" Mike said. "I asked him, 'How can you say that?' And he said, 'Mike, that comforts them. They know they're about to pass away. And I mean it, I want them to save me a place up there.'"

"I hope he saves me a place."

Football served Boulder's Irwin well on golf course

By Gary Baines For the Camera Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

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DENVER -- Learning curve? Who needs a learning curve?

When Hale Irwin first moved from southeast Kansas to Boulder at age 14, he had played golf on grass a grand total of three times. Unfazed by his lack of experience, he entered his first tournament -- a local Jaycees event at what is now Flatirons Golf Course.

And he won it.

"I look back and that's really where I got the injection of the tournament blood," Irwin said Tuesday night just before receiving the Nicholson Award for a lifetime of commitment and dedication to the game of golf. "I thought, 'This is my first tournament and I won it.' I can remember being so excited.

"Then there was the rapid success of going on and seeing what golf could do. I had gone from southeast Kansas to Boulder, then in three (Jaycees) tournaments from Boulder to Denver, then on to Virginia (for a national event). So it was pretty exciting stuff."

And with that, the foundation was laid for arguably the top athlete Boulder has ever produced.

After winning a state high school golf title at Boulder, he earned four state amateur championships in the mid-1960s, then excelled in two sports at the University of Colorado. He was a two-time All-Big Eight defensive back in football and claimed the NCAA golf title in 1967.

From there, he won 20 times on the PGA Tour, including three U.S. Opens, and a record 45 times on the Champions Tour. This year marks the 20th anniversary of his induction into the World Golf Hall of Fame, and in receiving the Nicholson Award he follows in the footsteps of such golf greats as Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus and Tom Watson.

On Tuesday, the soon-to-be 67-year-old Irwin regaled several media members with tales of his start as an athlete. He remembered how he and his brother used to get chased off of Flatirons Golf Course (then Boulder Country Club) while trying to fish golf balls out of the lake.

It was there that Irwin demonstrated some of the ultra-competitive nature which served him so well as an undersized football player and at the highest level of golf. Back then, it wasn't at all unusual to see him practicing even when there was snow on the ground at the course.

"That just comes down to the 'These guys aren't going to beat me' attitude," Irwin said. "They could certainly outplay me but they weren't going to beat me. They might win the battle, but I was going to win the war."

And three of those "wars" he won came in the U.S. Open -- in 1974, '79 and '90. To this day, he remains the oldest winner of the tournament as he prevailed at age 45 in 1990. And it was all a

dream come true from his days hitting his own practice balls at Boulder Country Club.

"I can remember thinking this is the shot to win the U.S. Open because that was the one tournament for which I could qualify," he said. "That was the dream."

Irwin first qualified for -- and made the cut in -- the U.S. Open as a 21-year-old amateur. Coincidentally, the Open was played that year at the same course (The Olympic Club in San Francisco) where it will be contested next month.

Another thing that Irwin said served him well over the years was his days as a Boulder High and CU football player.

"There can be an argument that football was a hiccup in (my golf) development, but I think it was a necessary and good hiccup," he said. "I think I learned a lot from football and seeing the vast difference between football and golf and what it took to play golf. I applied a lot of what I learned from football to golf. Some people say I took that attitude with me to golf but it was just a very competitive environment. When I got on the Tour, that's the arena (football) from which I drew that experience.

"I looked at every golf course as a football field. It was me or them. I say that somewhat jokingly because the thing I had more of than the other fellas was effort. I point back to the football background. Look at me -- I was a little guy even then, and I wasn't terribly fast. So I had to read keys and be in position and play technically better than the next guy. Then I had to play over my weight. I had to hit harder. All that effort is what you could take to the golf course. So when you got to Winged Foot or those hard courses -- where others guys might let up because they thought it was too hard -- that was right up my alley."

The Washington Post

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Steelers agree to terms with 7th-round draft pick Toney Clemons

By Associated Press, Published: May 8

PITTSBURGH — The Pittsburgh Steelers have signed seventh-round draft pick Toney Clemons to a four-year contract. Terms of the deal were not disclosed.

The Steelers chose the 6-foot-2, 210-pound Clemons with the 231st overall pick to give the team needed depth at wide receiver.

Clemons, who is from a northern Pittsburgh suburb, had 43 receptions for 680 yards and eight touchdowns during his senior season at Colorado.

Pittsburgh is down to four wide receivers on the roster following the release of Hines Ward. Clemons will compete for a spot behind Mike Wallace, Antonio Brown, Emmanuel Sanders and Jericho Cotchery.

Wide receivers coach Scottie Montgomery says the Steelers like Clemons' size. He is now the tallest receiver on the team.

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Hale Irwin honored with Nicholson Award, talks golf and football

By Tom Kensler The Denver Post The Denver Post

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Hale Irwin, the seventh recipient of the Denver-based Will F. Nicholson Jr. Award for lifetime contributions to the game of golf, wasn't born in Colorado. But, after moving here as a teenager, this is where his illustrious career in athletics began — as a multi-sport standout at Boulder High School and then at the University of Colorado, where he became an all-conference defensive back and an All-America golfer. Irwin, a three-time U.S. Open champion, the Champions Tour's all-time victories leader (45) and a 1992 inductee into the World Golf Hall of Fame, sat down with reporters Tuesday prior to the awards dinner.

Q: Any amateur memories in the state of Colorado stand out?

A: I think back to the days here, and there's always a special spot for your first victory, the first victory anywhere. When I was 14, we had just moved to Colorado from southeast Kansas. I played in the local Jaycee event. I had never played in a tournament before, and I won it. That took us on to the state tournament, where I finished third, and then to the nationals in Virginia. The tournament blood - I got the injection then. I remember being so excited. That was really the ground work that got me started in the golf scene. It may be said that football was a hiccup in that (golf) development. But I really think it was a necessary hiccup.

Q: Football helped your golf game?

A: Yes, I applied a lot of what I did in football to golf. I learned a lot from being around my teammates, and seeing the vast difference between football and golf, and what it took to play both. Some may say I took that competitive attitude to golf. When I went to the tour, (football) is where I drew my experience. I hadn't played in national golf events.

Q: But football is such a team game and golf is an individual sport. How did one translate to the other?

A: The positions I played in football, being a quarterback and a defensive back, you had to kind of have a little independent thinking. Football molded me and helped initially in my golf development because I was under-talented and under-skilled when I started in golf. When you hit the big leagues, the PGA Tour, there are a lot of guys that can really play.

Q: Are you sad that multi-sport athletes are almost non-existent these days?

A: I am. Forget about those that make it as professional athletes. But even for those that don't get to that level, are we turning out citizens or are we turning out people that can do just one thing? Let the kids do other things. As parents, coaches, educators, we pigeon-hole these kids at such a young age, they don't have an opportunity to experience other endeavors.

Q: You turn 67 next month and are still competitive on the seniors tour. To what do you attribute your longevity?

A: A lot of it is obviously being genetically put together pretty well. My dad was a good athlete. My mom had longevity. There were some athletic genes that certainly got passed down. But I've just never accepted anything but my best effort. Whether that succeeds or not, if you give your best effort, that's all you can do. I've tried to learn from my errors. But I've tried to learn more from my successes. I've felt that if you dwell too much on your errors, you're dealing in the negativity of things. I don't like that. I'd rather work on the positive reinforcement, the things I did well.

Q: Five years have passed since your last Champions Tour victory. Still believe you can win?

A: I do. I'm close. I've said that for a long time. The hardest thing for me is not hitting the shots. I can hit any shot out there. But I don't have the intensity level that I once had or the concentration level I once had to carry through predictably (with that shot-making), time and time again. When I was playing well, those shots just happened.

Q: Winning three U.S. Opens and a pair of U.S. Senior Opens shows you thrived on the most difficult courses. Why so?

A: I looked at every golf course as a football field; It was me or them. I say that somewhat jokingly because, the thing I had was effort. With my football background, I was even a little guy back then. I had good football speed, but I didn't have flat-out speed. So I had to read my keys, be in good position. I had to play technically better than the next guy, and I had to play over my weight. All that effort is what I could take to the golf course.

Q: This award is about giving back. You have been generous in your involvement with Children's Hospital in St. Louis and the Hale Irwin Center for Pediatric Hematology/Onocology, and also with Wounded Warriors. Any new projects?

A: The old 'giving back' - it's not always in monetary terms, at least directly. Indirectly, you can give your time. Next week will be the first of a new program - I'm trying to help the military guys that are between deployments. I'll do the first several myself before calling on my fellow pros to get involved -- helping the guys with some decompressed, chill-out time. We're looking for ways to back this thing on a national level.

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