

Bedford wrestling founder Kelley dies

BY NILES KRUGER

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The man who started Bedford High School's wrestling program has died.

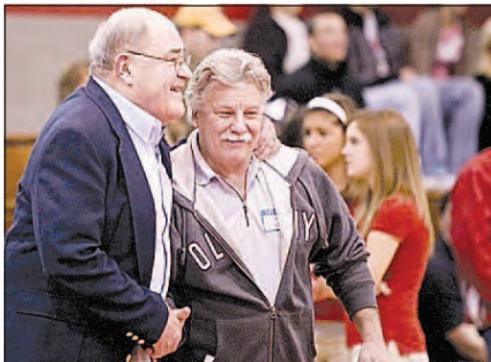
Clayton Kelley of Livonia died Wednesday at 81.

Services are scheduled for 11 a.m. today at St. Matthew Lutheran Church, 5885 Venoy, Westland. He will lie in state at 10 a.m.

In lieu of flowers, memorials to St. Matthew would be appreciated.

Mr. Kelley launched Bedford's wrestling program in 1958 and coached the Mules until 1965.

"I had a lot of conversations with him. He was a really good guy," said Bill Regnier, who succeeded Mr. Kelley as coach of the Mules. "He helped me a lot when I was just getting started. He had ingenuity, and he loved wrestling.



— Monroe News file photo

Former Bedford wrestling coach Clayton Kelley (left) greets his former players during a ceremony in 2007 at the 50th anniversary of Bedford wrestling.

He got people interested in wrestling at Bedford, and it really took off."

Mr. Kelley wound up coaching nine league champions, nine state qualifiers and a state placer.

He was hired as an assistant football coach at Bedford. He learned wrestling on the job.

Mr. Kelley shared his memories of the start of wrestling at Bedford with Monroe News sports writer Jeff Meade when the program celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2007.

"They asked me if I knew anything about wrestling," he said. "I said, 'Not really,' and they said, 'Are you willing to start a wrestling program?' I needed the extra money. My old football coach at Bowling Green (State University) had been the wrestling coach, too, and he gave me a couple of books to read.

"I loved it here. Those were my best years in coaching. I don't know if it was because I was younger or if it was the enthusiasm of the kids because we

Kelley (cont.)

were just learning. I was learning right along with them.”

Mr. Kelley attended BGSU and Eastern Michi-

gan University, Ypsilanti, and served in the Marine Corps before coming to Bedford.

After leaving Bedford he taught at Garden City until retiring in 1993.