



Honoring Al Manliguís

Ask any sports fan in Hawaii about Hilo High School and chances are they will mention “basketball” as one of the school’s special attributes. Most Hilo High alumni would agree, as memories of exciting home games at packed-to-the-gills Hilo Civic Auditorium remain one of their most vivid high school memories.

Few individuals have made a greater contribution to the Viking basketball legacy than Al Manliguís. Born and raised in Onomea, just a few miles up the coast from Hilo town, Al groomed his game in the plantation leagues to become an outstanding prep basketball player for the Vikings in the Big Island Interscholastic Federation (BIIF). He distinguished himself as an all-star performer in the 1947 and 1948 Hawaii Territorial Basketball Tournaments and was named the Hawaii Territorial Basketball Tournament’s Most Valuable Player in 1948.

After graduating from Hilo High School, Al attended the University of Hawaii, where he was a four-year starter for the UH Rainbows basketball team. He was named the team’s Most Inspirational Player in his senior season.

Al later returned to the Big Island and began coaching basketball in 1956 at Laupahoehoe High School, before assuming the reigns at Hilo High in 1958. He coached at Hilo High School for 27 years, retiring from coaching in 1984 with more than 500 wins to his credit. Included amongst those victories are an astounding 19 BIIF Basketball Championships and one Hawaii High School Athletic Association (HHSAA) State Basketball Championship.

At Hilo High School, Al worked as a teacher and counselor. He also coached the school’s bowling team and volunteered his time with the Boy Scouts. He will, however, be forever known as one of the greatest high school basketball coaches of all time—not just for Hilo, but in the entire state of Hawaii.

Al modestly explains that he acquired his basketball knowledge from his coaches over the years. He attended clinics and studied strategies utilized by other national coaching greats and adapted them to fit his team. In general, however, Al describes his coaching philosophy in two words, “Old school.” “I’m a stern disciplinarian,” he once said. “I tell my players, ‘If you guys have to learn by losing all the games, that’s the way we gonna do it!’” Al’s players always had their hair cut and faces cleanly shaven. Any player who took umbrage with coach’s rules or his team-first philosophy was reminded that he was free to leave at anytime.

Coach Al’s teams represented Hilo well wherever they played. What they lacked in height, they made up with scrappiness, speed and grace under pressure. They did more than bring pride and attention to the school on the court. By their success, they inspired all of us, proving that with discipline and hard work we could indeed compete with anyone on any level—even if we came from a small town like Hilo.
