

Cole Johansen dies peacefully at 67

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Beloved longtime Jefferson High School teacher and coach Cole Johansen, 67, passed away peacefully at his home Saturday afternoon of cancer.

His wife, Trudy, said he was in no pain and merely stopped breathing as family and friends were gathered around to watch the Iowa State basketball game on television.

A high school prep star at Woodstock, Ill., Johansen was a four-year scholarship player for the Cyclones in the mid 1960s. His team once played at UCLA in the midst of legendary Coach John Wooden's 88-game consecutive win streak.

"They clobbered us by 35 or so," Johansen recalled just days before his death. "But at least I can say I was on the same court as Lou Alcindor."

After serving in the Army and with a master's degree from Iowa State, Johansen taught at Lake Park and Parkersburg before joining the Jefferson faculty in 1987.

He served as a counselor and later taught history and economics for many years. He retired in 2007.

Johansen coached the golf team at Jefferson for 20 years and was an assistant boys basketball coach under Bob Landis, Rick Williams and Stu Ordman.

Jefferson teams went to the state tournament five times during his tenure.

While he had successfully recovered from three previous bouts of cancer, Johansen was

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diagnosed with lung cancer last summer. His condition worsened in recent weeks and he was under hospice care at home at the time of death.

“Cole wasn't in any pain and was perfectly coherent right up to the end,” his wife Trudy said Sunday night.

“He was talking about basketball with his niece's fifth grade son Saturday morning. That afternoon, he asked me if I was going to be OK, and then he just stopped breathing.”

Arrangements are pending at Murdoch Funeral Home in Marion. A visitation will be held at the funeral home Friday from 3 to 8 p.m. with a time of remembrance at 7 p.m.

Funeral services will be held Saturday at noon at First Lutheran Church in Cedar Rapids with visitation at 11 a.m. at the church. Burial will be held later in Woodstock.

Memorials may be sent to the charitable Cole Johansen Foundation, in care of his wife Trudy at 2114 Country Club Parkway SE, Cedar Rapids, 52403.

Donations will be used to fund a scholarship for Jefferson boys basketball players and for a memorial in Johansen's honor along the Cedar Valley Nature Trail.