

Mark Kurimai



In his younger days, Mark Kurimai was a standout defensive soccer player on the high school and collegiate level.

For the past three decades, however, the name Mark Kurimai has been synonymous with Special Olympics in Norwalk.

Kurimai founded the Norwalk Special Olympics program in 1980 and has been the local coordinator for the past 31 years, providing sports training and athletic competition for local children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

Under Kurimai's leadership as coordinator, Norwalk Special Olympics has grown from 12 athletes in the first year to more than 30 athletes, 20 Unified Partners and a host of volunteers, making it one of the most successful programs in the state.

In fact, in 1998, the Norwalk team received "Best Local Program" recognition while Kurimai was named the Volunteer Coach of the Year.

Three years earlier, at the 1995 World Games held in New Haven, Kurimai coached Team Connecticut to a silver medal in unified volleyball.

Now 62, Kurimai's involvement in sports began at Brien McMahon, which, when it first opened, doubled as a junior high and high school. Kurimai, a 1967 graduate, played soccer at the new school for six years, the last three as a member of the high school varsity.

As a junior, he was a starting fullback on the 1965 team that captured the school's first state championship in any sport, and as a senior captain he helped the Senators win the 1966 FCIAC crown and reach the state semifinals.

Kurimai played for Ralph King, a Hall of Fame coach and a 1996 Old Timers honoree, while his teammates on those McMahon teams included the great Phil Kydes, the city's all-time leading scorer and 2006 Old Timers honoree, and the late Eric Lund, Kurimai's best friend whose battle with cancer was the inspiration for a best-selling book and movie about his life.

Kurimai and Lund went on to play soccer at the University of Connecticut for another Hall of Fame coach, Joe Morrone, and as a senior Kurimai led the Huskies in playing time with more than eight full games.

Soccer wasn't the only sport Kurimai was involved with. Growing up in the Soundview Avenue area, he played second base in the Norwalk Pony League in 1963 and '64.

And while at McMahon, Kurimai was also on the track team and ran the mile and two miles for two more hall of fame coaches, Walt Czekai and Jack Casagrande, a 1995 Old Timer honoree. At UConn, he played club rugby and in the offseason played for amateur soccer teams in Willamantic and Wilton.

All these years later, Kurimai still finds himself on the soccer field. Following his graduation from UConn in 1971, Kurimai became a soccer official on the high school and college level and is now in his 40th year doing that. In 1976, he began officiating high school and collegiate lacrosse games and 35 years later also continues to do that every spring.

Kurimai taught Physical Education at Kendall Elementary School for seven years and for the past 29 years was a District Adaptive Physical Education Specialist. He retired from fulltime teaching this past June, but has continued to do the same work on a part-time basis this fall.

A father of two, Kurimai has also served as the longtime secretary of Consistory for the Hungarian Reformed Church in South Norwalk. He and his wife, the former Nora Catherine Modi, reside in Fairfield.