

Monty Heald was positive influence on Waterdown's rugby program

Mac Christie

Flamborough Review | Jul 16, 2015

George 'Monty' Heald, a long-time coach of the Waterdown District High School boys rugby team, passed away July 11 at his home in Waterdown, following a battle with cancer. He was 78.

Heald, born in Derby, England, was Rugby Canada's longest serving president, from 1991-99, and one of only two Honourary Life Members of Rugby Canada.

WDHS's Nathan Tidridge said Heald, who was active with the team up until last year, was there from the very beginning.

"The first season, we were practising in Memorial Park," he recalled, noting Monty was the team's uniform supplier through his rugby company, Monilex. "So he comes out all kitted out, ready to go in his gear to watch the practices."

"I had no idea who he was," Tidridge continued. "My rugby experience is very minimal, so after about five minutes, he comes over to me and says, 'Can I give it a go?'"

"From that point on he became our coach and ever since then he's been involved in some capacity."

Heald immigrated to Burlington in 1968 and moved to Puslinch in 1971. He played for several years for the Hamilton Hornets, captaining the club in 1971. He was a founding member of the Burlington Centaurs Rugby Club in 1973 and served as the club's first captain.

He served as the club's second president, ultimately becoming a Life Member.

Although his playing career concluded in 1988, Heald was involved in administration of the game, both with the Niagara Rugby Union and the Ontario Rugby Union.

At the national level, Heald became a national selector in 1981 and chaired the Canada Rugby Union Selection Committee from 1983-1994. He also served as manager of numerous Canadian teams.

Tidridge said that over time the Waterdown team learned who Heald was, and the history and calibre of rugby that he represented.

"We've been just so lucky – the opportunities that he's presented for us," he said, noting Heald was fundamental to the WDHS rugby program. "We couldn't have done it without him."

Tidridge noted Heald drafted the principles that govern the Waterdown team, which revolve around being gentlemen, playing fair and respecting coaches and officials.

"Monty understood that rugby at Waterdown is all about character development," he said. "Creating a community, and he was a big part of that."

In fact, Tidridge noted several members of past teams gathered at the Royal Coachman in Waterdown in memory of Heald.

"That was totally impromptu," he said. "I've been getting messages from guys as far away as Alberta."

"That's a testament to him, as well."

Current WDHS rugby coach Dave Tait said Heald was able to develop a good rapport with the young players.

"You would have thought, because of the age gap that there might be a (disconnect), but he was really, really good at getting on the same level of the kids and encouraging them," he explained. "If I was running a handling drill and one of the kids was having a problem, Monty would take him off to the side on his own and show him a few things."

"He was really, really good at building an individual rapport and sharing his enthusiasm for the game."

Tait added Heald was a phenomenal asset to the school, with his wealth of rugby knowledge and international experience.

Tait said he knew Heald for about 15 years, through the Burlington club.

"Just a genuinely nice guy, a gentleman," he said of Heald. "I never heard a bad word out of him."



WDHS rugby mourns the loss of Monty Heald, who had a positive influence on the club during its formative years.

“He was a really decent man and rugby was his life.”

Heald is survived by Una, his wife of 54 years, and their three children. A celebration of his life will be held in the coming months.

Mac Christie is a reporter with the Flamborough Review. He can be reached at mchristie@flamboroughreview.com . Follow him on [Twitter](#) and the Review on [Facebook](#) .