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Cloquet's trailblazing, enigmatic hockey coach dies

Bill Kennedy led team to first state tourney

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Word began to filter out early Monday morning that the godfather of Cloquet hockey, former boys hockey coach Bill Kennedy, had passed away Sunday at the age of 85 at his home in Mahtowa. The tough-as-nails Kennedy coached the Lumberjacks from 1967 to 1987 after

taking over for Don Bourdeau. Kennedy was instrumental in putting the program on the map.

He was also a favorite teacher to thousands of students who met up with him in his classroom during his four decades of teaching.

Bruce Plante, who played for Cloquet and then was a longtime Bantam coach there before moving on to become the head coach of the Hermantown program, spent a ton of time learning the coaching game from Kennedy.

"Bill was a disciplinarian to the highest degree," Plante said. "He did some things at times

that weren't right, but they were always with the good intention for the betterment of the team and the individual. He wanted our Cloquet kids to be tough and fearless."

Not only did Kennedy coach a hockey team, he also had foresight. When he arrived, the team played their home games — and practiced — at the hockey rink outside Washington Elementary School. In the late 1960s, voters turned down a referendum to build a new indoor hockey rink next to the high school.

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Bill Kennedy took over the Cloquet varsity coaching job in 1967. He is shown here in the 1968 school yearbook with captains Sep- po "Andy" Sormunen and Bob Ames. Kennedy, who died Sunday, led the Lumberjacks to their first state tournament appearance in 1982. He retired from coaching in 1987.

HARROWING TIMES IN THE BEARGREASE RACE



Sister dogs Goose and Charlie lead six other dogs and Esko musher Alex LaPlante at the start of the Beargrease 120 race Sunday just north of Duluth. She finished early Monday morning north of Finland. Amber Nichols / Pine Knot News

Esko musher has trouble on the trail

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When Alex LaPlante's third leg of the John Beargrease 120 sled dog race started, things went suddenly and dramatically wrong: Her sled tipped over right as the dogs were taking off after the countdown for the

final leg of the race Monday from Finland to the Trestle Inn.

"I got dragged out of view of the checkpoint, hanging on to my snow hook," LaPlante said. "At first I thought I lost the team ... I lost my grip on the handlebars, but suddenly my left arm went taut and I realized I still had the snow hook. I was

just hanging on because they were really strong."

LaPlante, from Esko, was one of two Carlton County residents on the trails this week. Wrenshall's David Little competed for the first time in the Beargrease 40.

The first two legs of this year's mid-distance race went

fairly smoothly for LaPlante.

The veteran LaPlante said she could tell the dogs knew something was wrong because they would slow down and almost pause, then take off again. She finally thought to holler "woah."

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State: Replace county jail soon

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After the yearly review by the state corrections inspector earlier this month, the Carlton County jail is looking at a forced retirement.

The final report following the Jan. 9 inspection of the jail and its daily operations included plans to recommend to the commissioner of corrections that a future "sunset authorization" be made for the facility. Senior detention facility inspector Sarah Johnson noted in her findings that "it is the intent of the Department of Corrections to continue to work with the officials of Carlton County to address the public safety needs of this community."

Without plans to fund and build a new jail and provide required programming for incarcerated at that facility, some time in the near future the Department of Corrections will move to close the Carlton County jail.

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