

Dave Currey (1943-2023)



Late Chapman Director of Athletics Dave Currey stands on the football field around the time of his retirement in 2015.

Former Chapman University Director of Athletics David Currey, the architect of modern Chapman athletics and a beloved campus figure, passed away July 15 following an illness. He was 80.

Currey oversaw Chapman athletics for 25 years after coaching Division I football, including Rose Bowl appearances with Stanford. He helmed Chapman's transition from Division II to Division III athletics, which led to the university entering the prestigious Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SCIAC).

In honor of Currey's retirement, the athletic directorship was endowed as the David Currey Endowed Directorship of Athletics.

Currey said at his retirement in 2015 that the last 25 of his 50-plus years of coaching and teaching were "what I think of as maybe the best of my life, because at Chapman I found a family that accepted me and made me feel a part of them. So many wonderful things have happened to us in the intercollegiate world."

After coaching at Stanford, UCLA, Long Beach State and the University of Cincinnati, Currey came to Chapman in 1990 "to see if I could stay away from football."

When then-President Jim Doti asked what he thought of starting a football team, Currey told him he was crazy. Chapman hadn't had a team in more than 60 years, and local universities were eliminating the sport.

"Of course, we laughed, and set out to do it," Currey said. Doti called Currey his "Rock of Gibraltar" in tough meetings during the controversial division transition. "To be there alone would have been really difficult, but having Dave at my side made it bearable," Doti said.

Under Currey's leadership, Chapman went from being a Division II program, "losing most of the time, with mediocre facilities and only 150 students participating, to what I think is now one of the leading Division III programs in the nation, with more than 500 students participating, and state-of-the-art facilities," Doti said.

Current Director of Athletics Terry Boesel said Currey is synonymous with Chapman athletics. "Coach Currey's fingerprints are on every single aspect of our Athletics Department and will be for many years to come," he said.

Former women's basketball coach Mary Hagarty said at Currey's retirement that an athletic director might develop new facilities or enter or transition into an athletic conference "but Dave's done all those things and stood like a rock."

Currey built relationships with student-athletes and coaches. "He stayed connected and engaged in conversation with students and alumni throughout the years," said Chapman President Daniele C. Struppa. "Thousands of Chapman alumni remember great days on the field, court, track, course and on and in the water because of his vision and passion."

Currey hired and worked with some of Chapman's longest-tenured coaches, including women's volleyball coach Mary Cahill, men's basketball coach Mike Bokosky, softball coach Janet Lloyd, men's soccer coach Eddie Carrillo, and tennis coach Will Marino, all of whom have been in their positions for more than 20 years. On Currey's watch, 15 received regional coach of the year honors from their respective governing organizations.

Head football coach Bob Owens took morning walks with Currey. "Sometimes those were walks of a thousand questions, and he was always kind enough to respond in a way that allowed me to reflect, or be challenged, by the situation I was dealing with," Owens said at Currey's retirement. "How good is that? It was an opportunity for me to grow as a head coach under his tutelage."

Struppa said Currey was known for being kindhearted, funny, honest and "famously frugal." Former associate athletic director and coach Penny Brush told the story at Currey's retirement of when they both went to the NCAA National Convention in San Antonio in 1993.

"At the airport we go to the car rental, and we get a blue Pinto, the most bottom-of-the-line car they had," she said. "And you should know that Dave doesn't just have the coaches save money when they travel – he saves money, too. We didn't stay at the convention site hotel. Oh no, those rooms were way too expensive. We stayed – 'It's only half an hour away, Penny, come on!' – at the Holiday Inn Express."

"But seriously, for all that he's frugal, we all know the generosity of Dave on the things that really count ... The generosity of his leadership, and his time, and his mentoring of new coaches, his enthusiasm, his welcoming of people to support the athletics program because it's great for student-athletes," she said.

After retiring to Utah, Currey returned to campus three times. In 2017, he returned to be inducted into the Chapman University Athletic Hall of Fame. In 2019, he was recognized as a member of the Charles C. Chapman Legacy Society. In spring 2022, he was honored with the SCIAC Distinguished Service Award.

At the time of his passing, he was considering another trip.

Currey's son John-David '98 said he relayed "all of the well wishes from the good folks at Chapman" as his father's illness progressed. "Thank you for the support over all of these years – he loved and appreciated you all very much," he said.

Dave Currey is survived by his wife of 18 years, Elaine; John-David, his wife Michelle and their children Jenna and Ben; and daughter Tracey Riness, her husband Clayton and their children Owen, Phoebe and Piper.

Joy Juedes, July 18, 2023