

A Legend and a Friend

Otho Davis was many things to many people: teacher, healer, confidant, friend. How will you remember him?

Many people knew him simply as “O.”

That was fine with him – Otho Davis was never one for formality. Quite the opposite, in fact.

Otho – who christened his Philadelphia Eagles athletic training room The Otho Davis Wildlife Sanctuary – loved a good practical joke, the kind that could incite a belly laugh years later.

When cancer claimed Otho’s life in May, it was his humor, his zest for life and his caring attitude that friends and family recalled.

In those recollections they found a way to honor a man whose life made a lasting impact on a profession and on the individuals in it.

“My favorite memories of Otho are the stories I would hear from training camp about the pranks he pulled to lighten the situation during a very intense time for people,” said EATA President A.J. Duffy III, MS, ATC, PT.

“That was part of what made him so special. He took care of the person just as well as he took care of the injury. Hearing all those stories reminds

you of that and serves as a lesson,” Duffy added.

Take, for example, Otho’s penchant for pulling the wool over his rookies’ eyes. Former Eagles quarterback Ron Jaworski still laughs about Otho’s sincere announcement, every year, of an Atlantic City casino trip for rookies.

Promised \$500 in chips, the rookies would eagerly gather in the early morning hours to await a bus that never arrived.

A few months later, they would fall prey to Otho’s prankster ways again when he doled out “free” coupons for a Thanksgiving turkey.

But underneath the jokes, Otho harbored a serious, abiding commitment to athletic training.

From the day he chose the profession until the day his health forced him into the hospital for the final time, Otho Davis worked to further athletic training.

He leaves a legacy that began with his first experience as a certified athletic trainer, when he cared for the U.S. Army’s baseball and basketball teams at Fort Leavenworth dur-

ing the Korean War.

He went on to earn bachelor’s and master’s degrees and to serve as a certified athletic trainer for Kent State University, Duke University, the NFL’s Baltimore Colts and the Philadelphia Eagles, with whom he spent 23 years.

It was in his role as the Eagles’ caretaker that he met his wife, Mary Louise.

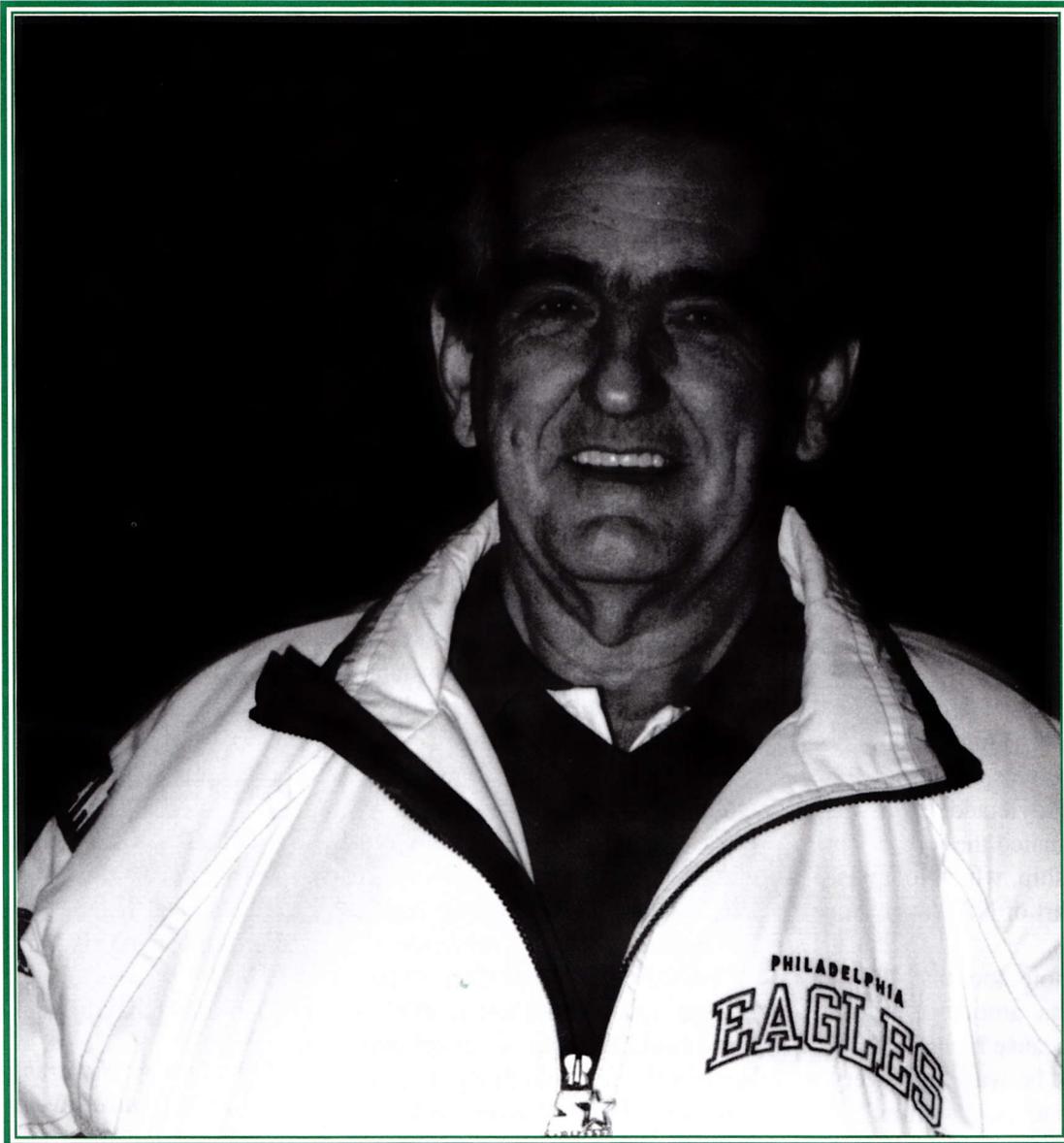
“I worked for the dentist who was the team dentist for the Eagles, and Otho would call up and make appointments. That’s how it all started,” Mrs. Davis said. “I fell in love with his Texas accent first, and then it was his dimples that got me.

“He became my best friend,” she added.

“Outside of his profession, he was a very private man. He loved to take me out to a quiet dinner. He loved to cook – his chili is famous. He loved to sit home and read. He loved to go to his parents’ farm in Elgin (Texas) and just fish for hours.

“Away from his profession, he was a homebody,” Mrs. Davis said. “He just loved the quietness of his home and his family.”

When Otho was in



Otho L. Davis

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working mode, however, there was nothing reserved or quiet about him, Mrs. Davis explained.

“He put 110 percent into it,” she said. “He would get up around 6 in the morning, and sometimes it would be 2 a.m. when I finally would say, ‘Otho, enough is enough.’”

After retiring from the Eagles, Otho was the driving force behind organizing a new opportunity for certified athletic trainers, urging a

pharmaceutical company to hire ATCs on a contract basis to conduct drug audits.

The idea was typical of the type of vision he brought to his profession. Finding this new way to employ athletic training made Otho happy, Mrs. Davis said.

“Otho was very proud of this work,” she said. “He saw it as a way to help his [certified] athletic trainers.

“He loved what he did,” Mrs.

Davis added. “He was happy at what he did, even if that meant spending all night with a player, getting him ready for a game, which he did many, many times.”

Otho’s devotion to the physical and emotional well-being of his athletes was matched only by his dedication to pushing the profession forward.

Always an active member of the local and state athletic training associations, he became the NATA execu-

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tive director in 1971.

For 19 years he guided the association and with it, the profession.

Under his leadership, the NATA grew from 1,989 members to more than 10,000 strong in 1990, with a net worth exceeding \$3 million.

He also moved the national office from North Carolina to Dallas, where it is housed today in a building that bears his name.

Executive Director Eve Becker-Doyle, CAE, credits Otho for paving the way for the NATA.

"Otho made our association and profession what it is today," Becker-Doyle said. "He was the driving force behind NATA's growth and public recognition of certified athletic trainers.

"He was able to get people involved in the NATA and bring the association into the spotlight as well," Becker-Doyle added. "It was Otho who originated the idea of corporate sponsorship, which today is an important part of NATA's revenue block.

"We should note, too, that Otho did all of that in what amounted to his 'spare time,' because he had a full-time career, and he was there every second his athletes needed him."

Former intern Stan Wong, ATC, said the busy schedule was simply part of Otho's style, and it imparted a life lesson to his students.

"He always said if we watched and learned, anything was possible," Wong recalled. "He challenged us, tested our common sense, our mettle and our ability to separate right from wrong, and all those things in life have carried me.

"Every year I work is a tribute to Otho Davis."

Tributes have poured in by the thousands, Mrs. Davis added.

"Otho was such an amazing man. He would talk to people and make them feel so comfortable just by the way he

would speak to them," she said.

"I got a letter from a man who sat next to Otho on the plane the last time he traveled, maybe two years ago.

"The man was a total stranger – but O made such an impression on him during that flight from Dallas to Philadelphia that he kept his card and kept track of what was happening in Otho's life."

In fact, the Davises rarely went to any town or business without someone recognizing and greeting Otho, Mrs. Davis said.

For that matter, Otho was known internationally as well.

When the Philadelphia Eagles played exhibition games overseas, Otho made friends with all sorts of health care professionals, constantly serving as an ambassador for the profession of athletic training.

Dr. Walter McKone, an osteopath who met Otho when the Eagles played in the United Kingdom in the early 1980s, remembers both the certified athletic trainer and the lessons he taught about sports medicine.

"His influence crossed the sea to Europe, and I would like to think that I could continue to reflect his drive in the field of athletic health care in the UK," McKone said. "[When remembering Otho Davis], you could quote the words of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'The first and last thing required of genius is the love of truth.'"

That Otho's reach extended across oceans does not surprise his wife.

"No matter where we'd go, somebody would shout his name, and Otho would say 'Hi, how are you?' and make that person feel like he was a special friend, even if he didn't remember them," Mrs. Davis said.

"Otho treated everybody the same, no matter who they were, and people responded to that."

Movie stars, singers, superstar athletes: all were treated to the same

compassion under Otho's leadership, Mrs. Davis said.

"When John Travolta was making a movie in Philadelphia in 1980, he hurt his ankle, and they called the owner of the Eagles, who called O," she said. "They wanted Otho to go out to the set and take care of John Travolta.

"Otho said, 'I'm trying to get your players ready for a game. Can they come here?'"

"And they did. They brought John Travolta down to the [athletic] training room in a limo every day for a week," she said. "Otho took care of him just like he took care of every person who needed him.

"No matter what time someone called, he would answer. No matter what the problem was, he would help." ■

Otho Davis is survived by his wife, Mary Louise; sons Mark, Duke, Richard and Thomas; daughter Denise Farrington; and six grandchildren.

Memorials may be sent to:

Otho Davis Scholarship Foundation
1326 Central Avenue, Suite A
Glendora, NJ 08029
Attn: Marie Solano Mascia

Cards and letters can reach the Davis family at:

131 Mountainview Road
Mt. Laurel, NJ 08054