



James L. Comer, Former Professor of Physical Education and Director of Intramural and Intercollegiate Athletics, Passed Away January 14, 2015.

James L. Comer, former Professor of Physical Education and Director of Intramural and Intercollegiate Athletics, passed away January 14, 2015. His career at Cal State Hayward (East Bay) spanned the years 1963 to 1970. In 1969-1970 he was honored with the Outstanding Professor Award.

The following has been provided by his family.

James Lewis Comer

October 11, 1923 –January 14, 2015

James Lewis “Lew” Comer passed away peacefully at the age of 91 in Costa Mesa, California. Lew was born in Gainesville, Texas where he lived on the family farm with his sister and five brothers. At the age of 14, his family moved to San Diego, California. Known as “Tex”, he excelled in academics and was captain of his high school football team and a noted track man. In 1942, after graduation, he attended Iola Junior College in Kansas on a football scholarship. He scored 120 points from his tailback position which earned him the rank of second highest scoring football player in the nation. He then joined the Marine Corps where he served in WWII from 1943 through 1946. In 1944, he married his sweetheart, the former Barbara Seay of Iola, Kansas. After the war, he attended Fort Hays State in Kansas where he was captain of the football team and won all conference honors running the 440 in track. He has been referred to as the outstanding Fort Hays State graduate.

In a career that spanned almost 40 years, Lew Comer was a highly imaginative, humorous, inspirational and energetic man who compiled an enviable record as teacher, coach, administrator, and athletic director. He won recognition for his outstanding leadership in intercollegiate athletics and community activities while at CSU Hayward (now CSU East Bay), CSU Bakersfield, and CSU Long Beach. He was distinguished as the California State University 1970 Professor of the Year. He was also appointed as Commissioner of the California Collegiate Association of NCAA, Division II. As a result of his exemplary leadership and skill, he was inducted into the Halls of Fame at Cal State University, Hayward, Central Missouri State University, and Cal State University, Long Beach.

Comer was an avid learner, earning his B.A. in History and his B.S. in Physical Education at Fort Hays State. After moving to Warrensburg, Missouri in 1953 to become head football and track coach, Comer not only built and coached a championship team, but he earned his M.S. degree. Then in 1957, Comer moved his family to Las Cruces, New Mexico where he was director of physical education and athletics for the Las Cruces public school system for four years. Then he joined New Mexico State University as an assistant professor and cross-country coach. During his time in New Mexico, he continued his studies and earned the Ed. S degree from NMSU and the Ed. D degree from the University of Utah.

In 1963, Dr. Comer accepted the position of Athletic Director at Cal State University, Hayward. He also served as the head track and cross-country coach the first year. He helped start the first football program at CSUH and was instrumental in getting the stadium and track. Under his guidance, CSUH developed one of the top intercollegiate

athletic programs on the West Coast.

Never one to ignore a challenge, Comer accepted the position of Athletic Director at CSU Bakersfield in 1970 where he was charged with the task of developing their athletic program and designing their track and field. While engrossed in his work there, he was heavily recruited to join the staff at CSU Long Beach as Athletic Director. Those were tumultuous times at CSULB because the school was under NCAA sanctions, but Comer took it on in 1971. After a few years, Comer elected to finish his career as a full time professor until he took early retirement in 1980 to live on his ranch in Mission, Texas, a place where his grandchildren loved to ride horses, drive the tractor, and fish in the pond. He was famous locally for his huge garden from which he made generous donations to his neighbors and to those less fortunate.

In scholarship, publication, teaching, counseling of students, and in service to his church, community, state, and nation, Comer was outstanding. His personal edict was “plan your work and work your plan”, and he followed it in his life and instilled it in his students, children and grandchildren. His work ethic was without reproach, and he always performed to the limit of his abilities and encouraged others to do so as well.

Preceded in death by Barbara, his wife of almost 66 years, Dr. Comer leaves behind one brother, George Comer of Springfield, Massachusetts; his four children: Ronald (Betsy), Barbara Marrs (Buck), David, and Daniel (Sandy); ten grandchildren, fifteen great grandchildren, and one great, great grandchild. He took great pride in his family, and he was most happy when playing with his grandchildren. He loved his fellow man. He loved helping, sharing, giving, and teaching; even after his death, his legacy lives on in the donation of his body to the UCI Willed Body Program where university students will continue to learn from him.

The world is a better place because Lew Comer was here. He continues to be loved and missed more than mere words can say. A celebration of his life will be held Saturday, February 28, 2015 at CSULB.