

Earl Barber, an everyday hero, passes away

Written by Mark Dukes

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You probably didn't know Earl Barber but perhaps you know someone like him.

Those of us advancing in age sometimes like to speak of "the good old days," when life seemed simpler. People worked at the same job for years and years, making a decent paycheck for their family. Parents were supportive of their kids and their activities. Families took regular vacations. People were involved in their community.

Earl Barber, who died last week at age 85, was a lot like that. He worked at Link-Belt/FMC in Cedar Rapids for 40 years. He and his wife Virginia raised two girls and a boy. Earl gave a lot of his spare time to the Cedar Rapids Jefferson Booster Club and the local and state American Legion baseball programs, among other interests.

The thing that struck me about Earl is that he never missed a game in which his son played, at least until college. His son is Bruce Barber, one of my best friends. We were rivals in junior high school, he at Roosevelt and I at Taft. We became friends at Jefferson, where Bruce was a nice punter on the football team but a star for the J-Hawks' baseball team in the mid-1970s. He was 14-5 with a 0.90 earned-run average in 1974, marks that still rank high on Jefferson's all-time lists.

Bruce also played on some very good Hanford Post American Legion teams under Ken Charipar, who died March 21. Ken and Earl spent a lot of summers together. Earl wasn't just a casual observer. He was a local managerial staff member and a state Legion committee member.

Bruce left home after high school, earning a scholarship to pitch at the University of New Mexico. That obviously prevented Earl from seeing a lot of games. Bruce was a four-year letterman for the Lobos when they played the likes of powerhouse Arizona State on a regular basis. Bruce spoke of the horror of facing ASU slugger and future major-leaguer Bob Horner. Earl may not have wanted to see that matchup.

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I suspect there are plenty of Earl Barbers who are involved in our Metro high schools, men and women who devote time to coaching youth, working in concession stands, turning the dirt on the diamond, arranging travel to and from games, and simply being involved in their child's interest.

High school sports wouldn't be much without those types of people.

When Earl left us last week, it was at the stroke of noon. That ironically, and appropriately, corresponded to the first pitch of the baseball season. Bruce was there with him.

Instead of mourning, we celebrate the labors of people like Earl Barber. Our hats are off to those who not only take time to watch their kids play, but also unselfishly become involved. The memories and the rewards are priceless.