

## Keith Bloom

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**I**t's hard to imagine there was ever a time when Keith Bloom didn't love sports. He has spent a lifetime playing sports, talking about sports, coaching sports. That was exactly what he wanted.

When Bloom was in school in Powell, Wyo., a junior high coach got him started in the world of athletics by encouraging him to play basketball. Sports became his main interest. "That was what I wanted to do, not necessarily become a pro, but extend my experience in athletics as long as I could," Bloom says. "My favorite sport was whatever was in season."

Coaches gave Bloom a lot of encouragement to continue, and he did. In high school, he earned 12 varsity letters and All-State honors in football, basketball and track.

Right after high school, he enlisted in the Navy. The year was 1945, as World War II was ending, so Bloom was part of the winding-down process; he helped return military equipment back to the U.S. He also played basketball in the Navy and got some professional offers from that, but Bloom was determined to go to university.

He got a chance to do that when UW basketball coach Ev Shelton offered him a scholarship. "I love Wyoming," Bloom says. "When Ev called, I jumped at the chance." His scholarship allotted him \$15 a month plus books, fees, and room and board. Bloom wanted to go into engineering; but soon found athletics demanded a lot of time that he needed to study. "I found it difficult to stay in engineering. I changed to education, and I'm not sorry I changed. I love working with kids."

He also found athletics took too much time for a lot of outside socializing. He joined the fraternity SAE, but ended up in "Ev Shelton's fraternity" after a call from the coach asking: Did you want to come to university to participate in fraternity life or to play basketball for me? The answer was clear for Bloom. In 1950, he was the basketball team captain and the Most Valuable Player. He felt privileged to play for two Hall of Fame coaches, Bowden and Wyatt, and to follow in the footsteps of Kenny Sailor's 1943 championship team.

In the spring, Shelton was the



Keith Bloom (BS '50)

baseball coach, and he encouraged Bloom to go out for baseball. That set Bloom on the path to become one of only a few people in UW history to have won varsity athletic letters in three sports: football, basketball and baseball.

He remembers those UW years as outstanding because of the friends he made; his memories of that time are of his teammates. "You build a special bond when you line up together in football and travel all over the country," he says. Bloom is still in touch with some of those teammates, such as John Kosich (BS '50), Tuff Samuelson (BS '52) and Gunder Haag (BS '52).

Bloom did go on to extend his experience in sports past his college career. He played basketball in Denver for the Frontier Refiners in the National Basketball League, until the league folded. He signed with the Brooklyn Dodgers and played a couple years in their farm system, until he broke his leg playing baseball in Phoenix. Along the way, Bloom managed to earn a master's degree in physical education and athletic administration from Indiana University.

He was still planning to return to baseball spring training the year following his accident when the superintendent of schools in Evanston called and asked Bloom to come and coach basketball. Eddie Talboom (BS '50), another former UW football player, would be his assistant basketball coach; during football season, the two would swap and Talboom would be head coach, with Bloom as his assistant.

After working in that arrangement for two years, Bloom was offered a chance to go home to

Powell and coach basketball. He felt a little apprehensive about the prospect of returning to Powell. "It doesn't always work out, the hometown boy coming back," he says. But for Bloom, it did.

He met his future wife, Joyce, on a blind date. He spent the next 38 years teaching and coaching in Powell. He taught everything from general science to social studies, physical education and drivers' education, until he retired in 1992. He loved the work. "Working with young people helped me stay young in my thinking," Bloom says. "It helped me stay young at heart. There's a thrill in seeing young people come to you, not knowing where they're going, and watch them develop into mature, successful students and doctors and lawyers and then meet their families and see how their kids are developing." Many of his former students still call and visit Bloom and his wife.

Bloom has also remained close to UW; he served as president of the UW Alumni Association in 1979, after three years on the board. But his primary interest has remained where it always has been, in athletics and working with athletic personnel. Bloom was inducted into the UW Athletic Hall of Fame in 1996. He was chosen as one of the Top 50 Athletes of the Century

and one of five finalists in the sports division of the Wyoming Citizen of the Century search. In 2002, he was inducted into the Wyoming Sports Hall of Fame.

The list of other organizations to which he gives his time, and recognitions he has received in return, is long. He has received the Legion of Honor Award and the 2000 Golden Bell Award for statewide contributions to education. The list also includes, but is not limited to, the Wyoming Coaches Hall of Fame committee, on which he still serves, and the Powell School Foundation, where he is still president. He is a past president of the Powell Rotary Club; he's been involved with the Cowboy Joe Club, Northwest College Foundation and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He has served as state president of the Wyoming Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation; the Wyoming Coaches' Association; the Wyoming Interscholastic Athletic Administrators' Association; and the Western Wyoming Athletic Conference for three terms.

"I am most happy with life when I am helping other people," Bloom says, and a lifetime of service to his students and his community proves it. ♣