

## Carlos “Caloy” Loyzaga, 1930 - 2016

Carlos “Caloy” Loyzaga passed away on Wednesday, January 27, Manila time. He was 85 years old. The Philippines is as basketball crazy as ever, but the younger generation of fans have probably never heard of Caloy. To my generation, he was Mr. Basketball, the greatest ever. Playing for the San Beda College Red Lions, he was arguably the most well known Filipino athlete of the 1950s. No other basketball player came close in fame. The only other nationally famous athlete then was Gabriel “Flash” Elorde, the world champion junior lightweight boxer.

As a student at San Beda, I tried to attend every game, played at the Rizal Memorial Stadium. There were only six teams in the NCAA league, playing ten games a season. Ten thousand fans would be packed into this tin roofed box, devoid of air conditioning. We didn't measure temperature humidity index, but I'm sure it exceeded 100. I always sat in the cheering section. Every time our players scored a point or two, we would cheer. Most often the cheer was “Loyzaga, rah rah rah, Loyzaga!”

As a six foot four center, he is small by today's standards. But I have no doubt that he could have made a 1950s NBA team if they had held tryouts. Caloy's height is only a couple of inches less than the centers of the era and he's bigger than the Boston Celtic's legendary Bob Cousy. Of course Caloy was an “amateur” so he couldn't continue playing in Manila or the Olympics if he as much as played one game as a professional. Those were the days of Olympic sham amateurism and hypocrisy. Caloy lead the Red Lions to three championships, also leading the Philippine teams to the Asian Games, Asian basketball championships and the Olympics.

From playing in college, Caloy went to play in the industrial league. Technically they were employees of the various companies, so they remained amateurs. From there he went to coaching. The basketball world as I knew it has changed drastically. Colleges now import foreign players, typically African Americans, to augment their teams. The collegiate leagues have expanded. There are female cheerleaders. There is a professional association. But the Philippine teams no longer dominate Asian basketball. From winning gold year after year, they are lucky to win a bronze nowadays. Forget the Olympics.

Caloy's life was a metaphor. Philippine sports and economic conditions fell behind the rest of Asia. Loyzaga the great player and winning coach had to migrate to Australia in search of better opportunities. His contribution to national pride brought him no monetary rewards. Because of his Spanish heritage, some have questioned whether he was a “true” Filipino. But he was born and raised in the Philippines, speaking Tagalog. Like a native, of course! Taken ill a few years ago, perhaps knowing that his days were numbered, he returned to the Philippines. He wanted to go home.

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Requiescat in Pace, Caloy. Thanks for the passion and excitement you generated for kids like me.

Mario E. Orosa  
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