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Bryce Jacobsen, St. John's intramural legend, dies at 78



Bryce DuVal Jacobsen, 78, former director of the nationally recognized intramural athletic program at St. John's College where he taught for 30 years, died of complications of a stroke May 31 at Spa Creek Center, Genesis ElderCare Network.

Known as "Jake," Mr. Jacobsen was born and raised in Baltimore County and attended the demonstration school at the former State Normal School, now Towson University. He graduated from Towson High School in 1938 and then St. John's College in 1942.

He was a conscientious objector during World War II and spent time in federal prison in Kentucky, where he learned farming. He worked on farms in Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia and New Jersey. In 1944, he and his wife moved to a farm near Gettysburg, Pa., where they lived for 15 years and where he also worked as a carpenter to enhance his income.

In 1958 he gave up farming to become a teacher of biology and mathematics and manager of the intramural athletic program at his alma mater.

St. John's dropped intercollegiate athletics in 1940 after adoption of the academic New Program, with its study of the Great Books. In its place, the college began an extensive intramural program with team competition for students in soccer, flag football, basketball, volleyball, softball and track as well as individual tournaments in tennis, badminton and table tennis. Mr. Jacobsen, who was known for his tennis prowess, directed all these programs, refereeing every game that was played, some 200 annually.

He received the 1978 Alumni Award of Merit during homecoming for distinguished and meritorious service to the college.

"He has consistently demonstrated to all that Socrates and softball, philosophy and football and Ptolemy and tennis are by no means incommensurate," the alumni citation said.

After he retired from St. John's in 1988, his son and grandson started a construction company with him where he worked until becoming ill. In addition, he ran a mail-order business in rare stamps.

Mr. Jacobsen was an avid stamp collector and Baltimore Orioles fan, and was known for his collection of wild and colorful neckties.

As a student, he was nearly thrown out of the college when he rebelled against the rule requiring ties to be worn in the dining room.

"I believe wearing ties is an absurd, irrational custom. But I think it's symbolic to keep 'ties' with the system and the status quo," he told *The Capital* in a 1982 "Spotlight on People" article.

He is survived by his wife of 54 years, Phebe Robinson Jacobsen; a son, Eric G. Jacobsen of Riva; a daughter, Kristin Onyeme of Charlotte, N.C.; two brothers, Jerome Gill Jacobsen of Mansfield, Ohio, and John Jacobsen of Anchorage, Alaska; a sister, Karen Jacobsen of Towson; five grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

Funeral services are private. Arrangements are by John M. Taylor Funeral Home. Memorial contributions may be made to the Athletic Department, St. John's College, P.O. Box 2800, Annapolis, MD 21404.

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