

Death of Bugalski girls saddens Aptos community

By JOHN MURPHY

"There've been a lot of tears so far this week," said Aptos High School instructor Judy Ledley following the death of former students Leslie and Mary Bugalski Friday night.

Leslie, 24, and Mary, 23, were star athletes at Aptos and were the daughters of Barbara and Bob Bugalski, the latter a Cabrillo College physical education instructor who was formerly the basketball coach at the college. The Bugalskis are long-time Aptos residents.

Leslie and Mary were killed in a head-on crash Friday about 8 p.m. on the divided highway between Tijuana and Ensenada. Four others died in the two-car accident; two others remain in serious condition.

Described by Watsonville resident Ed Kelly as "athletes from the word go," Leslie and Mary were traveling in a van from San Diego to officiate in a triathlon in Ensenada. The young women were living in San Diego — still attending school part-time — after graduation.

In addition to their studies, Leslie was managing a fitness club and Mary was involved in land development.

According to Capt. Miguel Cotero of the Mexican Federal Highway Patrol, the Bugalskis were riding in a van with four other people when the vehicle veered out of control about a mile north of Rosarito Beach on the toll road to Ensenada. The van crossed over the highway's median and crashed head-on into another van, setting it ablaze. Four of the six persons in the Bugalskis' van were killed. In addition to Leslie and Mary, Greg Woods (age unknown) and a woman identified only as Anita were also killed. The driver of the van, Will Childer, 24, is in serious condition at Tijuana General Hospital. Another passenger, Tracy Moore, 25, suffered injuries and was taken to the same hospital.

The girls were standout athletes in basketball and volleyball at Aptos High. Leslie, who also participated in track and field, was named female athlete of the year in Santa Cruz County in 1978, the year she graduated. Mary graduated in 1979.

Leslie played center and Mary forward on the Mariners' league championship basketball team in 1978. The team advanced to the Central Coast Section playoffs, finishing fourth. Mary went on to also star for Aptos in 1979, leading the Mariners to another league title and a third-place finish in the CCS.

Leslie made all-league in both basketball and volleyball and also made the CCS all-tournament team in volleyball. She still holds the school record in the shot put, which she set while competing for coach Bill Warmerdam's track team. Leslie had a perfect 4.0 grade point average in high school.

Another sister, Ellen, is a volleyball player at Cal Poly University at San Luis Obispo. She was also a star basketball and volleyball player at Aptos. A fourth sister died of leukemia in 1963.

"We're in shock," Cabrillo College athletic director Dale Murray said. "Shock and disbelief — there's no other way to describe what's happened. 'They were the type of kids that you're proud of. They were good athletes, good students and good citizens.'"

Several friends of Bob Bugalski described the family as being unusually close. "They were an extremely close-knit family," said Kelly, who has worked each summer with Bob Bugalski at the Cabrillo Summer Basketball Camp. "When Bobby (Bobby Bugalski, a junior at Aptos High) was growing up, it was like he had four mothers instead of one. Each kid was totally into and interested in what the others were doing."

"They are one of the closest families." I've known, said Jim Belcher, an old friend of Bob Bugalski's, who coached

with the latter at Mora Central High School in Watsonville from 1958 until 1964. (Bugalski later became the basketball coach at Watsonville High, before taking the Cabrillo coaching job).

"You never heard a derogatory remark about those girls. Usually, you hear something, but with those girls you never heard anything of a derogatory nature." Belcher was leaving this afternoon to pick up Bugalski at the airport. Bugalski had to go to Ensenada to identify the bodies.

Ledley, a P.E. teacher at Aptos, said the tragedy is "a great loss" for a school that has had more than its share of grief over the years. In 1974, Erik Stakkestad, a former Mariner basketball standout, died in a fall at Yosemite National Park. Stakkestad was the son of a Cabrillo instructor.

In 1979, Billy Warmerdam, son of Mariner coach Bill Warmerdam, was killed in an auto accident. Billy was an all-league player for his father at Aptos and also played for Bugalski at Cabrillo.

The Aptos community was also saddened in 1979 by the death of Clifford King, father of Mariner baseball stars Matt and Marc King. King collapsed while watching his twin boys play a junior varsity baseball game against Soquel High.

"The Bugalski girls had outstanding dedication to their sport," said Ledley, who coached the girls in volleyball. "They gave their all no matter what the situation was. They were very close girls. They were outgoing, though Leslie was a little more quiet."

Added Ledley, "Aptos High sure has had its share of tragedies."

REFERENCE