

Ratliff hailed community 'hero'

Bio-R

Deceased friend, coach honored by Santa Cruz

By Jim Seimas

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SANTA CRUZ » Energetic Lorenzo Lowery, a 1973 Santa Cruz High alum, approached the podium set up below the JumboTron at Kaiser Permanente Arena on Saturday afternoon and told the 600 to 800 in attendance that superheroes were fake characters only found in comic books.

But Bytheal Ratliff — a beloved Cardinals athlete-turned-coach — was quite real, he continued, as photos of Ratliff, often smiling, coaching or hugging, flashed on the screen.

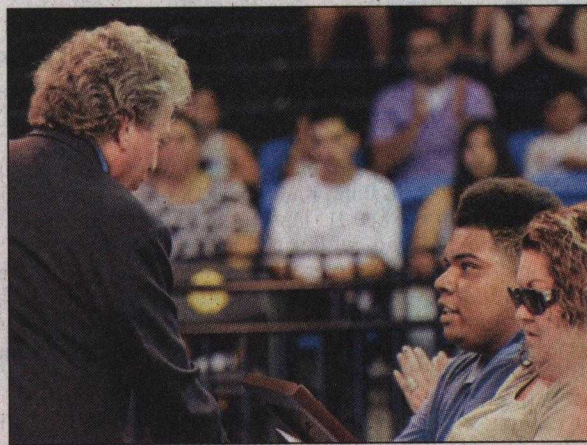
"He's our hero ... He was someone to look up to and inspire," Lowery yelled, drawing a hearty applause.

More than a dozen speeches gushing about Ratliff were given during a two-hour Celebration of Life held on the home court of the NBA D-League's Santa Cruz Warriors. Each was met with applause and reinforced what they already knew: they lost a special man.

Ratliff, who spent much of the past two decades giving back to the community, died June 1 of heart disease. He was 49.

Among the speakers were Santa Cruz City councilman Chris

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PAM IRIGUCHI — SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

First District Supervisor John Leopold presents a Board proclamation honoring Bytheal Ratliff to his wife, Lisa, on Saturday at Kaiser Permanente Arena.

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"It wasn't until late that I realized how much he gave of himself and got out himself because of his heart."

— Joel Domhoff, friend and former teammate of Bytheal Ratliff

Local Roundup: Locals finish atop men's, women's divisions in volleyball tournament. **B2**

Ratliff

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Krohn and First District Supervisor John Leopold, who presented proclamations declaring June 17, 2017, as "Bytheal Ratliff Day" in both Santa Cruz and Live Oak. Several other tributes to Ratliff are in the works, including retiring his No. 55 Santa Cruz High football jersey.

A fixture at most Santa Cruz varsity sporting events, Ratliff coached junior varsity football for the Cardinals, AAU boys basketball, Little League baseball, Cabrillo GALS, Crushers softball teams and a variety of teams at Shoreline Middle School.

His work schedule was equally impacted. He was employed by the Live Oak School District the past 18 years, serving as athletic director at Shoreline and providing campus security for the Live Oak School District.

"They're going to have to hire eight people to replace him," Erik Redding, Santa Cruz's athletic director and Ratliff's close



PAM IRIGUCHI — SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

A Celebration of Life for Bytheal Ratliff was held at Kaiser Permanente Arena on Saturday.

friend, said prior to the ceremony.

Colleen Martin, principal at Shoreline, vouched for that.

"Normally, you leave one job when you get promoted," Martin told the audience. "Bytheal kept doing all those jobs."

Ratliff, a former line-man at Santa Cruz an Cabrillo College, was known as a gentle giant. He was a calming, supportive and knowledgeable presence as

a coach, colleague and friend. He earned respect with his effective, sincere style, stressing the importance of character above all else.

Martin said Ratliff laid down the law with parents who tried to interfere from the sidelines. In preseason meetings, he told them he would count to three if he witnessed a violation or unsupportive chatter. There would be consequences, he noted.

Ratliff never had to count to three during games.

Always supportive and smiling, Ratliff was a hugger. He had a catch phrase or 20. Among them, a reassuring: "I got you! I got you!"

He made sure he had time for everybody, which is why many speakers thanked his wife, Lisa, for sharing her husband with the community. Ratliff is also survived by three children: Teresa, 26; Kayla Banuelos, 26; and Deontae, a 16-year-old who plays basketball at Harbor High.

Several speakers praised Zelma Fennell, affectionately known as

"Momma Z," for helping mold her son into such a caring, giving individual. Fennell was given a standing ovation.

Ratliff, a 1986 Santa Cruz graduate, played football, basketball and baseball for the Cardinals. He also played football at Cabrillo College before falling ill with kidney issues.

He received a kidney transplant in 1997. His sister, Annissa, served as his donor. He suffered a pair of heart attacks the past two years.

High school baseball teammate Joel Domhoff said Ratliff wasn't an NFL, NBA or MLB prospect, but he often left teammates in awe with his results.

"We'd turn to each other and ask, 'How's he doing it?'" Domhoff said of his pitching success. "He had success because he had more heart than anyone else who was playing. It wasn't until late that I realized how much he gave of himself and got out himself because of his heart."

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