

Here's to you, Bobby Brown

Family, friends reflect on the life of a Daphne sports legend

By Thomas Boni

Editor

bulletin@gulfcoastnewspapers.com

DAPHNE -- Bobby Brown's life story is told through picture frames, autographs and plaques on glass shelves in his wife's Daphne home.

Amid photos of his beloved Arva and their four sons — Pat, Mark, Bena and David — are tokens from his journey.

Personal autographs from Mike Shula and Mike Gottfried stand in close view from the kitchen table. A plaque from Daphne High's football team marks the years he drove the Trojans to their games. Nearby rests a replica of Spanish Fort Charters, the bus he drove. Also on display, a picture of Brown and a Crawford Beverage 18-wheeler that reminds Arva of her husband's old part-time job — and his legendary cleanliness.

"That was his truck, number 10, and he kept it spotless," she says, reflecting on fond memories of Brown, who died last week. He was 72.



BROWN

Brown, born in Chatanooga, Tenn., in 1935, dedicated much of his life to sports. For about 40 years, he served Eastern Shore youth teams as a coach, umpire and referee.

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Later, after retiring from 35 years years of shift work at Chevron Asfalt in Mobile, he drove Daphne's and Fairhope's football teams to their championships.

Sports played a major role in Brown's life, Bena said.

"The main accomplishment in his life was being nominated to the Fairhope High School Hall of Fame and to the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame," he said.

Brown also was inducted into the Baldwin County Varsity and Middle School Hall of Fame and the Baldwin County Coaches Association, according to old newspaper reports.

Bena said he believed people respected his father's fairness.

"Every time you knew he was on the floor (as a referee), you knew you was gonna get his best effort," he said.

"He always examined himself about 'Did I make that right call?' 'Did I get the rule correct?' 'Was I in a position to

make that call?'" Bena said.

Arva remembered her husband's sense of ethics.

"We got rule book after rule book after rule book," she said. "He didn't just put on a striped shirt and just go out there and call."

David McKelroy, director of the Daphne Recreation Department and a friend, said he and others appreciated Brown's efforts.

"I have never heard anybody say anything other than that he was the ultimate professional in the way he refereed high school athletics," McKelroy said.

And Brown still gave it his all when he drove the teams to their games, Bena said.

"He just said, 'Tell me when and where and I'm there.' That's the kind of relationship that he built with these coaches," he said.

Brown was widely known for his contributions to Eastern Shore athletics, but at home he taught his children some valuable life lessons.

"I can always remember, me

and him were sitting outside one day, cleaning up our lawnmowers after cutting grass," Bena said. "I said, 'Daddy, Why do we do stupid stuff like this?' and he said, 'Son, if you grew up the way I grew up, not having a dime to your name, you will always learn how to take care of things that belong to you.'"

Arva said Brown always adhered to these beliefs.

"He didn't use anything that he didn't clean. If he used a shovel, he washed it off afterwards; if he used a hoe, he did the same thing ... It wasn't something that he was gonna let go by," she said.

Bena follows his father's example.

"Every time I cut grass," he said with a knowing laugh, "or every time my car gets dirty, I am out there washing it. Whether it's just doing stuff around the house to clean up, to show that I do take care of my stuff, I always remember what he told me."

Friends say they'll always remember Brown's smile and good nature.

"He's the kind of guy that lit up the room; He was always smiling. He was always going to have something nice to say," McKelroy said.

Julian Guarisco said Brown was one-of-a-kind.

"That was the best man I've ever known; There's never been one like him and there will never be another one," he said.

Though her husband has passed on, Arva finds some comfort in the pictures and plaques on her kitchen shelves; the ones that tell the story of her husband's life.

She also takes heart in believing he'll reunite with lost loved ones.

"We joked that my brother-in-law met him at the gate up there with a can of wax and a cloth in his hand; and Austin and Randy met him there with a ball and bat, ready to play ball; and Benny Ray met him there with a referee shirt," she said.

"We laughed about that and remembered a lot of those things."