J-Hawks dedicate Niemeyer Field

Written by Tom Fruehling Wednesday, 12 June 2013 22:51

Even after suffering two embarrassing defeats Wednesday night, Waterloo West softball players one-by-one stopped to pay their respect to Larry Niemeyer, the coach they barely got to know.

"Keep your chin up," he told the girls. "You're better than you think you are."

Niemeyer was seated at a picnic table behind the backstop of the newly named Larry Niemeyer Field at the Jefferson High School softball complex.

Dedicated in his honor between games, the field was built from scratch soon after he started his legendary 33-year career as J-Hawk coach in the spring of 1979.

He wanted a place where the players would be proud to play.

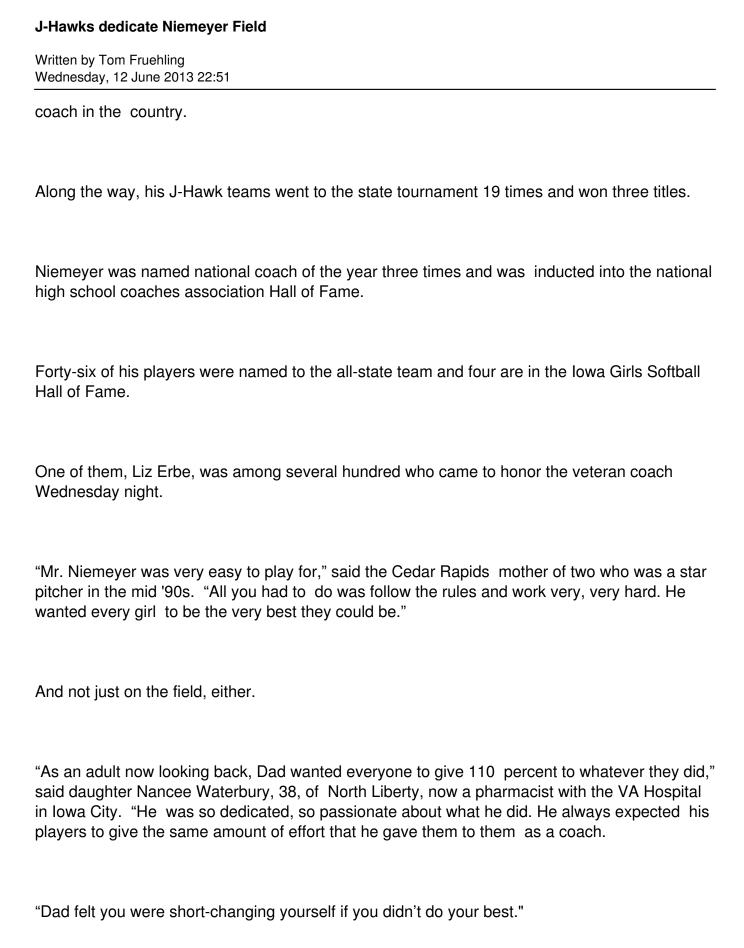
Instead of a dirt outfield, it had manicured grass. The diamond was the first at any area high school to have lights. And a lighted sign in right field that Niemeyer designed himself.

It was, and still is, a showpiece.

"This diamond has probably had more high school softball games played on it than any other diamond in Iowa," Niemeyer said.

And more home team victories, as well.

In 52 years as a high school coach, first at tiny Adel in central lowa and up through his last at Jefferson in 2012, his teams won 2,089 games and lost just 429. That's the most ever for any



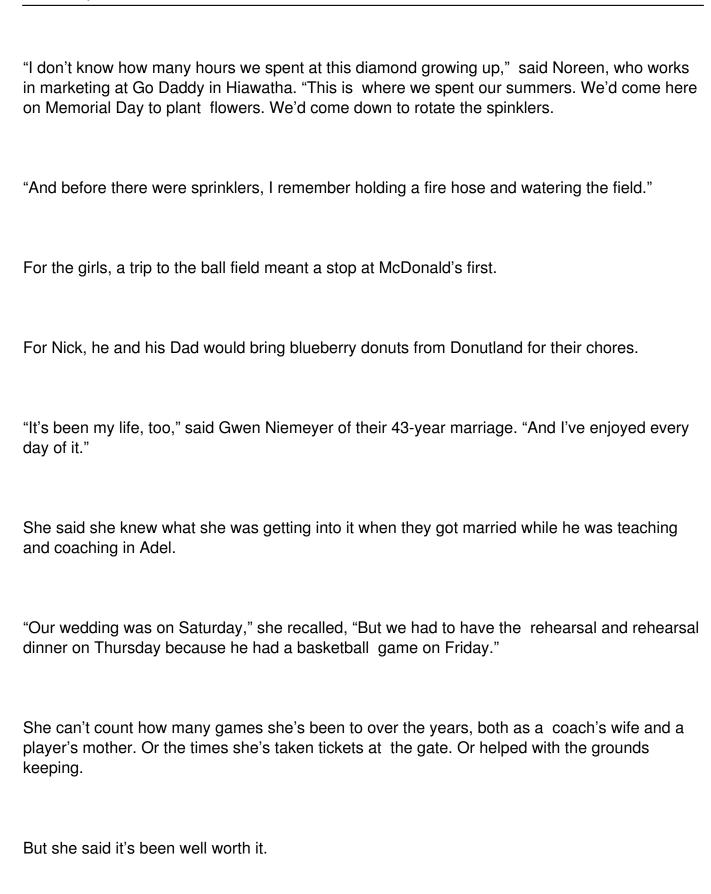
Nancee, along with sisters Noreen Thurston, 35, and Natalie, 25, played for their father and

later helped him coach. Son Nick, 32, was his assistant for 10 years at Jefferson.

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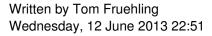
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"I'm very proud of Larry. Not just about what he's accomplished, but for the impact he's had on

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so many young women over all these years.

"There's no one who has higher morals or higher standards. He's taught girls how to be good adults."

Niemeyer was supposed to be coaching the Waterloo West girls this season. He'd signed on for the job last fall and had a few weeks of practice in this spring before recurring kidney problems forced him to step down the week before the opening game.

His health is much improved, he said Wednesday night as he watched the young Wahawks drop a pair of 12-0, three-inning routs to his former J-Hawks.

"I miss coaching," he said wistfully.