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SPECIAL REPORT

The Ring-tum Phi

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

LEXINGTON, VA.

MAY 1, 1995

Fallon dies at 56

By KEITH GRANT
Phi Staff Writer

Gary Fallon, Washington & Lee's head football coach since 1978, died suddenly Saturday morning at his Lexington home. The cause of death was an apparent heart attack, according to a source close to the family. He was 56 years old.

Fallon, W&L's winningest football coach, came to Washington & Lee in 1978, a decade after the Generals' last winning season.

During his 17 year tenure, Fallon compiled a 76-85-1 record and won two Old Dominion Athletic Conference championships. Fallon was named the ODAC's Coach of the Year three times.

This past season, W&L started with three straight losses, but finished winning five of their last six for Fallon's ninth winning season.

The news came as a shock to those who knew Fallon. Fallon was "in great shape for a man 56 years old," according to Norris Aldridge, who has been an assistant football coach at W&L for 26 years under three coaches. Fallon lifted weights, ran, and played racquetball. Aldridge said in an interview with the *Roanoke Times & World-News*, "When I was told [that Fallon had died], I had to ask the person to repeat it twice." Aldridge was in Fallon's office on Friday, and recalls that "He seemed to be in a good mood. He wasn't sick." Junior Robert Hull called Fallon a "father fig-



File Photo

The end of an era

Coach Gary Fallon inspires players with a fiery pep talk during a Generals football game. Fallon was noted as a superb motivator.

ure" to the players, the school, and the community. "I can't begin to describe with words how I felt about Gary Fallon," said Hull. "I loved him. He was my coach; he was my friend."

The Syracuse University graduate was the dean of ODAC football coaches. Fallon came to Lexington after six years as an assistant coach at Princeton and coached the Generals longer than any of the previous 27 head coaches in the program's 105 year history.

"Football is here to add to an individual's college experience, not take the place of academics," he said of his coaching philosophy. "The aim of our program is to develop the total person, one who can leave us with his degree in hand after four years, one who can reflect back on his college career and see it as a meaningful and important

learning experience."

This may not have sounded like the philosophy of a man who had played big-time Division I football, but it was a philosophy that seemed to bring Fallon success throughout his life.

A native of Watertown, New York, Fallon earned 17 varsity letters at Watertown High and Manlius Military School.

Fallon then earned a scholarship to Syracuse University, where he starred in football and lacrosse. A fullback responsible for opening holes for 1961 Heisman Trophy winner Ernie Davis, Fallon was a key member of the Orangemen's '59 national championship team. He was a member of the All-East football squad his senior year and, as a

starting midfielder, captained Syracuse's 1962 lacrosse team. He also wrestled during his busy collegiate athletic career.

Following his graduation, Fallon played three years of professional football. After a season with the Minnesota Vikings, Fallon went north to the Canadian Football League, where he played with the Hamilton Tiger Cats and the Toronto Argonauts.

He spent the next six years with the U.S. Marine Corps, two years on active duty and four as a reservist.

In 1967, he received his M.A. in special education from Syracuse.

Fallon took the reigns of Washington & Lee football in 1978. Two years later, the Generals posted their first winning season since 1967, the final year of Lee McLaughlin's coaching tenure. W&L has had only four losing seasons since.

In 1981, the 8-2 Generals won the ODAC for the program's first championship in 20 seasons. Fallon was named the conference's Coach of the Year for a season that marked the beginning of W&L's winningest era since the McLaughlin years. The Generals capped their sixth straight winning season by again winning the ODAC title in 1985.

Fallon's players have earned a first-team All-ODAC selection 61 times and he has coached 12 All-Americans.

This past fall, W&L began Fallon's 17th season by dropping its first three games and totaling just two points. However, the Generals came together and posted a 5-1 record the rest of the way. Included in that stretch was a 13-7 upset of regional power Guilford. The heavily underdogged Generals stopped repeated late scoring attempts by the 7-1 Quakers, dashing the 5,300 hometown fans' hopes for an ODAC championship. "It was the most exciting game I've seen in my 17 years," Fallon said.

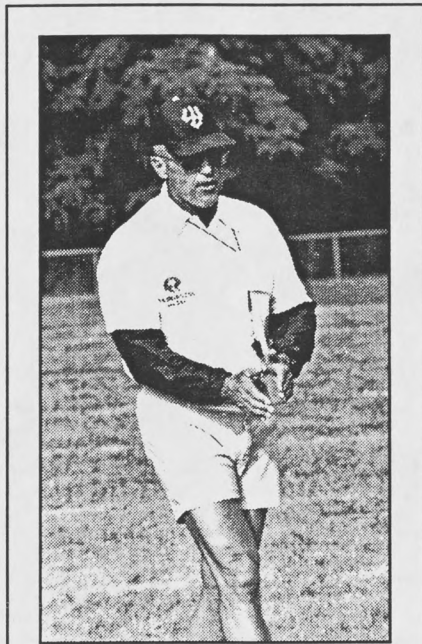
The Generals ended the season with a 14-11 win at Swarthmore College to earn a 5-4 record.

Fallon was a member of the American Football Coaches Association and served on the NCAA Division

III rankings committee. He also worked as an official for collegiate lacrosse, working games in both the ACC and NCAA tournaments.

Freshman Seth McKinley, whose emergence at tailback helped spark the team's strong finish in '94, said Fallon played a large role in McKinley's decision to come to W&L. "When I came to visit the school, I had a long talk with him," McKinley said. "He was one of the main reasons why I came here."

Hull has chosen to dedicate his final season with the Generals to his



File Photo

Coach Fallon paces the sidelines during one of the many practices of his 17 year coaching career at W&L.

coach's memory.

"He was an amazing individual who helped to forge my character," Hull said. "He will always live in my memory. My senior season goes out to the 'great Falcon.'"

Mike Walsh, Director of Athletics, is certain that Fallon's 17 years at W&L will be known as the 'Fallon Era' in memory of the "enthusiasm and zeal, the commitment to excellence, and the ability to motivate young men toward a common goal" that Fallon embodied.

Fallon, an avid New York Yan-

kees fan, was a man who seemed to make his mark at W&L in more ways than as just a football coach. Walsh believes the W&L community to be in "a state of shock, because we've lost a true friend, a wonderful coach, and an unusually fine person."

A 1979 reporter from *The Ring-tum Phi* seemed to know the second-year coach well when he noted, "Head coach Gary Fallon is a nice guy—too nice a guy to have a 2-10 career record."

Walsh met with the football team and coaches last evening, providing an opportunity for them all to be together and share memories and thoughts about Fallon.

A funeral service will be held Wednesday, May 3, at 11:00 a.m. in Lee Chapel. Burial with military rites will follow in the Stonewall Jackson Cemetery in Lexington. The family will receive friends from 3 to 5 p.m. and from 7 to 9 p.m. on Tuesday at the Harrison Funeral Home on South Main St.

Fallon is survived by his wife, Patricia Grant Fallon, three daughters, and seven grandchildren.

Memorial donations may be made to St. Patrick's Church, 221 W. Washington Street, Lexington, VA 24450.

Fallon's Record

1978 -- 2-8-0

1979 -- 3-7-0

1980 -- 6-4-0

1981 -- 8-2-0

ODAC Champs

1982 -- 5-4-0

1983 -- 6-3-0

1984 -- 6-4-0

1985 -- 7-2-0

ODAC Champs

1986 -- 2-7-0

1987 -- 3-6-0

1988 -- 5-3-1

1989 -- 5-5-0

1990 -- 5-5-0

1991 -- 1-9-0

1992 -- 5-4-0

1993 -- 2-8-0

1994 -- 5-4-0