

# We are better for knowing Dave Lewis

By TOM WILLIAMS  
Sports Columnist

A few days before he died last week after a long bout with cancer, Oakcrest boys basketball coach Dave Lewis was at Richard Stockton College to watch his Falcons play in a high school league. He had come directly to Stockton from the hospital, where he had received one of the many medical treatments he had endured over the past year.

That is a perfect description of Lewis and his dedication — his dedication to the basketball program at Oakcrest, his dedication to the young athletes of the Cape-Atlantic League, his dedication to his family, his dedication to life.

Lewis became the head coach at Oakcrest seven years ago. He basically switched places with Jon Evans, an athlete he had coached at Mainland. Evans had been the Falcons head coach and Lewis was a Mainland assistant. When Evans left to return to his alma mater, Lewis applied for and was hired as his replacement at Oakcrest.

In its history, Oakcrest had qualified for the NJSIAA basketball tournament five times in the 24 seasons before Lewis became the head coach. He promptly took them into the post season six straight years. His teams won 92 games in his seven seasons, playing against the tough CAL American and a challenging lineup of non-conference opponents. Throughout his first two seasons, whenever he was given credit for his accomplishments, he pointed to Evans, saying that he had organized the program and set the improvements in motion. While there was some truth to that, it was another example of this man with virtually no ego.

Lewis loved the Boardwalk Basketball Classic in

## Oakcrest coach dies following surgery

By STEVE BELL  
Staff Writer

HAMILTON TOWNSHIP — Oakcrest High School boys varsity head coach Dave Lewis died Tuesday, June 17 from complications following abdominal surgery.

Lewis, who is survived by his wife, Beth and his four children, Rebecca, Rachel, Emily and David, was 58.

Lewis taught and coached at Oakcrest for seven years and had been diagnosed with multiple myoma, a disease that attacks the body's white blood cells.

Through his ordeal Lewis found the strength and fortitude to coach from the sidelines for a few games last season. His presence offered inspiration and leadership to the Falcons basketball team.

Lewis was also a Vietnam Veteran and recently received the Charley Dinsmore Courage Award at a Coaches vs. Cancer event held at the Palestra in Philadelphia.

Oakcrest coached at Mainland Regional High School before he came to Oakcrest.

Beth Lewis remembered her husband as a man who always found time for the development of children. She was reminded just how he had touched the lives of many young people.

"He was a great nurturer and role model for the kids," she said. "He had a tremendous impact on a lot of kids' lives."

Lewis was buried at Veterans Cemetery in at the Atlantic County Park in Estell Manor following a ceremony at the Central United Methodist Church in Linwood.

Wildwood. He loved the competition, the quality of the event and the opportunity to see one game after another. He spent a lot of time in the Wildwoods Convention Center between Christmas and New Years Eve, including the day when he left the hospital and came down to coach his team in a championship game.

Before he became the coach at Oakcrest, and before he was an assistant to Whitey Haak at Mainland, Lewis was part of Sam Botta's staff at Mainland. They took over the program and, starting with a talented group of freshmen, went through some struggles before building the program into a CAL champion and South Jersey finalist.

"Right after those kids finished their sophomore year," said Botta, "they made a strong commitment to get better and win the league championship. We decided not to enter a summer league but, instead, to practice every night and set up a few scrimmages. I was working two jobs that summer and could only be there some nights. Dave took on the

bulk of the responsibility and, five night a week for three or four hours, he worked with those kids in the gym. I'm convinced that one of the major reasons those guys — Jon Evans, Rob Higbee, Danny Williams, Mike O'Brien, Pete Medica, Chris Meade, Tommy Adamson, all of them — the major reason they improved so much and were able to win those two championships was the work Dave did with them that summer."

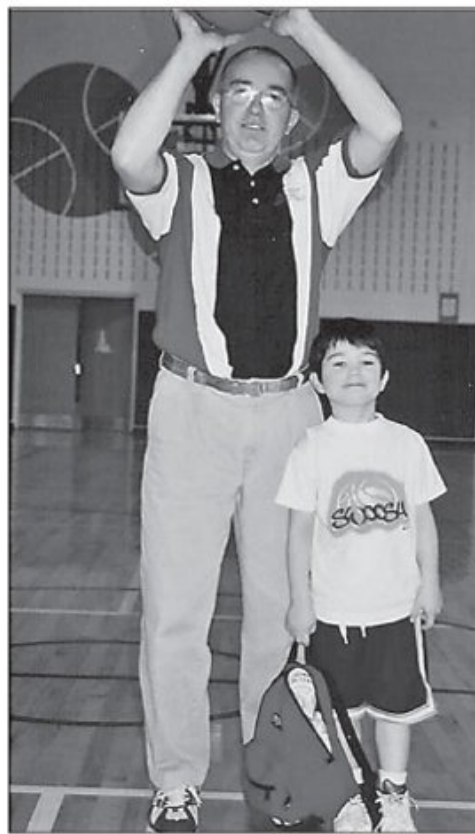
Of course, if you had asked Lewis about his contribution, he would have downplayed it. He always seemed more comfortable giving credit to others than receiving it himself.

Another event that Lewis enjoyed was All Star Saturday, whether it was watching the young eighth graders play, seeing the former players battle in an alumni game or watching the best of the CAL seniors tangle. In 2004, his Falcons were division champs and he got to coach in the game in Ventnor. That same year, he defeated Wildwood Catholic's Dave DeWeese and Ocean City's John

Bruno in the coaches three-point shootout, making 10 straight in the finals. From Matt Byrnes to Ryan Staton to Alex Nelson, Lewis always encouraged his senior players to make sure All Star Saturday was one of the all star games they chose at the end of the season.

Partly because of his fondness for All Star Saturday, all future the most valuable players in the Dixie Howell Boys Classic will be presented with the Dave Lewis Memorial Award. Dixie and Dave would have been good together.

Earlier this year, Lewis received the Charlie Dinsmore Courage Award from the Philadelphia Chapter of the Coaches versus Cancer. Dinsmore was a former Ocean City summer resident who also died from the disease. Temple coach Fran Dunphy and St. Joseph's coach Phil Martelli showed up at an Oakcrest game this year to inform him of the honor. When the story about his award and a photo appeared on the back page of the Philadelphia Daily News, Lewis only wanted to talk



Tom Williams

Dave Lewis and his son, David, posed for this photo after the 3-point shootout competition held during the 2004 All-Star Saturday event.

about the fact that his son, David, got to be in the photo with him.

Lewis left a highly-paid position in hospital administration to become a teacher and high school coach. In a profession filled with screamers, he was soft-spoken and unassuming. When his players first met Lewis, they were not overwhelmed by his presence. He was not the former high school star who tossed in 20 points a game or threw down jarring dunks. He was the guy who worked hard to learn the offense and played

aggressive defense so he could get more minutes on the court in high school. And he eventually convinced them to approach the game pretty much the same way.

In just seven years as a head coach, Lewis taught the Cape-Atlantic League basketball community a lot. His dedication to the game, his thorough approach to preparation and his enjoyment of the competition and the camaraderie were an example to everyone.

We are all better for knowing Dave Lewis.