

Vonnie Gros

Women's athletics suffered a significant loss when Vonnie Gros passed away on Feb. 28 at the age of 90.

She was multi-sport athlete in the early 1950s at Palmyra High School, where she starred in the three main sports available to girls in the day - field hockey, six-a-side basketball and softball. In basketball, she scored more than 1,000 points during a time when teams didn't play many games, and she was Burlington County's all-time leading scorer until the mid-1970s.

She moved on to Ursinus College in Pennsylvania, and she became an All-American in field hockey and another sport, lacrosse. After graduating, she was a United States national team player for more than a decade in both of those sports.

She turned to a career coaching both sports, first at a high school in Pennsylvania and then at West Chester (Pa.), Princeton University and Ursinus. Teams that she coached won several AIAW national championships.

All the while, Vonnie became one of the most influential figures in developing the sport of field hockey in America.

She was head coach of the United States team that qualified for but did not get to participate in the 1980 Olympics in Moscow, due to the American boycott. But she did coach the U.S. team at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. That team won a bronze medal - the first time America ever medaled in field hockey.

By the end of the '80s, she also developed the concept for what became the Futures program for USA Field Hockey. But aside for advocating a fast, possession-driving approach to the game, she was equally appreciated for the way she related to and worked with her players.



After her death, USA Field Hockey paid tribute by calling her one of the true architects of the sport in the United States.

"At a time when resources were limited and international success felt distant, Vonnie raised standards," the organization said in its news release. "She emphasized possession-based play, tactical discipline and mental sharpness long before those ideas were common in the United States. Former players described her as ahead of her time - a coach pushing the sport toward its future. Her legacy lives not only in memory, but in every training session on turf (which she advocated when grass fields were standard), every possession built with purpose, and every player who dares to meet the highest standard."

