

Alan David Yarr

May 1, 1934 - May 26, 2023

Alan David Yarr died after a long and fulfilling life at the age of 89 on May 26, 2023, at the Halifax Infirmary.

He was born in Victoria, B.C., on May 1, 1934, a first generation Canadian, to Michael and Phyllis (Cox) Yarr. Life growing up on Vancouver Island featured summer days at Maple Bay, tubing on the Cowichan River, playing tennis and hiking in the mountains.

Al's life path changed forever one day as a young man walking in Victoria. He passed a recruiting office that suggested he join the Air Force and see the world. He trained as a navigator, and was posted to CFB Greenwood in Nova Scotia. It was while stationed there he met his first wife Rosemary (nee McMaster). This would eventually set him up for life as an East Coaster. He accepted a job teaching at Dalhousie University in 1963.

Although living thousands of miles away, for the rest of his life Al visited home often to reconnect with family and school friends.

In addition to teaching, Al came to Dal to coach basketball, and while he would see some success in coaching that team until 1979, it was when he started coaching track and cross-country that his star truly began to shine. He guided Dalhousie teams to more than 60 AUAA championships, and was head coach of the Canadian women's cross-country team at the world championships in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1991.

He won more coaching awards than his bio on the Nova Scotia Sport Hall of Fame website cared to count.

But his legacy as a coach is best marked by the impact he had on the athletes he inspired, many of whom stayed in contact and sought out his advice for decades after they left university, perhaps because his true passion lay in the heart of the athlete, and helping to shape their development as a full person. “The art of coaching is to challenge athletes to do something they have doubt about,” he told Dalhousie’s student newspaper.

“I get just as excited as they do when they do something they didn’t think they can do.”

Al continued to coach until the end. He carried on because, as he often said, “If you love what you do you’ll never work a day in your life.” Even through the pandemic he could be found at Point Pleasant Park, putting runners through their paces. He also coached youth basketball after retiring from teaching, both on club teams and skill camps.

He had a passion for precision in sport — whether it was running technique, a free throw, or a golf swing. He never stopped looking for that next tiny detail that would bring any of these a little closer to perfection.

And he would never hesitate to demonstrate his discovery of the latest minutiae of the golf swing in his living room.

He loved dogs, marvelling at their athleticism, and he loved music, with a personal collection of more than 2,000 albums and CDs. He brought the same desire for perfection in a golf swing to his sound system. He had a particular affection for jazz singers: Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Rosemary Clooney being among his favourites. He also turned to his young athletes to keep him current, and introduced his family early to musicians who would go on to be considered among the greatest of their time, bringing home Simon and Garfunkel in the summer of 1968 and The Temptations Masterpiece a few years later.

Al leaves behind a large family, including Pam (nee Currie), the wife he loved deeply for 40 years. From his first marriage he leaves his children Michael, Kevin (Susan), and Gina (Scott) Peckford. He was predeceased by son Stephen, sister Rosemary (Ralph) Branting, and grandson Tristan. From his

marriage with Pam he leaves Jordan and Deanna. He is also survived by eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, and will be missed by his daughter-in-law Denise De Laat and her family.

A Celebration of Life will be held at St. Agnes Church Hall, 6903 Mumford Rd., Halifax, on June 7, 2023, at 2 pm.

Donations in his memory may be made to the Canadian Cancer Society.

Tribute Wall

DG

“ I just decided to google Alan and was dismayed to read of his passing. His mother and mine were best friends in Duncan in the '50s. I "boarded" with Alan and Rosemary (and Michael and Steven) in '60-61 when he and I were both students at UBC. He and I stayed in touch until the last ten years or so and I visited him and his lovely second family in Halifax many years ago. He was a man of many talents and many interests. He is no doubt missed by a host of people. My condolences to Pam and the rest of his family.

Denise Goodkey

Denise Goodkey - June 29, 2024 at 05:19 PM



“ In the fall of 1971 I was a newly aspiring runner with one years experience visiting Halifax from Arichat CB. While running in Point Pleasant Park from Cowie Hill, I was asked to participate in a intensive training session there with the Dalhousie Team and ran intervals with the likes of Robert Book and Richard Munro. Coach Yarr was so impressed with me that he asked me to enroll at Dalhousie to be part of the team. Unfortunately that would only have been inpreceeding Fall so in January 1972, I enrolled at the University of Saskatchewan, now the University of Regina. My tribute to Coach Yarr was the belief that I could be very successful which I did out West. Thanks to him I was inspired to be the best I could.

Merrill Boudreau - May 19, 2024 at 09:11 PM

KJ

“ My first memory of Coach Yarr was in the fall of 1969 at Ricker College in Houlton, Me. The Tigers were competing in the great Potato Classic basketball tournament. I was there with my Fredericton High team having earlier had our rear ends kicked hard by Houlton High. We were seated near the Dal bench. The energy, focus and enthusiasm that Coach Yarr infused into that Tigers team was very evident and powerful for a high school player. A few years later I got the opportunity to attend Dal and play for the Tigers. That was a great experience. But what I will always treasure was getting to know him and experience that positive energy in person. Al was an exemplary coach and an even better person. I'm so glad our paths crossed! Condolences to his family.

Keith Johnston - July 04, 2023 at 03:50 PM

BB

So very sorry to learn of Al's passing. He was a great man and a wonderful soul who had a major impact on my life as I, too, coached high school basketball for 30 years using many of the fundamental basketball principles that I learned playing for coach. He always wanted you to do your best on the court but his primary concern was to develop you as a caring and giving person and, in my case, to display those traits as an educator. I have not seen since 1975. Have not spoken to him since 2005. Even so, I will miss him dearly.

Robert Blount

Bob Blount - September 13, 2023 at 05:40 PM

GP

“ Nothing narrows the world like the loss of a life-time friend. Though, after we met in Duncan in grade nine our meetings were rare, I remained drawn to you for much more than the desire to profit from your mastery of the mechanics of the golf swing. The solidity of our attraction stemmed from a mutual understanding of the importance of the exchange of our passions, and this is what formed the bedrock of our friendship for three quarters of a century. Yours were always there in plain view; your devotion to Pam and your family, and your unwavering focus on your chosen profession. But for me, the traits of your character I admired the most is how relentlessly you inspired others in their search for their own betterment. Thank you, Alan, for this priceless contribution to my enjoyment of living; I will treasure it to the finish line.

George Plawski - June 24, 2023 at 06:44 PM

ST

“ So sorry to hear of Al's passing. We met him in the '90's when he coached the neighbourhood youth basketball team. We will miss seeing him on walks through the Horsefields. With deepest sympathy to your family. Farewell and Godspeed Al
Steve & Mary

Steve - June 15, 2023 at 08:18 AM

AG

“ My condolences to Pam and the Yarr family. Al was a deeply devoted person who cared all of those who came into his sphere. He helped me many times in my running journey and most especially with self discipline. I will be forever grateful to all the ways in which he helped and instilled a sense of belief in my abilities. May he rest in peace.

Angela Ghiz - June 07, 2023 at 03:44 PM

NT

“ So sorry to hear of Al's passing...but so thankful to have had the experience of working with Al while running for Dal in the 1980's. His enthusiasm and desire to help us get the best out of ourselves was inspiring. His example helped me immeasurably with my own coaching journey. I am so glad I was able to see Al at the National Usport Cross Champs last November. Thanks for the selfless contribution you gave to so many of us which helped shape our athletic and personal development Al! RIP

Norman Tinkham - June 07, 2023 at 02:36 AM

LM

“ Our great memories of Al start in 2008 as he took on a basketball training role for us. We are forever grateful for his dedication and time...6am sessions, weekend games, and in depth conversations about more than the sport. His mentorship and life lessons will live on in our hearts and minds forever. Miss you Al.

*Lyon McLean,
Laura Lee Josey and Geoff McLean*

Lyon McLean - June 06, 2023 at 08:51 PM

SA

“ Michael, Kevin, and Gina:

I'm sorry to hear about the passing of your Dad. I'm sure you have terrific memories and that you'll miss him dearly.

I was a beneficiary of his love of music through you, and I have very fond memories of my summers at the lake, many of which involved listening to a wide variety of music. Handling the records was always done with care, so that none were scratched. I suspect you had strict orders about the care of these special treasures. I guess I can thank your Dad in part for the love I have for a wide variety of music today!

I also remember my golf lessons with your Dad. Kevin and I spent many summer mornings at the Eden Golf Course in Paradise. It was there that I learned the fundamentals and etiquette of the game of golf. Your Dad took the game very seriously and did a great job coaching us on our swing. I suspect he was frustrated with us at times, because as I remember it, we spent as much time searching for balls in the woods and water holes as we did golfing. We would have a snack at the clubhouse each day before heading back to the lake for a swim to cool down.

He also took canoeing very seriously and showed us the ropes in that area as well. Any red canvas marks left on the rocks were Kevin's fault though.....lol.

All awesome memories for me!

I'll be thinking about you tomorrow, and trust all is well with you and your families.

*Best regards,
Steve Adsett*

Stephen Adsett - June 06, 2023 at 06:59 PM



“ Joyful Memory was purchased for the family of Alan David Yarr.



June 06, 2023 at 06:53 PM



“ Pam and Family:
I was so sorry to read of Al's death. His coaching and mentorship during my time as a basketball Tiger in the late 60's still resound, and it was always a pleasure to see and talk to you and Al at Dalplex - even as recently as this past winter. I, and many hundreds of others, have benefitted from knowing Coach Yarr. I will miss him.
Sincerely,
Bruce Reynolds

Bruce Reynolds - June 06, 2023 at 10:29 AM



“ I'm so sorry to read about Al's death pam. Every fall I looked forward to seeing All and Pam at Dal basketball. They were part of our basketball family. He taught me a lot about the game. I last saw him at the U sports championship this year. There will be a huge whole this fall when we go to the games. So sorry Pam.
Rick and Susan farrell

Susan farrell - June 06, 2023 at 09:50 AM

MC

“ *Pam and family,*

Sending our sympathy on the passing of Allen, a very respected gentleman.

Will keep you in our thoughts and prayers.

Kevin and Mary Coady

Mary Coady - June 05, 2023 at 12:15 PM

DE

Hi Pam and Family, My deepest sympathies on the loss of your beloved husband, Alan. You are in my thoughts and prayers. Love, Doreen (Clarke) Elwood

Doreen Elwood - June 05, 2023 at 01:55 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Alan David Yarr.*



June 04, 2023 at 10:15 PM

LC

“ Al's passing has brought back so many memories. I was a member of the North Vancouver High senior boys' basketball team that Al coached during the 1960-61 season while he was a student at U.B.C. I believe it was the first basketball team he coached. As he often mentioned - at least to those of us on the West Coast - that experience was his instigation for an amazingly successful coaching career at Dalhousie. My wife and I were given a tour of Halifax by Al when we stopped there in 2012 during a cruise from Boston to Quebec City. Then we met Pam back at their house. Everyone has an impact on everyone they meet, however brief it may be. Thank you to Al's family for sharing Al with us.

Len Corben - June 03, 2023 at 04:19 PM

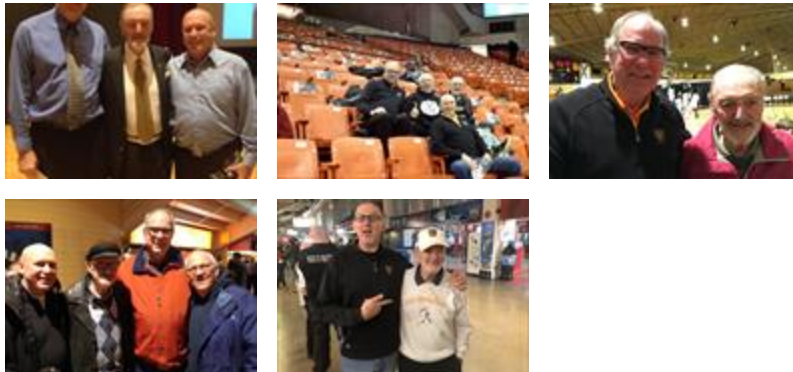
DS

“ The man LOVED to coach and at times be coached. + effect on many lives. Rest in peace Coach. Darren Steeves

darren steeves - June 01, 2023 at 01:11 PM

TC

“ 5 files added to the album Basketball



Timothy Crowell - June 01, 2023 at 09:47 AM

RC

“ I have many fond memories with Al, a passionate coach, and the Dal Tigers Cross Country Team.... at Point Pleasant Park- Fall Cross Country races and early Sunday morning runs.

During races at Point Pleasant Park- he would be at every corner cheering us on. (I think he ran as far as we did!).

My sincere condolences to Pam and family.

Rorri Currie

Rorri Currie - June 01, 2023 at 08:39 AM

SB

I was going to TUNS back in 1992-93. Tuns never had a cross country team. Al Yarr gladly took me in to train with the Dalhousie Tigers. I was able to fulfil independant racing under his continued assistance and attention. He was such a dedicated coach!

Sean Best

Sean Best - June 01, 2023 at 01:37 PM

GW

“ *Pamela and family, I was saddened to hear of Al's passing. I remember when he came to my high school and was impressed with his ability to convince me and others to come to Dal. I ran track for him for the years I attended Dal. His influence was so great that I continued to run many years after leaving Dal. My thoughts and prayers are with you and your family at this most difficult time.*

Gary Williams - June 01, 2023 at 05:20 AM

BF

“ A staple at Dalplex and the range at Ashburn , Al “coach” would always have a story and some advice from his exemplary approach to motivating Nova Scotia youth to excellence. As a young mental skills trainer under Dr Carolyn Savoy in the early 2000’s I was fortunate to coach Al’s daughter Deanna in her time as a tiger and appreciate all that Al and his family offered. I looked for you on the range this year Al and please know you are not forgotten.

Regards

Bryan Fader

Dalhousie School of Dentistry.

bryan fader - May 31, 2023 at 09:27 PM

RB

“ From first meeting Coach Yarr in May, 1964 to last speaking with him at the national university cross country in November 2022 I was always struck by his never ending enthusiasm for distance running. I was fortunate to have him as a coach 1964-67, and always appreciated his willingness to offer advice and assistance in the decades following. Hundreds of athletes at all levels in multiple sports benefited from his coaching. Al was remarkable in continuing to learn more himself year after year, and for sharing what he learned.

Deepest condolences to Pam and the rest of the Yarr family.

-Randy Barkhouse

Randy Barkhouse - May 31, 2023 at 09:08 PM

MG

“ Deepest condolences to Pam and family. Al was a wonderful human being, devoted to coaching and bringing the best out of his athletes. I would see him regularly in Point Pleasant Park doing what he loved to do, coaching athletes. RIP 🌸 Mona Ghiz

Mona Ghiz - May 31, 2023 at 08:34 PM

RC

“ Any time I travelled to Halifax and had an opportunity to talk to Al about basketball and golf, it was a pure pleasure. I always knew when I was doing a good job officiating when Al gave me a thumbs up from the stands. However, he always made sure he gave me feedback on most calls. I admired his knowledge of sports in general. Anyone who had the opportunity to talk to Al was better off for it. I will continue to talk about my many good memories of Al with family and friends for years to come.

Reg Caulfield

Reginald Caulfield - May 31, 2023 at 07:50 PM

RC

“ On behalf of all NSBO officials, our deepest condolences to Al's family and friends. Officials always knew when they had a good game when Al's team won. He was a true professional and a good friend of officials. Our thoughts and prayers are with Al's family during this difficult time.

Reg Caulfield, Provincial Supervisor, NSBO

Reginald Caulfield - May 31, 2023 at 07:47 PM

VF

“ To Pam and family,

My deepest condolences to the loss of a legend.

Al was an inspiration to many and will be missed immensely.

I will always cherish the hour long chats we had in the backyard. He spoke about his coaching career with passion, and was always willing to give me advice as a coach myself.

Al touched many of us, and the world won't be the same without him.

*You will be missed,
My neighbour Al.*

-Victoria Frauzel



Victoria Frauzel - May 31, 2023 at 06:03 PM

TF

Al was a constant at Dal from the time I watched him Coach my brother Mike to talking to him from time to time as I played at Dal and later as he offered help while I was an assistant to Bev Greenlaw. He was kind ,helpful ,passionate and generally a wonderful human being. My deepest sympathies, Tim Flinn

Tim Flinn - May 31, 2023 at 06:11 PM

JB

“ I am so sad to hear about Coach Yarr. As one of the team in the 1990s fresh over from England, Coach Yarr made me feel so welcome and helped improve me as an athlete and a person. Thank you Coach.

Jason Bocarro - May 31, 2023 at 03:51 PM

KW

“ Pam and Family- so very sorry to hear of Als passing. Reading his obituary- he sounds like he accomplished a lot in his lifetime. Take care - Karen & Terry Webb

Karen Webb - May 31, 2023 at 02:49 PM

DS

“ My condolences to the Yarr family. I always have held him in high regard as a coach and a gentleman. I still have a couple of recruiting letters he wrote in flawless penmanship to me in 1969. Although I didn't end up going to Dal I enjoyed competing against his basketball, cross country and track teams. He did some mentoring when I went to Atlantic High Performance training sessions at Dal in 1971. I always made a point over the years of going to talk to him whenever I went to the Metro Center or AUS XC races. Jog onward and rest in peace Coach.

Dick Slipp - May 31, 2023 at 02:16 PM

MS

“ *to Pam and family*
*I have known Al since the sixties. We where both involved in coaching football and basketball. I had previously been involved with the Athletic dept. at Dal. Over the years we maintained that friendship but recently due to the aging process our contact has dropped off. I was sorry to read about his passsing. He was a fine example of what a coach should be.---*Merv Shaw

merv shaw - May 31, 2023 at 12:43 PM

HM

“ *Al was an incredible coach. My sincerest condolences to Pam and all his family. Many wonderful memories from days at Dal and beyond! He made an impression on my life as a runner that I always carry with me, on every stride. 💕💕*

Heidi McLellan - May 31, 2023 at 12:21 PM

NM

“ Throughout the years, Al imparted countless invaluable lessons upon me, and I quickly learned that these lessons could arise at any given moment.

Whether it was on the basketball court of Dalplex at the crack of dawn, during leisurely walks with his dogs in the local park, or even in a hallway wearing street clothes because he caught something new from a player's performance on TV the night before, Al was always immersed in the pursuit of knowledge. He taught me the importance of being a perpetual student of life, never allowing ourselves to stop growing and learning.

Al's unrelenting passion for sports and self-improvement touched the lives of numerous athletes, and we are eternally grateful for the impact he made. Personally, I consider myself fortunate to have shared a close relationship with such an extraordinary individual. From the early morning workouts to his unwavering presence at my games, from the invaluable life advice he shared to the profound influence he had on shaping me into a young man, I will forever cherish the moments we spent together.

Rest easy, Coach Al, knowing that your influence will forever live on in the hearts and minds of those whose lives you touched.

Nash McLean

Nash McLean - May 31, 2023 at 11:10 AM

PH

“ Deepest condolences to Pam, family and his many, many friends ... as we all know, Coach Yarr had a love and passion for teaching/coaching, and he left his indelible mark on SO many students/athletes over a long and illustrious career.

The life lessons he shared far outweigh what I learned on the basketball court and classroom, and simply put I would not be the person I am today without his guidance.

Grateful for the opportunity to thank him in person at the CIS championships a few years ago, and of course, we talked basketball strategy! He was a true fan of the game.

Requiescat in pace, Coach Yarr.

Much love, always remembered.

*Phil Howlett
Belleville, ON*

Phil Howlett - May 31, 2023 at 11:03 AM

JB

“ I always appreciated Al and Pam’s support and friendship during my days with Run Nova Scotia.

Jerome Bruhm

Jerome Bruhm - May 31, 2023 at 10:30 AM

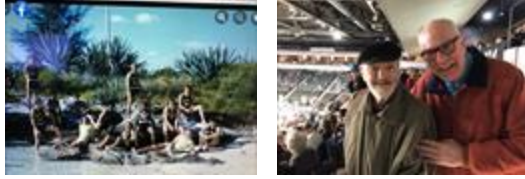
DP

“ *Godspeed Coach.*

David Paquette - May 31, 2023 at 09:15 AM

TC

“ 2 files added to the album Basketball



Timothy Crowell - May 31, 2023 at 08:56 AM

AW

“ I am deeply saddened this morning by the news of the passing of a great coach and dear friend, Al Yarr. I was proud to serve as Al's Associate Cross Country Coach throughout the 1990's when I was head of the teaching and learning office at Dalhousie. My sympathies, along with those of Marie-Jeanne and the three Wright children, go out to Pam and the Yarr offspring.

Al's passion for running in particular and sports in general is legendary, as was his dedication to mentoring and supporting the student athlete. The lives of hundreds of student athletes were enhanced due to the efforts of Al Yarr, and his courses on school curriculum also had an impact on many in higher education.

Thank you, Al Yarr, for your boundless energy, your sustained leadership, and your enduring friendship.

*Alan Wright
Welland, Ontario*

Alan Wright - May 31, 2023 at 08:37 AM

KB

“ As newly arrived immigrants to Canada, the Belzer family was warmly welcomed and encouraged by the Yarr family. May you all experience gratitude and peace in your time of mourning.

Kathryn Belzer - May 31, 2023 at 08:20 AM

VB

“ Pam and family, my sincere and heartfelt condolences on the loss of your dear husband/father/grandfather. Will remember you in prayer and know, with time, all your wonderful memories and the love that never ends will bring you the comfort and acceptance needed. May he rest in peace. - Veronica and Lyle

Veronica Brown - May 31, 2023 at 07:28 AM



“ Oh my goodness... deep-heart-hugs to the entire family. During my own track-busy-coaching days, Al was a treat to encounter at all National university competitions. There were always old tales to swap-remind us all of our naivete as well as the creativity required of us as coaches. "Look out for this one, Peter." Many other coaches were difficult to create deep relationships with because there was always a team to take care of. Al Yarr was an exception - always. Al was a live-walking-reminder that sport is a "special" place for individuals that occupied a "big" heart world. "Ego" never led the walk to the starting line. Thanks for the reminder Al. Thank you.

Peter Grinbergs - May 31, 2023 at 07:01 AM

SC

“ To Pam and children. Sorry for your loss. I was your tenant for a few months on Cambridge Street in 2002/2003. Sharon Cunningham

Sharon Cunningham - May 31, 2023 at 05:23 AM

HW

“ Al was a tremendous and kind individual who always had time for people.

His knowledge and vast experience were a delight to those with whom he shared.

Just a few months ago, he shared with me, his early days in NS, and some great old running stories, along with basketball and golf.

May you overcome the loss by the strength of the amazing memories of this great individual

You fought the good fight now rest my friend

Harold White - May 31, 2023 at 05:22 AM

RM

Condolences to Pam and the family. In my five years as a Physical Education student at Dalhousie, I was in every class that Al taught and he was my supervisor when I did my practice teaching. Al had a huge influence guiding me as a young teacher. His advice to be "patient, kind, and demanding" was always in the back of my mind. He was a phenomenal teacher and I have so many great memories of time spent with Al during my years at Dal. He will be missed by many!

Robert Milligan - May 31, 2023 at 08:21 AM

RM

My condolences to Al's family. As an early member of Dal's swim team in the 1960's I sought Al's advice on sports nutrition and physiology. I always respected and valued his expertise in diverse areas. He was an excellent coach.

Rob Murray

Rob Murray - May 31, 2023 at 12:37 PM

SG

My condolences to Al's family and the Dalhousie community. I volunteered as the XC and Track team manager from 1997-2001. Al created an environment that developed so many fine student athletes. Amongst my happiest memories are those spent with the women's XC team over the years -- we created friendships that still stand 25 years later.

Al wrote one of my letters of reference for medical school. I have no idea what he wrote, but it did the trick. Thank you, Al, for helping me to create wonderful memories, amazing friends, and an incredible career. Rest well.

Sarah "Sparky" Giles

Sarah Giles - May 31, 2023 at 07:45 PM

DL

Although I don't live in Halifax anymore I knew I could always literally run into Al at the Park during most of my visits and have a laugh or two with him. Al truly brought together some of the finest runners and people that I have ever met. I am so grateful for my experiences with the Dal XC team and his coaching. There are too many stories to recount here but Al definitely created some hilarious memories from my time with the team that I will always cherish. Thank you for all the time you put into the sport and giving runners of all abilities a chance. I truly wish Al's family and Pam the warmest thoughts during this time.

Daun Lynch

Daun Lynch - May 31, 2023 at 09:48 PM

CF

I was very sad to hear of Al's passing. I last saw Al at the Hall of Fame induction event for 2005 cross country team a few years ago. He looked exactly the same then as he did a decade before. Al was a great coach and will be missed by many people. My condolences to Pam and Al's family.

Cathy French - June 02, 2023 at 07:14 AM