

Francis Delano Baxter

August 19, 1934 – September 9, 2021



“The Father of Oklahoma Tennis”

On September 9th, 2021, “Coach” Francis Baxter went to be with his creator at the age of 87 years. He was born at the end of the Great Depression on August 19th, 1934 in Kingfisher County, Oklahoma, and reborn seven years later when he accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior. He had fond memories of growing up on the wheat and alfalfa farm and watching his dad train their Belgium horses, “Dew Drop” and “Henry”. He would observe his father treating their horses kindly by talking gently, encouraging them, occasionally patting them on the back, and giving them plenty of feed, water, and rest. In return, they worked diligently plowing a straight furrow. Later, Francis remarked that this led him to coach his tennis players in much the same way. After graduating from Dover High School, he attended Central State College (now UCO) and played basketball, baseball, and then track. He reportedly happened one day upon two players, SL Shofner and Gene Land playing tennis. Thoroughly intrigued, he took up tennis and devoted his life to the sport after graduating with a mathematics degree. He taught math and successfully coached at John Marshall High School, then Harding High School before joining the staff at Central State University in 1970, where he coached the men’s teams for 36 years, and the women’s teams for 26 years, leading them to many victories and titles. He also played competitively himself for 45 years. He was inducted into five different halls of fame: the Oklahoma High School Tennis Coaches Hall of Fame, the University of Central Oklahoma Athletic Hall of Fame, the Oklahoma District Tennis Hall of Fame, the Missouri Valley Section Tennis Hall of Fame, and the prestigious Intercollegiate Tennis Association Hall of Fame. Coach also served in various positions with the USTA, Missouri Valley Association, and as the Captain of the US International Tennis Team from 1993 to 2001, winning the VonCramm Cup title seven years in a row and the Fred Perry Cup Crown twice. Of course, he credits his

wife Wanda "Jean" Baxter as a driving force behind his success on the courts and in life. Francis has described his marriage to her in 1962 as a "Red Letter Day". In 1980, together with her, they helped to found Faith Bible Church in Edmond, Oklahoma, where he served as an elder for 10 years and taught Bible study classes. Though his health was failing, he was able to attend the unveiling of a bronze statue in his likeness at the new tennis center in Edmond, "Edmond Center Court" on May 1st of this year. The statue pedestal lists many of his successes and accomplishments in the world of tennis and titles him the "Father of Oklahoma Tennis". This was brought into being by many of his former players who were greatly impacted by his mentoring. Though the Baxters' did not have any of their own children, they consider the students he coached to be their "kids" and they are greatly beloved. Francis leaves behind his wife of 59 years, Wanda Jean Selvidge Baxter of Edmond, nieces Mary Ann Gerst, Margaret Ramirez, Bette Castoria, Barbara Cote, all of Albuquerque, NM, Pat Eisenhower of San Antonio, TX, Laura Carter of Phoenix, AZ, Caroline Hayes of Ames, IA, Susie Moore of Edmond, OK, Shelly Whitmire of Hinton, OK, nephew Mark Selvidge of San Jose, CA, and great nieces Hannah Baxter Andrews of Poteau, OK, Alyssa McCollom of Austin, TX, and Katherine Selvidge of Oklahoma City, OK. He was preceded in death by his parents, John Francis Baxter and Mary Ellen Hughes, a brother, James Baxter, sisters Cleo Niemeyer and Mary Ellen Castoria, niece Mary Janice Young, and great niece Lucy Marcella McCollom. The family would like to thank the staff at Touchmark Assisted Living Center and Lifespring Hospice for their compassionate care in his last few months. In Lieu of flowers, please feel free to donate to the **Francis and Jean Baxter Junior scholarship** which supports young players in furthering their sport, at the oktennisfoundation.org. Alternatively, donations can be made to **UCO Tennis**. Please make checks out to UCO Foundation and include "tennis" in the memo line. Mail to 100 N. University drive, Edmond, OK. 73034. The following link will ensure that donations go directly to women's tennis. <http://www.centralconnection.org/francisbaxter>. A memorial service for Francis will be held at 10:00am on Thursday, September 16th, 2021 at Faith Bible Church in Edmond, OK. Services will also be livestreamed on the church website for those who cannot attend in person.