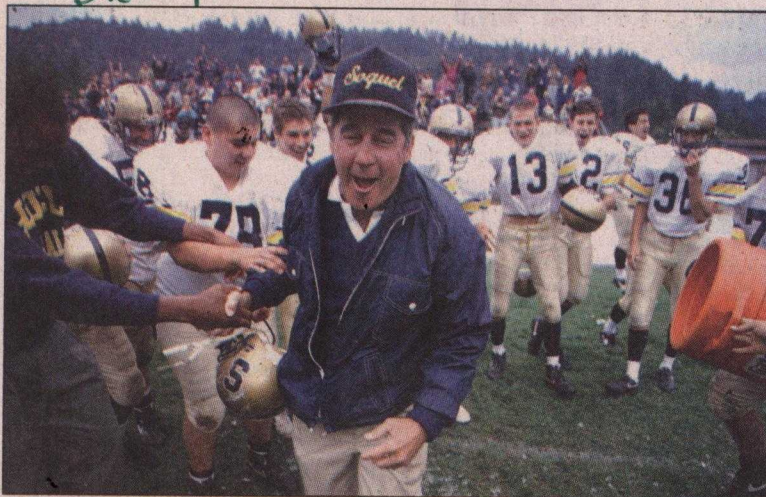


Soquel High coaching legend dies at 81

Bio-1

✓ Dewey Tompkins celebrates his 200th win as a varsity football coach with members of his 1993 Soquel High team after a game at SLV.

BILL LOVEJOY/
SENTINEL FILE



By JIM SEIMAS and ALIA WILSON
sports@santacruzsentinel.com

SOQUEL — Santa Cruz County lost a high school football legend Tuesday.

Former Soquel High football coach Dewey Tompkins died at Dominican Hospital. He was 81.

Tompkins was a competitor, on and off the field. He suffered from dementia the past seven years, his daughter Traci Tompkins said.

Former players described Tompkins as a driven coach who demanded perfection. But he also liked to cut loose.

"He loved parties, everything fun. He was always in a good mood, laughing and smiling," said his son Brad, one of four Tompkins children. "Even in the last few years, he was

not miserable."

The passionate leader coached high school football for 35 years, including his final 32 seasons at Soquel. His prized team at Soquel went 9-0 in 1976 — it remains the Knights' only unbeaten football team in the school's 47-year history.

"That was the easiest and best year I ever had," Tompkins said in an interview in October 2000, shortly after Soquel renamed its field to honor the coach. "We ran the score up and I got to play everybody by halftime."

Tompkins won 13 league titles with the Knights before retiring in 1993 with a career record of 203-125-7, a .606 win percentage. His teams won the Central Coast Section playoffs

SEE TOMPKINS ON C4

TOMPKINS

Continued from C1

six times.

In retirement, he and his wife, Betty, bought a motor home.

"They sometimes would leave without us knowing where they were going or when they were coming back," his son said. "They loved the adventure of the open road. As kids, there were a lot of road trips in the station wagon. As a father, I wish I could be as good, as half as good as he was to us. I never had it any better."

Tompkins was a traveler, not initially by choice.

"As a child, he had lived on Indian reservations part of the time and moved around a lot," Traci Tompkins said. "His dad was half-Cherokee, half-British, and his mother was Chickasaw Indian. They moved off the reservations and were cotton pickers during the child labor era. Dewey was proud of himself because he was the first out of his seven brothers and sisters to be born in a hospital."

Tompkins was born in Denton, Ga., on Nov. 22, 1928. He graduated from Lake Worth (Fla.) High.

The day after he graduated, he hitchhiked across the country to join one of his brothers, Luke, in California.

Tompkins, without a penny in his pocket, hitchhiked across the country three times, his son said. "Dewey's first pair of shoes was a pair

DEWEY TOMPKINS

BORN: Nov. 22, 1928

DIED: March 30, 2010

HOME: Capitola

OCCUPATION: Football coach

EDUCATION: Lake Worth High School in Florida, Long Beach City College, College of the Pacific

SURVIVORS: Wife of 55 years Betty of Capitola, sons Brad Tompkins of Santa Cruz and Rodney Tompkins of San Diego; daughters Traci Tompkins of Santa Cruz and Susan Jin of San Luis Obispo.

SERVICES: Private services today. Celebration pending for April 10 at the Dewey Tompkins Field.

football cleats," Brad said. "A coach saw him running around on the field and gave them to him. He was a great athlete through high school."

Tompkins played halfback for Long Beach City College's football team from 1949-50, rushing for 1,350 yards in more than 20 games, an average of 5.8 yards per rush. He was named Outstanding Freshman in '49 and the Junior Rose Bowl Player of the Game in '50, when he helped LBCC win the JC National Championship team.

After college, Tompkins joined the Army during the Korean War.

"But he was so good at sports, instead of going overseas, he traveled with [their] baseball team," Traci Tompkins said. "He ended up getting a football scholarship at the [College] of the Pacific in Stockton. In 1955, he met his wife of 55 years to be, Betty Fieguth."

Tompkins, who graduated from Pacific in '56, married Fieguth and took a teaching

and coaching job at Lincoln High in Stockton. He coached there for three seasons.

Traci said her parents moved to the area, expecting he would coach at Santa Cruz High after he got fired at Lincoln for not playing the principal's son. "Of course, he started at Soquel when it opened in 1962," she said.

And the legend grew quickly. After going 1-8 in his first season, the Knights rebounded the next year to go 6-2-1 and tie for first place in the Monterey Bay League.

"Everyone knew Dewey and that Dewey is the man, so whatever he said is what everybody did," said Brad Tompkins, who played for his father in '76 and later coached at Soquel. "It was his passion that helped drive and pull everybody in as one and his passion spread. Soquel didn't always have the best team, but he knew how to make a great team out of average kids — that was his secret."

Tompkins was tough and commanded his player be the

same — physically and mentally. He used to let his players execute tackling drills on him in practice.

"He yelled at me and screamed at me and I hated it but it made me stronger," said Steven Ward, who played halfback for the Knights from 1969-'71. "My first year with him, it was brutal. He made me tougher and the next of couple years I didn't have any problem working my way up."

On the field, Tompkins' teams were well-oiled machines. Even when the outcome was in hand, Tompkins didn't back off.

His teams produced some of the most lopsided outcomes in the history of county football, including a 74-0 trouncing of rival Santa Cruz in 1982.

His teams scored more than 50 points 21 times and more than 60 points nine times, including a 68-0 rout of Marello Prep in 1980 and a 67-0 trashing of Santa Cruz in '76.

"We were undefeated [in '76], which I think was his crown jewel," his son said. "He called us 'the best damn team ever,' because we were the only one undefeated team — not one of the best teams, the only undefeated team. He loved it to his last day."

"Coaching was his life. He started the program at Soquel. He picked the colors and the mascot; he started the whole thing. The first year, they were dead last. But the second year, they won first place, which I think shows how much work he did. He was a great man and had a great life. He used it all."