

Parker eulogized before hundreds at Kinnick



The video board behind the South end zone of Kinnick Stadium pays tribute to former Iowa defensive coordinator Norm Parker during his “Celebration of Life” ceremony on Saturday, May 31, 2014. Parker died last January from complications with Diabetes.

By Brendan Stiles

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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Four months after his death, former Iowa defensive coordinator Norm Parker was remembered Saturday inside Kinnick Stadium as part of a “Celebration of Life” service in his honor.

Family, friends, former players and coaches and fans alike all gathered for a 90-minute ceremony where stories were shared about the type of man Parker was both on and off the field. Seeing the mass of hundreds to congregate at Kinnick Stadium for this service spoke volumes for former Iowa defensive end Aaron Kampman, who was among the group of 11

speakers to eulogize Parker.

"This is like a reunion," Kampman said prior to the ceremony. "It just illustrates the fact that he was an unselfish person who tried to give more than he received. Because of that, you get to see the fruits of it here with all of the people that he touched and the relationships he was able to make because in the end, that's what it comes down to."

Former Iowa players to speak during Saturday's ceremony included Kampman and former linebackers Chad Greenway, Abdul Hodge, Mike Humpal and LeVar Woods (who currently is a co-linebackers coach for the Hawkeyes). In addition, former defensive tackles Mitch King and Matt Kroul and former quarterback Brad Banks were among those in attendance.

"He was very passionate about life and his family," Kroul said. "As soon as you saw his grandkids coming into the complex and the way he responded to some of those guys and girls that he had, you just saw how special a human he was and how he handled everything."

"He was always smiling and always laughing. That's what he was about."



Hundreds of people inside Kinnick Stadium listen to Jim Parker's eulogy during his father Norm Parker's "Celebration of Life" service held Saturday, May

31, 2014. Norm Parker served as Iowa's defensive coordinator from 1999-2011 and died on Jan. 13, 2014.

Iowa play-by-play announcer Gary Dolphin MC'ed the event and opened by sharing some of the jokes Parker would tell back when the two would travel across the state every spring on the I-Club circuit. Perhaps appropriately, Greenway and Hodge – two of the most decorated linebackers to ever play at Iowa during Parker's tenure – were the first two speakers to give eulogies.

Hodge said he had a mixture of emotions upon learning of Parker's death last winter and described how toughness and sometimes being a little bit crazy were among the two lessons Parker instilled in him during his Iowa days. Greenway used the term "resilient" to describe the type of person Parker was as he led the Hawkeyes to their successes in the mid-2000s while dealing with personal tragedy losing his son Jeffrey, as well as battling the very disease (Diabetes) that would ultimately take his life.

"He had been through so many things in his life, so many hardships, bad things, negative things," Greenway said during his eulogy. "Losing his best friend, his wife, going through all of these things that would get a lot of people down, that would really drag them down and take them on a different path.

"But that was never Norm. And that's really what life is all about – how many times can you get back up? We've all heard that saying, but he lived it and we could watch him live it and we could learn from that. Really, it's what made it special for us, to be able to go out there and play for a guy that you really cared about because you knew he cared about you."

Woods gave what he described as a "nondescript" story about

Parker during his eulogy. In 2006, the Hawkeyes were in Ann Arbor, Mich., to play Michigan. Parker invited Woods (who was then playing for the Detroit Lions) over to the team's hotel for the pregame dinner the night before and then invited Woods up to his hotel room where he and wife were hoping to talk with him.

"I walk with Norm up there, the door opens and there's about 75 people in the room, and it's all his family," Woods said. "That's something that I'll always remember about Norm. Now that I'm a coach and I'm thinking about Friday night before a game, so busy, so consumed with football, with this alignment, this assignment and all that, Norm always made time.

"He still made time and always made you feel like you were part of the family. To this day, that's something that I always try to think about."

Following a eulogy from Parker's grandson, Tyler Anderson, Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz took to the podium and started off by saying how hiring Parker was one of the best head-coaching decisions he ever made.

"I've been here 15 years, going into 16 now, and I've been wrong about a lot of things. But the one thing I got right was hiring Norm Parker to be our defensive coordinator," Ferentz said. "Boy, if we ever hit a grand slam, that was it right there."

After he finished speaking, Ferentz introduced Norm's son, Jim Parker. He began his eulogy by saying how his family knew his dad by two entities – "Coach Parker," and "Stormin' Norman." In discussing "Coach Parker," Jim talked about how instead of allowing football to consume his family, his father simply invited his family for the ride and let them come to the game he coached.

"I'm proud to be Norm Parker's son," Jim said. "I'm proud to be a coach's son. I'm proud to be associated with Iowa

football. I'm so happy to see these people here – friends and neighbors – come from Minnesota and from Michigan and from other states. It means so much. It means so much to our family and to me personally.

“To me, there will always be a ghost of Norm Parker that will roam that sideline and it's a place that he loved.”

Kampman closed the ceremony by giving his eulogy and then leading the entire crowd in a prayer requested by the Parker family. Following the prayer, every member of Parker's family who was on hand went out to midfield and the national anthem was performed.

With each eulogy, one message consistently reigned supreme Saturday afternoon – Parker's knack for being able to relate to anyone he encountered regardless of who they were, what they did or where they were from.

“Norm had a very special ability to connect with anybody,” Ferentz said. “No matter where you turn, there are a lot of people who have been impacted certainly in a very positive way by Norm and his comments.”

VIDEO: NORM PARKER REMEMBERED

**Featured in this video are Norm Parker eulogies from Chad Greenway, Abdul Hodge, Mike Humpal, Phil Parker, Kirk Ferentz and Aaron Kampman.*