

COACH ROBERT L. STRAYHAN

BAYTOWN CARVER HIGH SCHOOL



A Tribute

BY J. WARREN SINGLETON

The death of Baytown George Washington Carver High School's legendary varsity basketball and assistant football coach Robert L. Strayhan saddened many Baytownians as well as those of Lewisville, Arkansas. Coach Strayhan died November 27, 2011 at his home in Lewisville after suffering complications from a stroke and diabetes.

Coach Strayhan touched the hearts of many individuals, including former Baytown and Lewisville high school athletes, students, coaches, faculty members, staff members, family and friends, who had the opportunity to either be coached or mentored by him, or who worked with this extraordinary man. They were truly blessed and will never forget the name Robert L. Strayhan.

He was a one of a kind coach. When they made him, they broke the mold. He was the type of coach who truly loved his players, his "boys." He made sure they stayed focused on their school assignments and grades, and you had to make your grades to play sports for Carver and him. We had "no pass, no play" long before the state of Texas mandated it and coach Strayhan was one of the main enforcers.

He would see your grades before you or your parents and he made a point to keep in constant contact with you, your parents and your teachers to make sure you kept your grades up. If you didn't, you caught holy hell from him and, believe me, you didn't want to be in that situation. He kept a lot of the youngsters out of trouble and in school by keeping them focused on taking the right road. If he saw otherwise, he would sit you down, talk to you, and try to get you redirected.

Coach Strayhan would drive through McNair, Oak Addition and La Porte to make sure his boys were off the streets late at night. He expected you to be at home doing your school assignments. And you better not get caught on the streets or on the corner late at night, especially the night before a game. If you did, you had to pay the price. You couldn't play in that game no matter how good an athlete you were.

During practice, he was a hands on coach. He actually got down on all fours to show his players how to block. It didn't matter how big or strong you were, you couldn't move him out of his position because he kept himself in good physical condition.

It was fun to play sports for this man. He joked around a lot with us, however he knew when to stop and when to get serious and take care of business.

We need more coaches in our schools today like Robert L. Strayhan, coaches who care more about their athletes and not just getting a paycheck and going home early. We need more coaches like Robert L. Strayhan who care about their players making their grades, graduating from high school, being prepared for and attending college and getting a degree. But also, we need more coaches helping their athletes avoid teen pregnancies, getting involved in gangs and other troublesome crowds, and staying away from drinking, smoking or using drugs. We need more coaches like Robert L. Strayhan who care about what type of environment their athletes are living in and exposed to.

Further, we need coaches who will work hard to get scholarships for all of their deserving athletes, regardless of race or color. We need more coaches that will not use high school athletes for personal gain and for only winning games, but forget about them when they are getting ready to graduate. We need coaches who can and are willing to communicate with all athletes, across racial lines.

We need more Robert L. Strayhan's in our schools today.

I remember many stories about "coach," as many people still call him. One of them involved me and I will never forget it. Someone told coach Strayhan I couldn't swim. So, one day, he came up to me in the cafeteria during lunch and said, "Redd Foxx" (my nickname), I heard you can't swim. Well, guess what we are doing in P. E. today?" He made us go to the pool the first day of school, made me climb up the high diving board, and told me to jump off. I wouldn't jump so he climbed up, took me by the seat of my old gray tie-up shorts and threw me into the middle of the pool.

His youngest son Allan later told me he couldn't swim either until his father did the same thing to him. What a way to make you learn how to swim, though I still believe he was getting me back for beating his Oak Addition boys every year during May Day activities when I attended Harlem Elementary School. You see, Harlem competed against lil' Carver Elementary School every year and I would out run his Oak Addition boys.

I am so happy the Baytown Carver High School Recognition & Preservation Society was able to get the Prairie View Interscholastic League Coaches Association (PVILCA) to induct coach Strayhan into their Hall of Honor this year as a football coach. Coach Strayhan wasn't able to attend the July banquet in Fort Worth because of the stroke he had suffered. I was told by coach Strayhan's niece, Evelyn Turner, that when she returned to Lewisville from the banquet, she gave him his plaque and souvenir program. She said, "Uncle was like a little kid in a candy store. He started telling us stories about his days of coaching at Baytown Carver and he wouldn't stop talking."

It's so good to get your flowers while you can still smell them.

Through the efforts of our Recognition & Preservation Society, there were many "resolutions" and "recognitions," including ours, written in memory of coach Strayhan. Resolutions were also received from the City of Baytown, Goose Creek CISD, the PVILCA, Prairie View A & M University, Wiley College, the Carver Alumni Association and Antioch Missionary Baptist Church.

I presented them to his family at his funeral in Lewisville. Additionally, the Strayhan family received a resolution from the office of Texas Governor Rick Perry.

It is hard for me to believe that the last of the well known trio of Carver coaches, John W. "Johnny" Peoples, Roy Atmer Hutchins and now Robert L. Strayhan, is gone. If I had to guess what he is doing in heaven right now, I believe he is on a beautiful golf course with his old buddies, coach Peoples, Hutchins, Richard Lewis and others... and he's telling them about the whipping they are about to experience on that golf course.

Coach Robert L. Strayhan will truly be missed.

J. Warren Singleton is a 1963 graduate of Baytown Carver High School where he participated in track and football during coach Strayhan's tenure. Singleton is also the founder and president of the Baytown Carver High School Recognition and Preservation Society.