



Joe Moresco coached the Little Red to a 141-81-14 record.

LONG-TIME ITHACA COACH MORESCO DIES AT 86

Rivals, players recall man who led Little Red to its only state title

By Tom Fleischman and Ed Boulat

ITHACA — One of Joe Moresco's contemporaries and chief rivals on the football field, former Union-Endicott coach Fran Angeline, was also one of Moresco's great friends in the coaching fraternity. And when the former Ithaca High coach passed away on Tuesday, at age 86, Angeline was profoundly affected. "I can't say enough about him," Angeline said Tuesday. "It's a huge loss to me. We've lost a great competitor, a great friend and a great coach. I will miss him personally." Moresco, who guided the Little Red to 141 victories and a state title in 28 years at the helm, died Tuesday morning at his Ithaca home. He was 86. "I thought the world of him," Angeline said. "I just can't think of enough positive adjectives to describe Joe Moresco."

Former players felt the same way about the man who arrived in Ithaca in the mid-1950s and built Ithaca High football into a state powerhouse. He also coached baseball at Ithaca. "He was very, very tough, very disciplined. But he was fair," said Rick Wells, who played football and baseball for Moresco in the early 1960s. Wells is now retired and lives in the Gettysburg area. "A lot of people don't realize how good of a coach he was, not only in football but baseball as well," Wells said. "We played a game every day, and we would go through situations every day, so come game day, baseball-wise we were well rehearsed. Football-wise, if you didn't like contact, then you better stay home."

Current Ithaca College football coach Mike Welch credited Moresco for helping shape his career. "When I became head coach at Ithaca, he was a bit of mentor for me,"

Welch said. "He followed me very closely, and he gave me a lot of encouragement. "He was a constant. He gave me a thumbs up when things were going great and a 'hang in there' when things weren't. "He became a very good friend."

"He was a great football man," said Bill Bryant, the former Ithaca athletics director who took over the football program this past fall. "He loved what he did, and he certainly affected the lives of thousands of young men in his time as a football coach. He was really the one that transformed not only football but athletics in general at Ithaca," Bryant said.

Moresco — who attended high school in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., graduating in 1944 — coached at Ithaca from 1956-83, compiling a 141-81-14 record. His best years were from 1968-72, when the Little Red went 41-1-1, including a 36-game unbeaten streak, undefeated Southern Tier Athletic Conference teams from '68-72, and a state championship in 1970. Including a stint at Canisteo High, Moresco finished his high school coaching career with 155 victories, which ranks 109th all-time in the state. In 2000, the Ithaca district re-dedicated the football facility at Ithaca High as Moresco Stadium at Bredbenner Field. He is a member of the Section 4 Hall of Fame, the Ithaca High Athletic Hall of Fame and the Mansfield University Hall of Fame. Moresco is survived by his wife of 64 years, Shirley, and children, Joseph III, Nancy, Tim, Teri and Barbara, plus 10 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Calling hours

Friends are invited to call from 3 to 6 p.m. Thursday at Bangs Funeral Home, 209 W. Green St., Ithaca. A Mass of Christian burial will be held at 10 a.m. Friday at the Immaculate Conception Church, 113 N. Geneva St., Ithaca.

Reprinted from The Ithaca Journal, 11/28/2012