

SPORTS

Former 4-time Section 1 champion girls basketball coach Sue Adams recalled as game-changer



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When the White Plains girls basketball team was playing in the Section 1 Class AA Final 4 last March at the County Center, Sue Adams was in the stands.

Just where people would expect to find her.

She loved the game, loved White Plains and loved the kids who wore Tiger colors.

The ovarian cancer she'd been battling since the previous summer wouldn't stop her from watching White Plains make its first successful title run since she'd coached it to the section championship 15 years earlier.

Adams had once worn Tiger colors herself — with pride and much success.

When Adams, then Sue O'Gorman, graduated from White Plains High in 1978 she did so as the school's first female athlete to earn a college athletic scholarship.

She'd play basketball for Division I William & Mary

But it was after she'd earned her college degree and was teaching and coaching back at White Plains that Adams would record another first, becoming the first Section 1 coach to win four straight Section 1 Class AA girls basketball titles., the final one coming in 2008.

Friends, fellow coaches and former players are remembering that as they recall Adams, who died of cancer Thursday at White Plains Hospital at age 62, as an advocate for girls and women's sports and as a game-changer, not just on the court but also In many people's lives.

"She was one of the most wonderful, amazing women I've ever known," said longtime Irvington coach Gina Maher, a member of the state Basketball Hall of Fame.

Maher credited Adams with transforming White Plains into a championship team but moreover for being a huge advocate for girls' and women's sports. She noted Adams started and ran an annual tournament, the Queens Court, that included only girls teams coached by women.

To Dan Ricci, who'll begin his 33rd year at the helm of the Ossining girls basketball team later this year, Adams was a "great role model for female athletes."

He remembered her passion, her success, her preparation and the great rapport she had with her players, many of whom received athletic scholarships and some of whom became the first members of their family to graduate from college.

Ursuline girls basketball coach Beth Wooters, a longtime friend, whose children went to school with Adams' three children, said, "She advocated to push girls forward and give them the recognition they deserve."

Liz Flocks, a 2007 White Plains grad and a member of three of Adams' Section 1 championship teams, who's now an assistant women's basketball coach at Sacred Heart University, said, "She showed us what strong, independent females look like."

"She said, 'If you want to play soccer, go do it. If you want to play football, go do it,'" Flocks remembered of Adams, whose teams appeared in two state championship games and who was twice named New York State Basketball Coach of the Year.

Adams, a member of the White Plains Athletics Hall of Fame, was in some ways a taskmaster on the court ("She pushed us to our limits," Flocks recalled). But players seemed to know it was with their best interests at heart.

"She was all into supporting kids. ... She was everyone's No. 1 fan," Flocks said, recalling game stoppages and flowers and balloons each time a Tiger player reached 1,000th-point milestones.

Worried about some of her players not being able to afford to play on summer AAU teams, Adams started the Swish Hoops program for White Plains girl middle and high school players.

"Her girls adored her," Maher said of Adams' players.

Among them was Angelei Aguirre, who'll return to White Plains from her home in Dallas, Texas for Monday's funeral mass at Our Lady of Sorrows Church, Adams' lifelong church.

Adams pushed and prodded Aguirre, who moved to White Plains to start high school when her father, former NBA star and College Basketball Hall of Famer Mark Aguirre took a job as a Knicks assistant coach.

"She really did change my life," Aguirre said, noting Adams showed her "what preparation and working hard really meant."

"She truly invested in me and pushed me on and off the court to be a better, tougher, more competitive person," said Aguirre, a point guard who played a big role in White Plains winning those four straight titles.

"She worried about Angelie the person more than the athlete," said Aguirre, who embraces many memories of Adams.

They include eating pizza and Adams' "absolute best" chocolate cookie dough (both raw and baked) during countless visits to the Adams home. She also cherishes the memory of seeing Adams, White Plains assistant coach Debbie Flocks and their daughters/Aguirre's former Tiger teammates, Kim and Liz, at Aguirre's college Senior Night game. The four traveled to the University of California-Santa Barbara for that.

"She gave me the push in every direction I needed as a player and person. ... She was such a fierce and tough person in basketball and fun and enjoyed life outside of it," Aguirre recalled.

Adams retired in June of 2022 after 25 years of teaching at White Plains, her most recent post being as a physical education teacher at Highlands Middle School.

In her retirement post, she wrote, "I will always be a Tiger at heart."

And that spirit clearly captured the hearts of many, including former colleagues.

"Sue was one of the smartest, hardest-working coaches I have ever met," said retired White Plains teacher Fred Singleton, the longtime Tiger track and cross-country coach, who runs the famed Loucks Game track meet. "She will be remembered as a great coach, a great teacher, and a great friend. And as good as she was those three things, she was a better wife and mother."

Singleton also noted Adams, who also coached tennis at White Plains, was "always aware of the success of teams, of coaches in other sports, always congratulating all on their victories."

And the congratulations often extended to opposing players.

Maher, who also has coached tennis at Irvington, and former North Rockland High tennis coach Jen LaBier both recalled Adams calling out praise to their players during matches when one of their players did something special.



LaBier called her a "breath of fresh air" and recalled how she'd "light up a room" and was always "truly positive." Maher said Adams was "always smiling."

And sometimes she was dancing and singing.

Liz Flooks, who has been best friends with Adams' daughter, Kim, since first grade and who, along with Kim was one of five starters from one Adams championship team to earn a Division I scholarship (Flooks playing for Niagra and Kim, now an ESPN sports reporter, for Penn), noted Adams was the "life of the party" at the wedding of her son, Kyle, Adams' youngest child. That was just this June.

But that didn't surprise Flooks about someone she calls "one in a million."

"She was such a big personality. Every time she walked into a room it was just better," Liz Flooks said.

And that included long-ago early Saturday mornings when the room was the gym.

The kids weren't keen on 8 a.m. practices, so Adams brought post-practice bagels for them. And she also brought her musical talent. Before practice officially launched and with players stretching, she'd blast some Beyonce and let loose, singing and dancing.

"I can see her still to this day. That was her," Liz Flooks said, noting afterward two hours of non-nonsense practice followed because "she knew what we could do."

"I was privileged to have her as a friend. She was the most kind, thoughtful, caring person I knew ... She was dedicated to every team she coached and every person she met," said Debbie Flooks, herself a former D-I player at La Salle.

Liz Flooks credits where she is today in part to Adams. Immediately after college, she coached with her mother and with Adams in 2011-12, which was the pair's last season at White Plains, then took over the program for a year before leaving for college coaching.

"She always told me, 'Never settle. Go after your dreams and go big. You can achieve anything you want,'" Liz Flooks said of Adams, whose three children all were White Plains athletes and played collegiately.

"She was really what sports should be about and what life should be about," Maher said.

Obituary information

Susan Marie (O'Gorman) Adams was born to Edward and Elizabeth (Betty) O'Gorman on November 5, 1960, in Mount Vernon.

She attended White Plains schools and graduated from William & Mary in 1982.

In 1986, she married Robert (Bob) Adams, who went on to become a 25-year NCAA Division I basketball referee. He survives her, as does her mother; children Kimberly, Ryan and Kyle. Ryan's wife, Megan; Kyle's wife, Haley; siblings Betsy, Ted, Tom and Chris, and her grandchildren Elizabeth (Libby), 3, and Ryan, 1.

A wake will be held at Beecher Flocks Funeral Home at 418 Bedford Road in Pleasantville 3 p.m.-8 p.m. Sunday

Monday's funeral services will begin at 11 a.m. at Our Lady of Sorrows, located at 920 Mamaroneck Avenue in White Plains.

In accordance with Adams' wishes, the family has requested any donations in her name be made to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital.

Nancy Haggerty covers cross-country, track & field, field hockey, skiing, ice hockey, basketball, girls lacrosse and other sporting events for The Journal News/lohud. Follow her on Twitter at [@HaggertyNancy](https://twitter.com/HaggertyNancy).