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## Catholic League mourns Bazylewicz

May 26, 1999

**BY MICK MCCABE**

FREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER

In 1972, Walt Bazylewicz applied for a job as director of the Catholic League.

When he came to the part of the application that asked for references, Bazylewicz wrote: "Ask anybody."

Bazylewicz was hired by the Archdiocese of Detroit, and ask almost anybody: He was considered the best director in Catholic League history, the man who saved the high school conference.

Bazylewicz, also a highly successful coach, died of a coronary Monday at his home in Berkley. He was 77.

"Bazy had an unparalleled impact on Catholic schools and the Catholic League," said Tom Rashid, who replaced Bazylewicz as director in 1987. "He took over when parochiaid was defeated and the office of physical education and athletics, and other central offices, were threatened with closing. He stepped up and said he would fund-raise to keep his office open."

Parochiaid was an attempt to allow taxpayers' money to go to private schools.

Bazylewicz created other ways to raise money. When he became director, the Catholic League football championship was played at Detroit De La Salle Field. Bazylewicz created the Prep Bowl and staged the first few games at Eastern Michigan's Rynearson Stadium before moving the event to the Silverdome and making it a

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daylong extravaganza with championships in all divisions.

Bazylewicz founded the Catholic League Hall of Fame and its scholar-athlete program. He revived the Operation Friendship city basketball championship. He took control of girls athletics and added sports wherever possible. He began the popular physical-education raffle.

"The same programs he started 15 or 20 years ago are still in place now," Rashid said. "He set a foundation that is rock-solid. We enjoy much greater support from the archdiocese than the Catholic League did when Bazy took over."

Bazylewicz, a graduate of Hamtramck High, Lawrence Institute of Technology and the University of Detroit, was a staff sergeant in the Marine Corps.

He began his high school coaching career at Detroit St. Thomas, and he also coached at Dearborn Heights Riverside, Harper Woods Notre Dame and Detroit St. Mary of Redford.

His football teams were 146-42-9 and played in six Catholic League championship games. His basketball teams were 228-82 and won 13 Class C district titles.

At Notre Dame, Bazylewicz built powerhouse football teams and had a 29-4-3 record.

"He had a tremendous influence on my life," said Utica Eisenhower football coach Bob Lantzy, who played for him at Notre Dame. "He's the reason I got a chance to play at Northern Michigan. He just did everything possible to help me. He took us up there in the spring and talked to the coaches."

Bazylewicz was an old-school coach who pushed his players to excellence.

"He demanded more out of every player than they thought possible," Lantzy said. "It was 100 percent or nothing with him. He made you play at your best. I'm sure we all thought he was

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Wednesday, May 26, 1999

The Detroit News



High School Sports

# Catholic League's Bazylewicz dies

By Tom Markowski / The Detroit News

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The Detroit Catholic League lost a dear friend Monday. Walt Bazylewicz, director of athletics for the Catholic League for 15 years (1973-88) and a longtime football coach, died of coronary artery disease Monday at his home in Berkley. He was 77.

Bazylewicz, known as "Bazy", started in the Catholic League in 1948 at St. Thomas High School in Detroit as athletic director, math and social studies teacher and as head coach in football, basketball and track and field.

He ended a 35-year football coaching career last season as an assistant for his son, Walt, Jr., at Dansville High School near Lansing.

Bazylewicz loved the Catholic League and did everything to promote it.

He was the founder of the Prep Bowl -- the league football championships that have been held at the Silverdome since 1979 -- and the Catholic League Coaches Hall of Fame. He's credited with originating the Operation Friendship program with the Detroit Public School League and the league's girls basketball championships at Calihan Hall in 1974.

"He was a promoter," said Tom Rashid, who succeeded Bazylewicz as director of the Catholic League July 1, 1988. "He was one of a kind. Leadership ran through his whole body."

Other schools for which Bazylewicz included Dearborn Heights Riverside (1960-62), Harper Woods Notre Dame (1962-65), Detroit St. Mary's of Redford (1965-71) and Madison Heights Bishop Foley (1972) before taking over as director of the Catholic League.

After a brief retirement, Bazylewicz returned to coaching. At Redford Bishop Borgess, he was the head coach from 1989-92, and he was an assistant for five seasons under coach Dick Kennedy at U-D Jesuit (1993-94) and Dearborn St. Alphonsus (1995-97).

Kennedy was one of his closest friends and confidants.

"Bazy was one of the greatest," Kennedy said. "He was one of the most cantankerous guys you'd ever meet. He demanded excellence and he achieved it. He was one of the best coaches I've ever seen."

Visitation at the Sawyer-Fuller Funeral Home will be today from 6

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9 p.m. and Thursday from 1-9 p.m. The Sawyer-Fuller Funeral Home is on 12 Mile Road in Berkley, two blocks west of Woodward. Funeral mass is Friday at 10:30 a.m. at Our Lady of LaSalette Catholic Church in Berkley on Coolidge between 11 Mile and 12 Mile roads. He will be in state at 10 a.m.

He is survived by six daughters and a son.

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