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FEATURED

From the Daily Journal archives

Aragon 'icon' Bill Daskarolis dies at 83

By Nathan Mollat Daily Journal staff

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“I think we’ve lost our biggest icon.”

Those were the words Aragon athletic director Steve Sell used to describe longtime Aragon teacher, coach and administrator Bill Daskarolis, who died Friday night at the age of 83.

Daskarolis first stepped foot on the Aragon campus as a student-teacher in 1962 a year after the school opened. He became a full-time teacher in 1963. He served as the school's athletic director for 24 years, handing the baton to Sell beginning the 1996 school year. Daskarolis retired as a physical education teacher in 1997 and then spent the next 20 years coaching the Dons' cross country and track and field teams, finally stepping away in 2017 after 55 years.



During his time with Aragon, Daskarolis was honored countless times. He was named the 1993 Central Coast Section Cross Country Honor Coach and was inducted into the Crystal Springs Cross Country Course Hall of Fame in 1996. He was in the inaugural induction class for Aragon Athletic Hall of Fame in 2009. Daskarolis was named the California Interscholastic Federation Track and Field Model Coach in 2012 and in 2014 he was awarded the Dan Fukushima Lifetime Achievement Award by the California Coaches Association. Daskarolis was inducted into the Peninsula Sports Hall of Fame in 2015.

“You can count, literally almost on one hand, the years he wasn't on (the Aragon) campus. He's been working with kids since the campus opened,” Sell said. “I say [this] unapologetically: nobody came close to impacting the number of kids he did.”

Many of those “kids” have since returned and joined the Aragon coaching ranks. The influence he had as PE teacher and coach has resulted in more than a half dozen Aragon grads who have returned to coach the Dons — including Sell, girls' volleyball coach Nettie Gennaro-Trimble, girls' basketball coach Sam Manu and boys' basketball coach Hosea Patton.





Bill Daskarolis

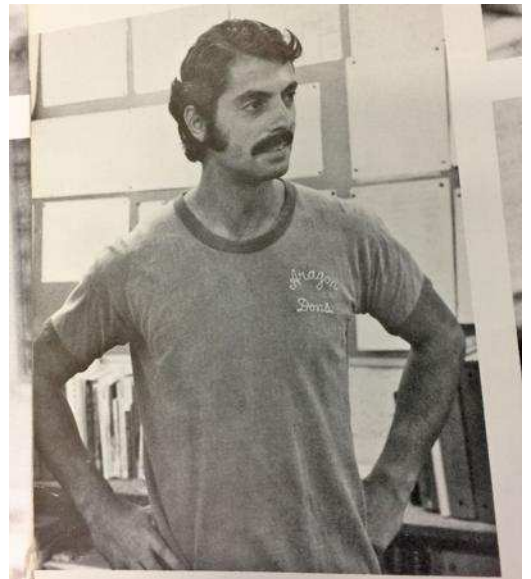
“I can’t tell you how many coaches stayed on because they felt such a loyalty to Bill,” Sell said. “If you didn’t come into this program bleeding red and black, you certainly did when you left. There is a reason a lot of us came back to work here.”

For Sell, personally, it’s another big blow. He lost his football mentor, Britt Williams, at the beginning of August and now loses Daskarolis, who helped Sell become the athletic director he is today. Sell, whose own family history goes back to the late 1970s when his older brother Jim first attended the school, credits Daskarolis — as a coach and as an administrator — with making Aragon athletics what it is.

“He was one of the most influential figures at our school. He helped out two departments — PE and athletics. He was the foundation for those program being strong,” Sell said. “His passion for Aragon athletics had no bounds. He was absolutely passionate about it.”

Sell said he didn’t know exactly how big a deal Daskarolis was until he was around him as a peer. When Sell took over Daskarolis’ seat at the CCS Athletic Directors Advisory Committee, it was as if he was anointed.

“The thing that struck me was how widely respected he was. ... It was like walking around with Vito Corleone,” Sell said. “Let me put it this way: He was a charter member of the ADAC at CCS. When I replaced him in 1996, it was kind of like I had a head start. Anyone who succeeded him had a lot of goodwill (already built up at CCS). It was a sign you knew what you were doing. [I] got the benefit of the doubt right off the bat because of the relationship to Bill.”



A photo of Bill Daskarolis's early days at Aragon High School

Courtesy of Frank Hunt



Daskarolis' death is the third this year that has affected the Aragon community and the larger San Mateo County sports community as well. Lou Murgo, who spent 50 years at Aragon, died in January, with Williams' passing coming mere weeks ago.

"He wasn't just respected. He was revered — by coaches, CCS people, administrators," Sell said. "We've lost some icons (this year)," Sell said. "No disrespect to academics, but I think we've lost our largest icon.

"He was giant."

While Daskarolis was a titan at Aragon, he was also a very good friend. Frank Hunt, the Dons' cross country coach, first joined Daskarolis in 2009 when Hunt was informed Daskarolis was looking for a new assistant coach, although he had a relationship with the Dons' coach from his years spent coaching at Burlingame.

"I said, 'I'll go talk to him,'" said Hunt, 82, who was an assistant at Burlingame at the time. "I told him, 'I'll coach cross country (at Aragon beginning in 2009), but I'm going back to Burlingame for the track season.'

"As it turned out, I never left."

What started as a coaching relationship became much more to both men. Hunt said the two of them talked quite often — even after Daskarolis finally stepped down as an Aragon coach after the 2017 track season and even up until two days before he died. Hunt said the two would talk by phone every Sunday and emailed each other constantly.

Hunt said the last email he sent to Daskarolis was at 2:09 p.m. Sept. 22.

"(His death was) very sudden (to me)," Hunt said, adding Daskarolis had never mentioned any life-threatening ailment. "I talked to him (the previous) Sunday and we were exchanging emails on Wednesday. ... He passed away Friday night.



“It was a shock. ... It’s just like a big hole in my life. (He was) really a good guy. Just lucky to call him a friend.”



William Peter Daskarolis

May 21, 1938 - Sept. 25, 2021



The Daskarolis Family and friends lost a lot of love and laughter with the passing of Bill on September 25, 2021. Bill was a proud son of Greek immigrants, Maria Avarli and Pangnotis Daskarolis, who taught him that loyalty and dedication are the values of a good life. Bill nurtured these characteristics throughout his full life, and generously shared his sincere smile and sense of humor.



Bill was an Aragon Don to the end, sharing 55 years of sage advice and silly comments with thousands of students/athletes, supporting coaches and anyone near to hear his silliness keeping one on their toes. Bill will be missed by Aragon Dons, Saint Ignatius and San Francisco State Alumni, thousands of students, athletes, colleagues and all others fortunate to have been graced by his

endearing sincerity. He leaves behind his wife, Jacqueline, daughter Alisa, granddaughter Renee Marie, and his great granddaughter Noelle. Nephew Peter, niece KayMaria, sisters in law Elizabeth Daskarolis and Judy Ryan, and brother in law, Norm Ryan. He will be missed forever. A service in his honor, will be held at Aragon High School track, San Mateo, October 23, 2021 at 11:00 a.m.

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Courtesy of Frank Hunt