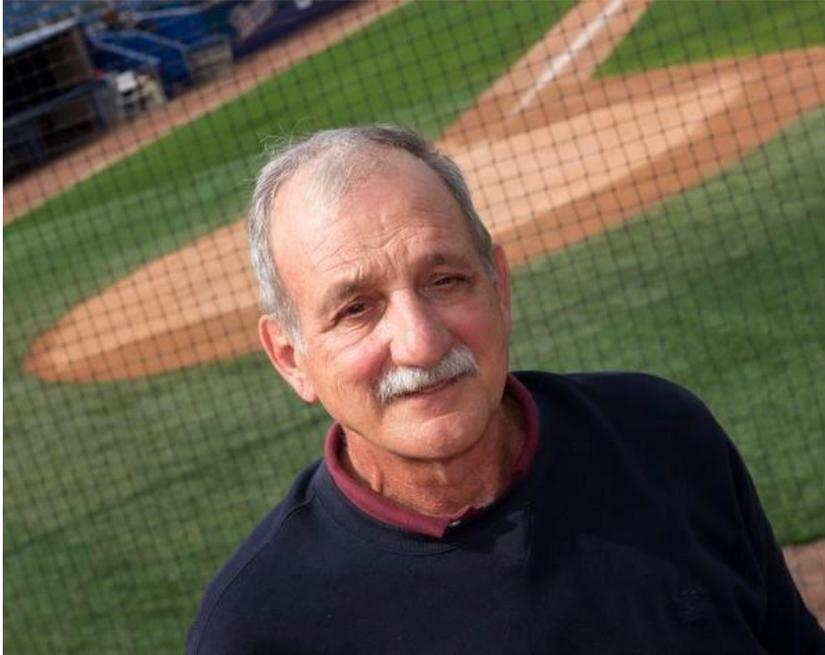


SPORTS

Waldner: Ken Ravizza made an impact in sports few realize



Dr. Ken Ravizza, a long-time professor of kinesiology at Cal State Fullerton, was a nationally recognized sports psychologist who worked with the Angels, Dodgers and Cubs, college athletes and Olympians. (Photo courtesy of Cal State Fullerton)

By **MIKE WALDNER** |

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There is more to playing baseball than see the ball, hit the ball.

Enter Ken Ravizza.

The Cal State Fullerton kinesiology professor was a consultant to the Angels, Dodgers, Tampa Bay Rays, Cubs, high school and college baseball teams, USC football, etc.

“Ken was a wonderful man who was on the cutting edge of the mental part of playing this game of baseball,” Angels manager Mike Scioscia said the other day. “For a long time, he helped countless players. He was just a pleasure to be around. He helped all of us.”

Ravizza, a longtime Redondo Beach resident with a doctorate in psychology from USC, died three weeks ago following an apparent heart attack.

The last time we saw one another was two weeks earlier when the Cubs split a four-game series with the Dodgers. I do not recall our casual conversation beyond the fact that, as Scioscia indicates, it was a pleasure to visit with him.

Baseball, like all sports and life in general, always is evolving. Always has. Always will.

Some changes, such as trying to hammer a home run no matter the count or the situation, seem counter-intuitive.

Other changes make sense even if they make the graybeards cringe.

When Ravizza first started working with the Angels, their manager was Gene Mauch, who was as rub-dirt-on-it as they come, except rubbing dirt on your head is not going to help with the mental approach to the game.

It's about understanding and dealing with pressure. It's about breathing exercises. It's about finding a focus point. And more. Much more.

Because pitching coach Marcel Lachmann championed him, Mauch begrudgingly allowed Ravizza to work with pitchers while making it clear he was to remain in the bullpen; under no circumstances could he interact with position players.

Back then, he was one of a very few psychologists working with teams. Now it is common for professional and college teams to employ mind coaches.

While Scioscia talks about Ravizza helping so many, a Ravizza comment tells so much about the open mind he brought to the ballpark. Augie Garrido was the coach who first turned Cal State Fullerton into a college baseball powerhouse.

"Augie represents all the coaches I've learned from over the years, from Augie to Dave Snow (LMU, Long Beach State) to George Horton (Cerritos JC, Cal State Fullerton, Oregon) to so many," he said.

Ravizza provided a mini-clinic several times over the years when he spoke to the South Bay Athletic Club (SBAC) luncheon group.

He would create a situation in which he was the pitcher. The catcher had just thrown him the ball. He would take a deep breath to clear his head. He would get the signal for the next pitch. He would concentrate on executing the pitch. He would throw the ball.

It took only a couple of critical seconds.

That, he explained, was the amount of time the pitcher had to be focused.

Just a few seconds.

Of course, the pitcher had to learn how to repeat the procedure again and again and again.

It was the same with the hitter — step out of the batter's box, breathe, adjust batting gloves, find a point of focus, perhaps a foul pole, look at it, step back into the box and be ready to deal with the next pitch.

Watching the audience soak it up, you could imagine old athletes remembering how they handled pressure, focus, or lack thereof, back in their playing days.

You also could imagine how a big leaguer can up his game with proper mental tools.

One year during the World Series broadcast, the former player talking on television mentioned that the starter had worked with Ravizza. Knowing a little about what the pitcher had been taught, you immediately saw he was incorporating the professor's lessons.

Ravizza did not limit his teaching to major leaguers and elite college players. When an SBAC member mentioned his son played high school baseball and how the mental tools would be valuable to him, Ravizza loaned the fellow a copy of his book, "Heads-Up Baseball: Playing the Game One Pitch at a Time," for the teenager to read during spring vacation.

That was Ken Ravizza. He enjoyed helping people.

Clearing out the mini-notebook

Sand, sun and fun: Older gentleman from Utah in the stands watching youngsters competing in the AVPFirst tournament, which was this week during the AVP Hermosa Beach Open, and talking to a local: "What a cool town." ...

Next up: The AVP Manhattan Beach Open will be Aug. 16-19.

...

It says here: Freshman JT Daniels remains the favorite over junior (technically redshirt sophomore) Matt Fink and sophomore (technically redshirt freshman) Jack Sears to emerge as USC's starting quarterback. ...

Bottom line: Scioscia on Vlad Guerrero, a member of the 2018 MLB Hall of Fame class: "The first thing I think about was his smile. He was just always very comfortable playing baseball, very confident and he had a lot of fun."

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