

A star from East High's glory years, gone at age 70

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Special to Kitsap Sun

USA TODAY NETWORK

Steve Boyce's heart gave out June 4, ending the life of a former basketball star at East Bremerton High School and stunning his many friends, many of whom noted on social media what that a really good guy was gone too soon.

Boyce, 70, was living in Bellevue with wife Marianne, the oldest Milcic whose brothers Mark and Mike and sister Jan made names for themselves running track at East in the 1970s. He began having difficulty breathing. Despite his pleas not to call 911, Marianne did, and 9 hours later he died from heart failure at Overlake Hospital.

"I'm still numb," Marianne said, who lost her husband after 48 years of marriage.

Boyce was a good guy, a loving guy, and a giving guy whose mother Sylvia reportedly urged her son to put more arch on his basketball shots. He did,

becoming a sharp shooter that enabled him to lead the state's 2A classification in scoring in 1971, when he averaged 21.4 points per game his senior year.

That averaged was elevated when he poured in a school record 37 points in a victory over North Kitsap. He had been taken out of the game with 35 points, just a point short of a school record. Coach Les Eathorne's wife passed him a note urging him to put Boyce back in to get it, which he did.

The 6-foot-6 Boyce and John McKnight, one of the state's all-time scorers who played three seasons at Battle Ground High School (1969-72), were the only class 2A players that made the all-state basketball game in 1971.

In his last two seasons at East, Boyce scored 725 points in 41 games to average 17.7 points. He was only the second sophomore to ever make the East varsity under Eathorne.

He inherited his basketball genes

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Steve Boyce, an East Bremerton High School alum and one of the best basketball players in school history, poses after a hole-in-one at Gold Mountain Golf Course in Bremerton. Boyce died in June at age 70.

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Boyce

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from his mother's brother, Ron Olsen, who after starring at Bremerton High School played four years at Washington and AAU ball, including with an Air Force all-star team.

Summer before his senior year, Boyce was a counselor in the Bob Houbregs basketball camp on Whidbey Island. A fund-raising game was held and Boyce wound up on Spencer Haywood's team. He remembered Spencer barking at him at one point for not setting a screen. Boyce didn't score in the game, but Haywood scored over 50 points.

Boyce was recruited to Washington by coach Tex Winter, who would make the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2011, Boyce played freshman ball for the Huskies (freshmen back then could not play varsity), including before a Husky varsity game against Bill Walton and unbeaten NCAA champion UCLA, which was a big highlight for Boyce.

When Winter left the next season, Marv Harshman became the Husky coach and he told Boyce his playing time would be limited. So Boyce came back to Bremerton and played one season for Olympic College.

"He was laid-back, but a good teammate – just a good guy," former OC assistant Wayne Gibson said for a 2018 story in the Kitsap Sun.

"He could shoot the eyes out of the basket," said OC Coach Larry Sampson.

Boyce, who scored 26 points in a half one night after having surgery for two broken teeth, took his game to Central Washington his junior season and played with its top players, Ned

Delmore and Les Wyatt. Wyatt had been the star for Ellensburg, the team that came back in the fourth quarter to beat East for the state championship in 1972.

The sudden death of his 25-year-old brother Dave six weeks after he was best man at Steve's wedding shook the family to its core and led Boyce to attend the Lutheran Bible Institute for two years. He played and coached the school's team while there.

"(His death) made me ask the question if I was ready to die and the answer was no," Boyce said for the earlier story. "I had a born-again moment and wanted to follow that up with some intense Bible teaching."

Friend Greg Albertson said of Boyce, "He was soft spoken, easy going. He never got upset with much. He would hit a bad shot on the golf course, shake his head and smile."

Boyce finished his education with a business degree at Washington. After a stint with Boeing, Boyce worked the last 19 years as a transcript analyst for adults at Northwest University in Kirkland. That job fit his personality because it enabled him to help others, a common trait that endeared him to many.

His son Joshua said Boyce loved his grandkids, and used to put up a tent in the backyard and play with them (as he did with his own kids).

"He was funny, and had a lot of fun," says Joshua. "He would tell the grandkids stories. He reached a lot of people, helped a lot of people. His faith is the foundation of what drove him."

Boyce had many friends, and three of them – Dave Hegland, Albertson, Jim Trostad – were with him from the beginning, starting with the North Perry Pee Wees.

"Steve and I have been friends since

elementary school," says Albertson, who graduated with a psychology degree from Central Washington and served as director of special services for the South Kitsap School District until retiring in 2013.

"I called him Beaver," says Hegland. "It's a play on his name. He was the truest of friends, loved being an East High Knight and stayed friends with a bunch of us. He was the administrator of our class of '71 Facebook page."

"I loved him for his upright life style, his love for his family, the loyalty and the love I felt from him as a friend. He was a great hug, too!

Golf has been the glue that has held their friendship together all these years. Boyce and the others played as a scramble team almost every year in the Les Eathorne and Kevin Eddy fund-raising tournaments.

It was in 2011 in the Eathorne tournament when Boyce aced the par-4, 255-yard 18th hole on the Olympic Course at Gold Mountain. If Boyce had done it on an earlier par 3 hole he would have won \$10,000. Joshua said his dad continued to joke he was still waiting for his check. Instead, tournament director Rick Walker, feeling sorry for Boyce, gave him a dozen golf balls.

"He cared for all of us so much," said Marianne, who gave grandson Mason (8 years old, Joshua's youngest), Steve's well-worn Northwest University sweatshirt with the school's mascot, an Eagle, on it.

"He hugs it and sleeps with it," Marianne said. "He says, 'I love Papa so much.'"

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