



Donald Hudson Sr.

October 26, 2018

Don Hudson – A Life Well Lived

Husband, Father, Grandfather, Coach, Athletic Director, Educator, Pioneer, Role Model

Donald Edward Hudson, Sr. died peacefully September 30, 2018 surrounded by his family at Levine & Dickson Hospice House in Huntersville, NC. after a long struggle with chronic lung disease. He is pre-deceased by his parents, younger brother Luther B. Hudson and grandson Stephen C. Hudson, Jr. He is survived by his wife of 43 years Constance Jean Hudson, younger brothers George Hudson, Jr., DeOnne Hudson and William A. Brown, daughters Natalie Hudson, Kelly Williams and Karla Hudson, sons Donald Hudson, Jr., Stephen Williams and Scott Hudson, nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Childhood – Pittsburgh, PA.

Don Hudson was born November 20, 1929 in Pittsburgh, PA., the son of Jazz Hall of Fame inductee George Hudson and seamstress Alice Nelson. In his early childhood, he lived with his mother and grandfather in a modest row house in Pittsburgh. It was near a tailor shop owned by his grandfather where his mother was employed as well. Like his father, he had an early interest in

music, taking several years of piano lessons. However, at the age of 10 he was introduced to the game of football and, despite his small stature, he had an instant attraction to the sport, enjoying its physicality and competitive nature. Thus began a life-long love affair with all aspects of football and a nurturing of his fierce drive to succeed. As a young man, he was also known for being a very social child with many loyal friends outside of athletics. Like his father, Don attended Westinghouse High School in Pittsburgh, which had a long and storied tradition of top-notch high school football in the football hotbed of Pennsylvania. He was also interested in gymnastics, participating on the intramural team at Westinghouse. And, of course, he went out for the football team, playing junior varsity his first two years before taking over the varsity starting quarterback duties his final two years. "Donnie" as he was called then, led Westinghouse to a share of the 1947 Pittsburgh City League Title. Like most African-American high school athletes during that period of history, his only opportunities to play collegiate football were at the historically all-black universities in the American South.

College Years in Missouri

After graduating from Westinghouse H.S. in 1948, Don enrolled at Lincoln University (LU) in Jefferson City, Missouri on a partial football scholarship offered to him by legendary head football coach and athletic director, Dwight Reed. Lincoln was one of the original historically black universities established shortly after the end of the American Civil War to provide educational opportunities for newly freed slaves and their children. Although he originally enrolled at LU as a music major, he changed his major during his sophomore year to physical education. Like many young men in college, he enrolled in Army ROTC to help pay for college expenses. While at Lincoln he maintained an active interest in other sports, including gymnastics, track & field, volleyball, badminton and golf taking courses covering the history and coaching of these sports. He was also a very socially active student, pledging

the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

But football was his first love, despite a somewhat tumultuous relationship with Coach Reed, who Don felt was always looking for a “bigger, stronger athlete” to play quarterback. Nevertheless, Don was named the starter his junior year and led the Blue Tigers to a 7-2 season mark and Lincoln became known for a prolific offense.

However, along with his athletic achievements came other challenges.

College life, especially in small-town Missouri in the post-WWII years, was a jolting experience for young Hudson and he was in some ways unprepared for the racial tensions and inequities of the Jim Crow south. Like all African-Americans of his day, Don endured the ever present reminders of second class citizenship and chafed under the constant humiliations of state-sponsored racial segregation. But these experiences and struggles would also help prepare him for his later role as a pioneer in integrating the head coaching ranks of both high school and college football.

Military Service/Korea

Graduation from Lincoln in January 1953 was accompanied by several changes both personally and professionally. He married fellow Lincoln alum Florence Dudley of Fulton, Missouri, started a family and, as was standard procedure with young men enrolled in ROTC at the time, was called to active duty as a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army. The Korean War was nearing its end as he underwent Basic Officer Training at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri. That was followed by Army Engineer School at Ft. Belvoir, Virginia where he was commissioned as a 1st Lieutenant in the Combat Engineers and immediately shipped out to the Korean peninsula. In Korea he was a Platoon Leader in the 13th Division and was assigned to minefield clearing duties in the Korean DMZ. He served with distinction, earning the Korean Service Medal and the United Nations Service Medal. As it turned out, Korea was also the last time he played competitive football; upon learning that Lt. Hudson was

an experienced college quarterback, the 13th Division Commanding General “requested” he “volunteer” to quarterback the Divisional football team during his last 6 months in Korea. After serving for 15 months in Korea, he returned home and was discharged from active duty in February 1955. Don then used his G.I. Bill benefits to spend a year earning a Master of Education Degree (M.Ed.) at Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Coaching and Teaching in Missouri – The Early Years

In late 1955, he began his coaching and teaching career at his alma mater Lincoln University. He was hired as an assistant football coach by Coach Reed, but also was an assistant coach in basketball, track and women’s gymnastics. In addition, he taught in the Health and Physical Education Department. In these varied capacities, from 1955 to 1962, he was able to impact the lives of hundreds of young adults and serve as a positive role model for African-American college students. Don was active in the local chapter of the NAACP, supporting the ongoing struggle for equal rights and access to public facilities in Jefferson City, specifically the city golf course, movie theater and municipal bowling alley. Somewhere along the way, he also acquired the affectionate nickname “Hut.”

As a junior assistant football coach, Don was assigned heavy recruiting duties involving long hours of travel throughout the South and Midwest in the off-season. He focused on improving his coaching skills as well, frequently attending coaching clinics around the country sponsored by football “power universities” such as Ohio State, Nebraska and Alabama. Because of these efforts, after 3 seasons Coach Reed advanced him to the position of Offensive Coordinator for the Blue Tigers.

In 1962, he left Lincoln to take an assistant football coaching position at Manual High School in Kansas City, Missouri. At the time he was hired, Manual, an inner city public school with sparse resources had suffered through consecutive winless seasons. Coach Hudson was appointed

offensive coordinator and installed an I-Formation system known as the “Veer,” a primarily run-based system he had studied at coaching clinics in prior years. That first year, in a season somewhat reminiscent of the popular movie “Remember the Titans,” Manual featured a potent high scoring offense, losing only one game and tied for a share of the Kansas City League title. It was a near miraculous season for the Manual Cardinals, during which it was not unusual for young Coach Hudson to host several of his players at his home for evening dinners and, of course, film study of their upcoming opponents. While in Kansas City, Don developed a friendly relationship with several players and coaches on the Kansas City Chiefs professional football team. In addition, he was selected to head the Kansas City branch of the NCAA National Summer Youth Sports Program, a federally funded program that targeted disadvantaged urban youths and served to introduce them to a wide variety of professionally coached sports clinics they would not ordinarily be exposed to, including tennis, golf, volleyball and gymnastics. Because of the success at Manual, he had expectations of landing a head coaching job in Kansas City but that opportunity did not materialize. In 1966, he returned to his previous assistant coaching position at Lincoln University in the hopes of one day succeeding Coach Reed.

Minnesota – “The land of milk and honey”

Then, in the spring of 1968, he received a phone call from a long-time family friend and former neighbor in Jefferson City, Donald “Bill” McMoore, who at that time was a prominent African American educator in the Minneapolis public school system. McMoore, a Minnesota native and well-known University of Minnesota alumnus, urged him to apply for the newly open position of head football coach at Minneapolis Central High School. Bill felt the time was ripe to break the color barrier in Minnesota and that Don would be a very competitive applicant. In typical “Big Mac” style, he advised Don that Minnesota was “the land of milk and honey” and “Hut, you won’t believe the

size of some of these high school kids you'll have on your team up here." But, he also didn't pull any punches in telling his friend that Minnesota was not immune to the racial tensions engulfing the U.S. in the 1960s and Minneapolis was undergoing significant tensions related to integration of the public schools. Don was not deterred and applied for the position. He was eager to fulfill a lifelong dream of being a head coach and felt that his previous experiences coaching in Missouri had prepared him well.

In August of 1968, he was hired at Central, making history as the State of Minnesota's first African American high school head football coach. But, it did not take long for racial and societal issues to come to the fore. In the first week after the hiring was announced, several white assistant coaches with the varsity football program resigned and many of the returning white football players quit the team. Obviously, this made for a difficult transition that first year as he was unexpectedly forced to hire an entirely new staff of assistant coaches and the team's player depth was severely impacted. However, for the coaches and players who remained on the squad (including several white players), it forged an unbreakable emotional bond that has continued for the rest of their lives. It also meant that in the 1969 season, Central H.S. was transformed into a powerhouse team that shut out their first four opponents and challenged for the City League Title. They were denied a city championship by an excellent undefeated Washburn High School team but clearly the Central H.S. football program had returned as a force to be reckoned with in Minneapolis. On the social networking front, there was formed an informal group of Minnesota African- American educators who modestly gave themselves the nickname "Magnificent Five," or "M5" for short. The members of that group were Earl Bowman, Richard Green, Bruce Williams, Bill McMoore and Don Hudson. In addition to serving as mentors to the next generation of teachers and coaches in the Minneapolis African- American community, they shared a passion for regular friendly rounds of golf at local courses. They could also occasionally be spotted on Saturday nights

holding informal “strategy sessions” at the old Nacarema Club in south Minneapolis.

In the fall of 1970, Coach Hudson accepted a position as assistant football coach at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. In December 1971 he again made sporting history - this time nationally and not just in Minnesota - when he was hired as the head football coach at Macalester, becoming the first African-American head coach at a predominantly white university in the modern NCAA era. Up until that time, there had been no African-American college head football coaches outside of the historically black colleges and universities. He also coached varsity track at Macalester for both men and women and was Assistant Chairman of the Athletic Department. The Macalester position fulfilled a lifelong goal of becoming a college head football coach but it came with many challenges which would prove stressful for Don and his family. During that period he separated and divorced from his first wife but remarried in 1975 to the lasting love of his life, the former Constance Jean McCoy-Williams forming an expanded family unit with her young children from a previous marriage.

His football tenure there from 1971-1975 was not a very successful one in terms of wins and losses but, as always, Coach Hudson had a positive lasting impact on both his players and the many Macalester students who took classes taught by him in the Physical Education Department. He also continued to direct a branch of the NCAA National Summer Youth Sports Program, and testified about the program before the U.S. Congress. Coach Hudson left a lasting legacy of goodwill and fond memories at Macalester and in October 2007, he and his family were honored at the college. The Head Football Coach’s Office in the Leonard Center at Macalester was also renamed the “Coach Don Hudson Football Office.” The mayor of St. Paul declared October 6, 2007, “Don Hudson Day” and Don was presented with keys to the city.

Back to Missouri and On to Colorado

In 1976, he returned to Jefferson City, Missouri to become the head football coach at his alma mater, Lincoln University. As before, he again occupied many formal positions, including head coach of the women's track team and Athletic Director. With that appointment, his football coaching career had come full circle. By the end of his final tenure at Lincoln, Don had finally grown a bit weary of coaching football and was open to moving on to different challenges. In 1983, he was contacted by one of his former assistant coaches, Dr. Eric Eversley, who was then the principal of Smoky Hill High School in Aurora, Colorado, a school of over 2500 students in the Denver metropolitan area. Dr. Eversley was searching to hire someone to oversee the Athletic Department of this sprawling school in Colorado's Cherry Creek School District. This would require a person with the knowledge and experience to oversee approximately 75 coaches in 20 different varsity and junior varsity sports (boys and girls), manage schedules and finances and represent Smoky Hill H.S. on the Board of Control of the Colorado High School Activities Association (CHSAA). Whoever he hired would have to be a mature person and possess a broad knowledge base of coaching and administrative skills, in addition to having excellent communication skills, the ability to manage large sports-related projects plus work well with people from varied backgrounds. Who could better fulfill that role than Don Hudson?

Mr. Hudson was hired in the summer of 1983 and remained in that job until his retirement in 1999. He performed admirably in this position and became a familiar sight at high school sporting events in Denver, a fixture at CHSAA Athletic Director Meetings and a respected figure on the Colorado Prep Sports scene. He was also a consistent advocate for the importance of students taking care of their academic program responsibilities as a priority matter. His wife Connie was employed at IBM in Colorado until her retirement in 1997. During this stage of his life he forged lasting friendships with many educators and parents in Colorado and, of course, he and Connie became die-hard Denver Broncos fans. Two of their children graduated from Smoky Hill High

School as well and, along with their four older children, have successfully “launched” into professional careers. Like many modern American families, their children are now scattered around the United States (and overseas as well). Toward the end of his time at Smoky Hill H.S., Don began to suffer the effects of his many years of smoking cigarettes (which began while stationed in Korea). He was diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), a condition that leads to a gradual deterioration of lung function and eventually to dependence on supplemental oxygen. In 1997, after a chest x-ray revealed a mass in his lower right lung, he underwent a surgical procedure to have it removed. Fortunately, the mass proved to be non-malignant but the procedure resulted in removal of part of his right lung. After his recovery, he quit smoking but soon required supplemental oxygen therapy. This treatment would continue for the rest of his life at gradually increasing levels.

Retirement and North Carolina

After his final retirement in 1999, Don and Connie remained in Colorado for the next nine years, staying very engaged in the lives of their children and grandchildren. Even though his lung condition slowly worsened over time, Don showed amazing resiliency and determination. The Colorado years saw them maintain an active social life with their many friends, especially in their Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. networks. They took family trips to several American cities and distant overseas destinations as well, including Spain, New Zealand and Brazil.

As his COPD continued to worsen, traveling became more difficult to manage with even everyday activities requiring enormous effort at times - especially at Denver’s high elevation. In 2008, his condition figured into a decision to move to Charlotte, NC, which had several advantages; the cost of living was less, it was located at sea level and also was near their youngest daughter and her family. Also in 2008, he was inducted into the Lincoln University Alumni Hall of

fame.

Because of his trailblazing accomplishments in athletics and coaching, in August 2014, he was interviewed for inclusion of his story into The History Makers section of the U.S. Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., an honor he cherished greatly.

Don and Connie remained in Charlotte for the last decade of his life and, to the surprise of no one who knew them, were very active in both neighborhood social circles and their church, Friendship Missionary Baptist Church. They frequently attended gospel and jazz concerts, professional sporting events and enjoyed the occasional restaurant meal/movie with friends. He was a member of the Charlotte Social Club, a men's group that sponsored monthly social activities. Don's ability to remain active in the face of a devastating and inexorable disease is a testament to his courage and resolve - and the help of family and friends who loved him. In this effort, he was blessed to have the undying love and tireless support of his wife Connie, who he described to others as "My Rock, Constance Jean."

Together, Don and Connie united their families from previous marriages, including two children from Don and four from Connie. Because of this, his proud family legacy extends far beyond the athletic arena and includes a journalist, two physicians, a business executive and two attorneys (one of which is a current Minnesota State Supreme Court Associate Justice).

"Coach Hudson" is gone now, but for those of us fortunate enough to have known and loved him, he will never be forgotten.

Public Memorial Service will be held Friday, November 2 at Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church, 3355 N. 4th St., Minneapolis, MN. 55412.

Visitation hour will begin at 12 Noon, followed by the service at 1:00 PM.

Private internment of ashes will be Monday, November 5 at Ft. Snelling National Cemetery in St. Paul, MN. In lieu of flowers, the family graciously requests you make a donation to the American Lung Association in memory of Donald E. Hudson, Sr. Please send your gift to:

The American Lung Association
Minneapolis/St. Paul Chapter
424 W. Superior Street, #202
Duluth, MN. 55802

Cemetery Details

Ft. Snelling National Cemetery

7601 34th Ave. S.
Minneapolis, MN 55450

Tribute Wall

CS

“ Will always be my "Home Boy ". Chop Chop / Smitty.

Charles A. Smith - September 23, 2019 at 02:00 PM

SK

“ Don Hudson treated everyone he met with respect, something he was not always afforded during his life. He was a role model for all of us, and I'm honored that I could call him my friend.

Stu Kantor - November 29, 2018 at 08:10 PM

HL

“ I will always remember and love coach Hudson for the opportunity he made for me to get me scouted by the Kansas City Chiefs. I will always be grateful because he believed in me. May God Bless, keep and comfort his family always.



Henry Rome 1964-69 (61) Linebacker - November 05, 2018 at 02:36 PM

JH

“ Connie,

My apologies for not personally connecting with you! I've been thinking about your loss of your companionship with Hut.

I pray that family can provide you with the support you need in this difficult time.

It goes without saying, that if there's anything that I/we can do, just let me know.

*Jeff Hassan
(612) 532-3694*

Jeff Hassan - November 03, 2018 at 02:14 PM

VS

“ *The Grand Hudsons! That's the well deserving title my family bestowed upon them. We adopted each other as family, and once our kids were born everything changed. They were "extra" special grandparents to our kids and eventually just became known to us as Grand. Grandpa Don was always loving and welcoming to me and my crew. He always has something funny to say to make me laugh as he teased Soror Connie. He was a role model to us on what great parenting looked like and how to bring out the best in our kids with love, patience, and support. I've always valued any words of advice from him. The Hudsons do all things grand and wrote the playbook on what exceptional , successful parenting looks like. I am forever blessed for to have been in your presence and loved by you. Thank you Hudson family for sharing your wonderful dad with us.*

*Love,
Veronda Smith (Charleton, Marcus, and Imani)*

Veronda Smith - November 02, 2018 at 09:57 AM

MM

“ I had the privilege of both coaching at Smoky Hill HS when Don was the AD and then sharing an office with him when I became an Assistant Principal. What I remember most about Don or "Coach" was his smile and ability to make others smile and feel better. He made the Athletics and Activities Office a great place to be and work. His ability to inspire and encourage others from high school students to adults was one of his greatest skills. I learned a lot about how to work with all kinds of people and situations from Don and for that I thank him. He will be very much missed by everyone who ever had the opportunity to know him and work with him. Thank you Don.

mike murphy - October 31, 2018 at 02:55 PM

GB

“ My condolences to Connie and the entire family on Don's passing. I met Don when working in the Athletic office at Overland HS and I had the privilege of sharing an office with him at Smoky Hill HS. His amazing stories of his life experiences in earlier years were very special and spoke to the kind of man he was. He was a true gentleman and a very special friend to me - I will always be very grateful to have known him and I will never forget him.
God Bless you and your family.
Rest in Peace.
Gayle Banyard

Gayle Banyard - October 30, 2018 at 11:42 AM

KM

“ Just saw the announcement in the Denver Post, please accept my condolences. I had the pleasure of working with Don for many years at Smoky Hill High School. Don always treated coaches with respect and fairness, he was an outstanding athletic director. He would often tell me about his children and their success in life, obviously a proud father and caring husband. He will be missed and is an integral part of SHHS history.

Keith McElreath

keith christopher mcelreath - October 30, 2018 at 10:38 AM

SF

“ Dear Hudson Family,
I worked with Don at Smoky Hill and loved this man! When he came to the Main Office where I was a secretary, he radiated warmth and kindness and brightened my day! Always talked about his family with such pride!
May beautiful memories comfort you!
Heartfelt sympathies,
Sue Fritzius

Susan Fritzius - October 29, 2018 at 04:33 PM

RM

“ Dear Connie and Hudson family,

My deepest and most sincere condolences to all of you with the loss of Coach. I had the honor and great fortune to work under Coach at Smoky Hill HS and eventually trained, was mentored and guided by Coach to be his successor as Athletic Director at SHHS. I can honestly say there are few if any men or women who have impacted my life more than Coach Hudson. My respect and admiration for all of his accomplishments and the people he helped along the way in so many different ways speaks to a man who led a life full of integrity, passion, unselfishness and love.

To declare Coach was a great man is a understatement. His positive influence, courage and wisdom was truly awe inspiring. I know Coach was one of the most influential men not only for me, but for hundreds and probably thousands of people lucky enough to be touched by his magic. I loved Coach very much and feel so grateful our lives crossed paths. I also know how much he loved his family and was so proud of all of you. I am saddened, but also know his life should be celebrated because of the truly extremely special man he is and all the goodness and love he brought to this wonderful world.

God Bless and warmest regards,

Russ McKinstry

Russ McKinstry - October 29, 2018 at 01:58 PM

TS

“ To Connie and Don Jr. and the family of Don: Please accept my heartfelt sympathies for a highly respected man. Ever since Don retired and moved to Charleston I have thought of him often and remembered our time being AD's together.

Don and I were fellow Athletics Directors in the Cherry Creek School District while he was at Smoky and I was at Overland. He and I shared supervision responsibilities for many an inner district and League games. I always enjoyed my time spent with Don, enjoyed many laughs, and always looked forward to seeing him. He was Smoky Hill's heart as far as I was concerned. I know he has left you with many lifetime memories.

Tony Schenbeck

Tony Schenbeck - October 29, 2018 at 10:56 AM

LW

“ My thoughts are with the entire Hudson Family at this difficult time. I was college roommates with Don's daughter Natalie and AKA sorority sisters with his wife Connie and my dear friend Natalie. May God bless you and bring comfort full of wonderful memories of Mr. Hudson.



Linda Williams - October 29, 2018 at 12:16 AM

MB

“ What an incredible man! I met Don when I worked in the Records Office at Smoky Hill High School. He would come to our office always with a story to tell. I'm so honored to have known him. My condolences to Connie and the family. Marla Bittinger

Marla Bittinger - October 28, 2018 at 08:43 PM

SS

“ *Connie and family - so sorry to hear of Don's passing. My sincere condolences to your family. (Connie and I worked at IBM in Denver back in the 80's; we were both secretaries.) I was sorry to see Don's obituary in the paper this morning.*

Susan Schneckner

Susan Schneckner - October 28, 2018 at 11:14 AM

ES

“ *Estes lit a candle in memory of Donald Hudson Sr.*



Estes - October 26, 2018 at 03:42 PM