



Coach John Blodgett Cheek

June 18, 1948 - July 19, 2017

Coach John Cheek finally met an opponent he couldn't beat. After an 8 year battle with prostate/bone cancer John transitioned from his temporary earthly home to his eternal heavenly home on Wednesday, July 19 at his home in Butte surrounded by his loving family. This is his obituary.

I was born on June 18, 1948 in Missoula, Montana. I was the second of four siblings, and the only son, of Catherine Sarah Jackson and John Blodgett Cheek. Dad had just finished college at the University of Montana and that fall we moved to Kalispell where he started his teaching/coaching career. We moved to Anaconda when I was four years old. I attended St. Paul's Catholic School for grades one through six then completed my regular education in the public school system and graduated from Anaconda High School in 1966. I was an all-state basketball player for AHS and then went on to play for the University of Montana Grizzlies on a full ride athletic scholarship while attending college there. I married my high school sweetheart, Debbie Kelly, on September 18, 1967 and started the most wonderful life that a person could ask for. We finished college after earning my BS from the U of M and then my ME in education and school administration at Montana State University. I then began my educational career that lasted 33 years as a teacher/administrator and 45 years as a coach. I spent 23 years as a math, social science and health teacher then 10 years as a principal/superintendent. I have many fond memories of my years teaching and felt I choose a very rewarding career path. I loved the little ones in PE class, the junior high and high school

students who would bribe me with either cherry or blueberry cheesecake and liverwerst to delay a math test for a day or two and the ever present “paddle” for those who really got out of line. My favorite kids were the ones that no one else could seem to handle...the ones on the edge. I seemed to always have a way to get them through school and survive whatever issues they struggled with in their young lives. Debbie and I started our family young and we were blessed with two beautiful daughters, Cynde Rae and Wynde Kae. Later we adopted a son, Harry Clark, and also have a foster son, Jim Paul. Debbie raised all our kids, and me!

Most of our married life was spent in central Montana where I taught and coached at Geyser, Stanford, Whitefish and Cascade. It was during this time that I became a highly successful coach of several sports, but my greatest achievements were in Track and Field where my athletes excelled as both state and national champions. As head track coach, my teams won 6 state championships, 13 Divisional titles and 16 District titles. I also won two additional state championships as an assistant coach. I was chosen Montana Track and Field Coach of the Year several times during my coaching career. I was a nationally recognized coach for AAU and TAC athletes and teams in the USA and China and coached USATF teams in foreign countries. I coached summer track for decades and received numerous awards while serving on various boards and committees throughout my coaching career. I was the youngest coach ever elected to the Montana Coaches Hall of Fame in 1994 and I was elected to the National High School Coaches Hall of Fame in 2014 after being a finalist several times. I was only the fourth track and field coach in Montana history to receive this prestigious award and the first one to represent smaller Class B and C schools. I was also honored in 2016 by being the only coach inducted into the Anaconda High School Wall of Fame. I was always grateful to the hundreds and hundreds of parents who allowed me to “borrow” their sons and daughters from junior high through college and teach them a sport I loved and become a part of their lives and shaping their future in some small way. My goal was always to teach them how to achieve

excellence; how to overcome adversity; how to set goals, and how to be part of a team and help others. I think I achieved that whether I was coaching football, basketball, cross country, wrestling, volleyball or track. I coached at 15 schools and helped many athletes in other schools including; Anaconda, Geysers, Whitefish, Stanford, Cascade, Broadview, Augusta, Drummond, Helena Capitol, Corvallis, Deer Lodge, Choteau, Fairfield, Butte High and the University of Montana. Besides my regular coaching activities, I also spent thousands of volunteer hours researching records of various sports dating back many decades for the Montana High School Association. I really enjoyed being their record keeper and was awarded their highest Service Citation Award for my contributions to making sure all the records in all sports are accurate. I hope everyone enjoys reading them. I also enjoyed serving on the Board of Directors for the Montana Coaches Association for several years, being Director of the Meet of Champions during the 1990's, serving on the Golden West Invitational Advisory Committee during the 1990's, serving as the Montana State High School Development Representative during the 1990's and being heavily involved with my commitment to Montana's youth athletic and educational programs for literally decades. I always felt teaching and coaching went hand in hand.

My love of statistics and research was evident in all of my coaching endeavors. At each school where I taught and coached, I developed a Hall of Fame that included "Top 10 Best" boards for each event in track and field. For the others sports I coached I did "Top 10 Best" boards for things like free throw percentage, blocked shots, tackles, yardage gained, 3 mile run times, aces, assists, take downs, etc. Each sport had several unique categories that encouraged my athletes to "get on the board" and move up the board. They served as great motivators, along with what my athletes called "Cheeks wallpaper" that was posted in the locker rooms each week indicating where each athlete in the district, division and state stood beside my athletes in various stats. The athletes strived to constantly improve and have "bragging"

rights the following week for moving ahead of a rival athlete. They became extremely dedicated to the sport, the team, the school, the fans and to me. We were all connected to a single goal...to be the best we could be, regardless of the final outcome. I would always put together my predictions on a score sheet for district, divisional and state track meets that both my wife and I would follow and record as the meets progressed. I was always proud of how very close I was each year on the final outcome and scores, but I put in hundreds of hours of research on each athlete and their abilities. It was something I really enjoyed. I know I coached literally hundreds of all state athletes, dozens and dozens of individual state champions and relay teams, a dozen or so athletes who received 5 or more state track medals in one year and 2 all national athletes (one a national champion decathlete and one who placed third in the national decathlon). I hauled athletes all over the nation to regional and national competitions. What great times those were! I was also remarkably blessed to have four generations of my family experience the thrill of being a state champion; my dad, me, our son and our grandson. I am not sure many people can boast the accomplishment!

I loved to hunt and fish and spent literally thousands of hours hunting, mainly in central Montana. I spent many a day on the McDonald, Evans and Wirtala Ranches and up Sheep Creek hunting with good friends, family and my three hunting grandsons, Hayden, Carsen and Clement. Most of my fishing was done on the Big Hole River in my Dad's old aluminum boat and at Uncle Richard's cabin on Tim Creek. I went to the cabin every year for decades and Debbie and the kids would go too and then we added our grandsons. Hayden went every year for 20 years. All the kids and grandkids learned how to fish there and listen to me tell stories around the campfire. We caught tons of fish, lots of frogs, a few snakes, and anything else that the boys thought were interesting. We hiked miles and miles and saw grizzly bears, moose, elk, deer, sandhill cranes, coyotes, and lots of smaller mammals. The wildflowers and mushrooms were incredible every year and nowhere on the planet is the sky as full of stars as at the cabin! The memories from our yearly trips there are

some of the best of my life. It was a very special place for us each summer. I had a number of summer jobs over the years in between coaching summer track and some vacations. They range from picking hay bales for .02 each, to diamond core drilling to managing my own painting business call EZ Painters. We painted everything from houses, barns and out buildings to many Conoco stations around the state. I actually became a pretty good painter, especially cutting around windows. Needless to say, this side profession created many painting jobs for family and friends...including their homes inside and out! Debbie and I spent all kinds of time traveling around the country, and the world, but we spent even more time watching our kids and grandkids in sporting events, concerts, plays, church and school activities and taking them all over the nation to one place or another. Gosh, we sure loved taking them places like Disneyland, Hawaii, Las Vegas, Florida, Seattle, Minneapolis, cruising in the Caribbean, etc. to professional sporting events and other special places to play and just have fun! We lived for 20 years on Hauser Lake in Helena and had many wonderful family gatherings there too. Family has always been the soul of my life and no matter if it was a holiday, birthday, baptism, first communion, wedding, anniversary, or some other kind of special event, we were always together and it was great! We always had enough food to feed an army and there were always the traditional family favorites like clam dip and chips, LOTS of mashed potatoes and gravy, meats, salads and amazing sweet things like fudge, sweet rolls, cream puffs, and pumpkin chocolate chip cookies that Deb made 10 dozen at a time! When I finally decided to totally retire, we moved to Butte and I have enjoyed living back in southwestern Montana closer to our extended family. I probably put together over 1,000 puzzles in my lifetime. The card table was always up somewhere with a puzzle on it. I also enjoyed my daily Suduko and going to the movies during my retirement, along with our cats Jaxsen and Flour, who have been my "bed buddies" since I have been pretty sick. Believe me, I had a fabulous life. Thanks Deb! I want to thank everyone who was in my life (good or bad) because I sure had some super experiences and I'm sure I will see you "down

the road". Oh, one more thing...my biggest pet peeve in life was people not being on time. I hated it when someone was late! Don't be late for my funeral. My surviving family includes my wife of 50 years, Debbie; daughters: Cynde (Mike) Ascherman, Wynde (Nick) Ford, son: Harry (Lori) Clark; foster son Jim Paul; sisters, Kathy (Bob) Keltner, Penny (Pat) Leary, Mary (CJ) Cheek Gribble; brother-in-laws Fred (Karen) Kelly and Tom (Kathleen) Kelly ; aunts, Irma Harrison and Alice Burgess; five grandsons: Hayden Boynton, Carsen Boynton, Dexter Clark, Cole Clark and Clement Ford; nine nephews: Jason Keltner, Dustin Keltner, Mackenzie Keltner, Patrick Leary, Mike Kelly, John Kelly, Donnie Erickson, Jon Kelly and Nick Kelly; four nieces; Jill Leary Evans, Marla Conie, Laura Gaibler and Tara McConnell and numerous cousins, and great nephews and nieces.

Cemetery Details

Mountain View Cemetery

3910 Harrison Avenue
Butte, MT 59701

Previous Events

Vigil

JUL 28. 7:00 PM (MT)

Holy Spirit Catholic Church
3930 East Lake Drive
Butte, MT 59701

Service

JUL 29. 11:00 AM (MT)

Holy Spirit Catholic Church
3930 East Lake Drive
Butte, MT 59701

Tribute Wall

JS

“ I feel very blessed to have known John and graduate high school with him and my precious friend, his wife, Debbie. When I think of John I think of one word... Dynamic. I feel humbled and blessed to have known him...
Janet Smollack

Janet Smollack - February 08, 2018 at 06:26 PM

FK

“ Debbie and family, My thoughts have been with you in recent days. I fondly remember many days coaching track and basketball and hunting with John during the Stanford days. I learned a lot. John always put a tremendous amount of time and energy into all he did. In return his athletes and those around him made tremendous efforts and had great success. Many will remember Coach Cheek for the rest of their lives. He will be truly missed.
Fred Koontz

Fred Koontz - August 01, 2017 at 08:14 AM

NR

“ *Debbie and the Cheek Family. So sorry to hear of your loss. John was such a gentleman and an inspiration to me growing up in Anaconda and the great times we had at Memorial gym in the summers playing basketball. He was a great teacher and always willing to help you. I miss the many conversations we had at Costco and after Mass when living in Helena. John will be missed by so many. Remember all of the great times he shared with you and so many, but most of all remember John's great smile. So sorry I will not be able to attend the service. My thoughts and prayers are with all of you.*

Nick Ranalli

Nick Ranalli - July 28, 2017 at 03:39 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Coach John Blodgett Cheek.*



July 28, 2017 at 11:38 AM

CM

“ *God bless you, you know my prayers are with you. I always look for John humping the hills on his bike, now he's zooming through Europe ahead of the pack, jogging on every beach and eating ice cream with a 30" waist. It's all finished on this side of the fence. I'll be supporting you in prayer each day. You are the beauty remaining of a great man.*

cindy malisani - July 27, 2017 at 07:18 PM

JH

“ *Debbie and family,*

*it is heartbreaking to lose a classmate, teammate, and especially friend. our hearts ache as we will miss him, but at the same time we share joy knowing he is out of pain and we look forward to seeing him in eternity. we mostly hurt for his family as his family is the center of life's connectedness here on earth. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Cheek family and we pray for comfort at this time. God Bless.
WE love you.*

John and Jan Harold

john harold - July 27, 2017 at 05:41 PM

TJ

“ *The Anaconda Jacksons and Julie purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Coach John Blodgett Cheek.*



The Anaconda Jacksons and Julie - July 26, 2017 at 02:30 PM

WM

“ *The Les and Wendy McKamey family have many fond memories involving Coach Cheek and his family. There is no doubt he helped raise our kids. He encouraged goal setting and motivated them to excel. They worked their hearts out for him and achieved incredible things because he believed in them. What a great guy!*

Due to my supervising the sheep shows Friday, Saturday and Sunday, I won't be attending in person, but you all will be on my heart. Sincere condolences.

*Love,
Wendy McKamey*

Wendy McKamey - July 25, 2017 at 04:31 PM

BK

“ *So sorry about his exit. He put up a long fight. I have memories of his laugh and and grin. My prayers are with you. He will be missed.*
Bob Kelly

Bob Kelly - July 25, 2017 at 12:16 PM

PD

“ *Growing up in Anaconda on west third street, John lived across the street from us. He was 7 years older than me, but I remember when he played basketball at Anaconda High, He was a great shooting guard and was someone who I hoped I could be good as when I played for Anaconda Central. That didn't come to fruition, but I had fun anyway. I remember when his dad died, it was like losing the John Wooden of Montana coaching legends. I'm sure Johnny is in that same category. I send my deep condolences to his family and friends and may he run with the angels in heaven*

*Patrick Dewing
Lancaster, CA*

Patrick Dewing - July 25, 2017 at 12:58 AM

SB

“ *Debbie and family ~ we just saw John's obituary and wanted to say we are thinking of you during this sad time. What a legacy he has left behind. He touched so many lives in such a positive way. He will be missed by many. God Bless.*

Sue and Rob Brooks

Sue and Rob Brooks - July 24, 2017 at 09:16 PM

YW

“ *John and Debbie took me and my son in during a particularly difficult time in our lives. They opened their home and made us feel like family. Grant and I were lost and they let us stay and heal until we had a place of our own. I don't think I ever expressed the depth of my appreciation for their kindness. John, you will be missed. Debbie, you are a rare woman of substance. I think of you often and have tried to emulate your generosity and kindness in my life. God Bless you in these times that try the soul.*

Yvette Worman - July 24, 2017 at 06:13 PM



“ *He was such an inspiration to me. I was sad to see him leave Cascade. I didn't feel I got along with most of the teachers and coaches because I had a difficult personality. Not him though. He always had encouraging words to say to me and always made me laugh! My favorite memory of him was when my best friend and I tried so hard to beat him at badminton, as he told us no one had yet. Every time he scored a point against us, he would laugh and then we would try harder with a huge smile. He made a difference in my life.*

Lori (LeVeque) Phinney

Lori N Chris Phinney - July 24, 2017 at 04:01 PM

DH

“ John was a very important part of my life while he was teaching and coaching in Stanford, Montana. The two of us coached track and field together for several years and also I was his assistant basketball coach for two years. Yes, it was always important for an athlete to be on time. The bus never waited for any athlete. Debbie, I am truly sorry I will miss John's funeral mass on Saturday. Such is the way of a working sports editor. You and John have meant so much to me over the years.
Doreen Heintz

Doreen Heintz - July 24, 2017 at 02:05 PM

JE

“ Debbie,
Mary and I wish to express our condolences over the death of your husband, John. The two of you enjoyed a long and wonderful life together. You are in our thoughts.
Sincerely,
Jeff Erickson & Mary Vandebosch

Jeff Erickson - July 24, 2017 at 12:37 PM

JT

“ A great one has moved on! john was a fellow friend and competitor as we had many head to head battles on the basketball court! I'm going to miss our conversations and laughter! he was truly a wonderful friend and human being!
john thatcher

John Thatcher - July 24, 2017 at 09:40 AM

HJ

“ Coach Cheek was coaching track and field in Cascade while I competed for Conrad in the late 80's and early 90's. He was always willing to help me out with my triple jump and had much to do with my success in the sport. I cannot imagine how many others he influenced in a similar way. I will always think of him fondly and forever be grateful.
Heather Tweet Johnstone

Heather Tweet Johnstone - July 23, 2017 at 09:25 AM

KS

“ Kevin Sukut lit a candle in memory of Coach John Blodgett Cheek



Kevin Sukut - July 23, 2017 at 01:36 AM

KS

“ John was the Head Track Coach when I began my coaching career at Cascade High. I believe his and my most challenging coaching task was that of Co-Coaching the girls volleyball team for one year. We were lucky the girls knew what they were doing. John you are a legend. You impacted 1000's of lives. Rest in peace. Kevin Sukut

Kevin Sukut - July 23, 2017 at 01:33 AM

BG

One of the greatest competitors I ever had the privilege to compete with...whether on the BB court or the track. Junior just wouldn't settle for anything but the best. His Dad made me a better person...Junior made me a better competitor. RIP

Bill Grubich - July 26, 2017 at 12:29 AM

MG

“Wow, what an amazing, dedicated person to his career! His obituary leaves me in aww of his contributions he has accomplished in his life toward students and athletes! He was one in a million! My admiration for him has grown tremendously after reading his accomplishments moving on from Geysler! We were very blessed to have had such a wonderful teacher/coach in our lives. I am honored to be able to say "John Cheek" touched my life. John Cheek, Mr. Cotton, and Mrs. Inman, are the three teachers that meant the most to me in my lifetime and left the biggest impressions on me. They are a huge part of why I became a teacher! He will be missed! Prayers to his family! Hugs from Mary Zitzlsperger Grantier-Smart!

Mary Zitzlsperger Grantier-Smart - July 22, 2017 at 02:43 PM

DO

“Debbie and family - my deepest condolences on the passing of John. Reading the obituary shows such a full life with family and sports. There are so many loving memories for you to share and fondly remember that John will always live in your hearts. My prayers are with you.
Donna Hansen

Donna - July 22, 2017 at 01:48 PM

ME

“ Mr. Cheek came into Geyser High School as our math teacher. Even tho I see now he was not that much older than we were, he sure seemed much older and wiser. The first day, he told us that ALL of our answers on our math assignments had to be circled, or they were wrong. As this was something new, few if any of us, did that additional task. Well, we got our papers back with F's on them - Wow! This guy was serious! :) But we soon learned after a few months, that if we could get the boys to ask him about the sports events over the weekend, we were soon relieved of at least 10-15 minutes of math class. I never had him as a coach, just a teacher, but he was a strong presence in the classroom and hallways and everyone sure had a lot of respect for him. We will be praying for all of you.

Maribeth (Olson) Ellis - July 22, 2017 at 09:37 AM



“ I'm so so sorry to hear about John. What a wonderful life you had together. You have my sincere condolences Debbie and family.
MaryLee McDonald Van Voast

MaryLee Van Voast - July 22, 2017 at 08:10 AM

DF

“ John was a year ahead of me in school. In High School I went to Anaconda Central and Johnny, and his dad were from Anaconda High. Lets say, they were not our favorite competitors. However, Johnny was always nice to me; and afterword one day when I was hunting pheasants in the Deer Lodge Valley I ran into his dad and we joined up and hunted together. Funny, but I was so proud to be hunting with John Cheek. We became friends after that and I came to know an amazing person, not just a coach. I'm sure his dad had a lot of influence on Johnny's life. I'm not sure he could have ever imagined what a great kid he raised! God Bless you Johnny Cheek.
Don Finnegan

Don Finnegan - July 21, 2017 at 11:02 PM

TM

“ To the Cheek Family,

The first time I met John was when I was 6 and he was 8 years old. My father, Al Murray, was an assistant coach to John's father at Anaconda High School. Our job was to manage the basketballs at Daly Gym when the Copperheads were practicing.

When we could we also got to shoot baskets and John showed me how to dribble and shoot. So I may be one of the first people he coached. On rare occasion we also got to travel on the bus with the team when they played away. One memory I have is returning from a game back to Anaconda and the bus stopped in front of the Park Café. As each player exited he was given a single silver dollar so they could get something to eat.

We would sit in the cafe with our fathers as they discussed the game and the areas that needed work.

Three years later our family moved to Helena when my father took a teaching position at Carroll College. Though our paths only crossed a few times more, the memory of Anaconda in the late 1950's always revolved around the Copperheads and by extension the Cheek family.

On behalf of Al and Colleen Murray, and their children, we hope the time of your mourning is short and that very soon your days turn to memories of happier times.

All love and prayers.

Tim Murray

Tim Murray - July 21, 2017 at 03:46 PM

DO

*The Coaching ranks became less ,this week with the passing of Coach Cheek. We are richer though because he was one of us!!
Thanks Coach, for the memories.
Thoughts & Prayers,
Don Olsen
Montana Coaches Association.*

Don Olsen - July 22, 2017 at 07:34 PM

BG

“ *Just a quick note to Mrs. Cheek, the girls, and Harry. Often I think about my time with Mr. Cheek, and many times find myself going the extra yard as he taught us. We thought he was hard on us, but looking back, he was probably not hard enough. His passion for track will never be matched in our lifetime. I just wonder who in heaven will get that face turned red the quickest!!! Please know that we are thinking about you Deb and the rest of your family. I know what he meant to you, and I hope all the prayers will help you through this difficult time. All our best, Bob and Barb Galt*

Bob Galt - July 21, 2017 at 03:36 PM

SF

John was such a wonderful compassionate man. He always went the extra mile for athletes. We will never forget what he did for Brandon. Our thoughts and prayers are with you all. The Forsons

Stacey Forson - July 21, 2017 at 10:08 PM

CF

Debbie and family, Our thoughts and prayers are with you at this very sad time. Love, Christina and Gary Freeman

Christina Holderreed Freeman - July 22, 2017 at 11:09 AM

DG

All our love goes out to Cheek Family. John was a joy to be around. Your Alaskan cousins Don & Adrienne

Don & Adrienne Goforth - July 23, 2017 at 10:38 AM



Garan
Marty

Coach Cheek made a huge impact in my life during the brief time I was lucky enough to be coached by him. He turned me onto Track and Field in Junior High while at Cascade. Later when I became a coach, I ran into him at the state meet. I still called him Mr. Cheek. He said "Garan, please call me John. You're an adult now." It was and is still weird for me to call him 'John'. You will be missed coach! God Speed.

Garan Marty - July 23, 2017 at 01:50 PM



RG

Debbie, our Hearts go out to you and the kids. Andina and I are blessed that we got to see you and John last year when you came to Florida. I know it is a hard road to travel. Now John is with our God and he is healthy. We pray that God keeps his hands on you all. We love you, Bobby & Andina

robert Goforth - July 24, 2017 at 02:41 PM



LM

Condolences to the family of John Cheek, who truly made a positive impact on the lives of a great many of the people who had the privilege to know him. I knew him as a student in Anaconda as a notable athlete and a guy with a great sense of humor. I knew him in his later years as a talented, kind and generous individual. Rest In Peace, John.

Laura Morris - July 24, 2017 at 08:42 PM



TN

John made a big impact on a lot of individuals over the years. He was a great motivator and he knew how to get the most out of athletes. He will truly be missed.

Tom Nau

Tom Nau - July 25, 2017 at 08:43 PM



SC

So many little things....but that one day...that one race...I was positive I couldn't do it...he was POSITIVE that I could...so I did. He was right. Thank you Mr. Cheek for believing in me, even when I didn't believe in myself. God Bless. ~ Sherri Beckman Clinger

Sherri Beckman Clinger - July 28, 2017 at 10:58 AM

CJ

To the Cheek family: I met John in the freshman dorms at the University of Montana in the fall of 1966. I watched him play freshman and then varsity basketball for the Grizzlies. After that, we would run into each other a couple of times a year and always had great visits. He was a great person who dedicated his life to teaching and coaching young adults. What a legacy he left.

Chuck Johnson - August 03, 2017 at 04:47 PM