

## **James Jefferson "Jim" Sauls Jr.**

James Jefferson "Jim" Sauls Jr., of Tallahassee, died Thursday following a brief illness. He was 71.

A native and lifelong resident of Tallahassee, Sauls grew up in the shadow of what would become his alma mater, Leon High School, and neither he nor Leon would come through their relationship unchanged. There was no mistaking it: Jim Sauls loved Leon. And Leon loved him right back, launching a storied coaching career that culminated in two state championships, a spot in several halls of fame, and a renaming of the Lions' legendary fieldhouse in his honor.

An offensive lineman for three years while a student at Leon, Sauls graduated and then walked on at Florida State University, starting every game for their freshman team. He then transferred and continued his play for Mississippi College. He joined the United States Army stationed in Fort Lewis, WA, and continued to serve in the reserves for several years. Sauls then finished his degree at Florida Atlantic University and later received his master's degree from Florida A&M University.

After launching his coaching career with Niceville High in 1973, several years later Sauls found himself back at his alma mater working alongside the legendary Gene Cox, first as a defensive coach, then as offensive coordinator and, finally, as head coach once Cox retired. Along the way, Sauls' coaching career took him to other schools, ranging from Newnan, Georgia to St. Augustine High, but his heart always pulled him back to Leon. The Lions vied for a state championship in 1992 with Sauls at the helm, and he was inducted into the Leon Hall of Fame in 2001 and the FHSAA Hall of Fame in 2002. But more importantly, generations of young men were shaped by their coach's code of ethics and his brand of servant-leadership.

On and off the field, Sauls walked the talk: He put others before himself; he went out of his way to help family, friends, and occasionally total strangers; and whenever a loved one was facing a tough spot, he plunked himself right in the trenches alongside them. And he could certainly weave a story, taking listeners on a wild adventure from beginning to end. His outsized enthusiasm for life was infectious.

After retiring from Leon County Schools, Sauls plunged headfirst into a new hobby: Bicycling. From mountain-biking at Lake Overstreet to taking long rides along the St. Marks Trail, Sauls left no path un-ridden, converting many of his friends into hardcore cyclists along the way. His love for cycling spawned a love for other gym activities, including weightlifting. Always an avid competitor, Sauls refused to give less than 110% and soon found himself as a star of the Capital City Senior Games and Florida Senior Games State Championship, bringing home multiple gold medals in powerlifting events.

He was an active member of St. Paul's United Methodist Church and Tallahassee's Northside Kiwanis.

Sauls is survived by his wife of 49 years, Lynn; his son, Jimmy (and wife Annie); his mother,

Bea; his brother, Bob; his cat, Charlie; and a multitude of family and friends. In fact, some might say he was a friend to all in Tallahassee, and they wouldn't be overestimating the headcount by much.

A celebration of Sauls' life will be held at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 22, at City Church, 3215 Sessions Road. Bevis Funeral Home is handling arrangements. In lieu of flowers, please make contributions to the Leon High School Football Program, 550 E. Tennessee St., 32308; the Fellowship of Christian Athletes; or the [charity of your choice](#).

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