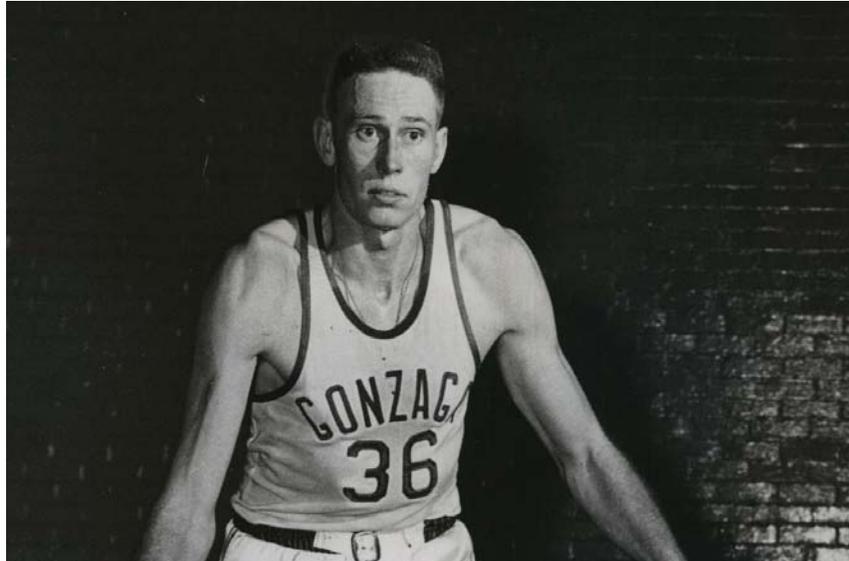


Gonzaga basketball great Jerry Vermillion dies at 85

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Jerry Vermillion, Gonzaga's career rebounding leader, died Saturday, Oct. 21, 2017. (Archive photo / SR)

By **Jim Meehan**

Jerry Vermillion, a 6-foot-4 center who became Gonzaga's all-time leading rebounder, died Saturday night in Union, Washington. Vermillion, 85, had been in failing health the last few years, his brother Dennis said.

"The last couple of years were pretty tough," said Dennis, who lives in Spokane Valley and played at GU from 1956-59. "He knew it was coming and he made a lot of final decisions to help his family."

Jerry Vermillion, utilizing a combination of timing, instinct and athleticism – he had a standing jump of 11 feet, 1 inch – grabbed 1,670 rebounds from 1952-55, according to Gonzaga's record book. Elias Harris is a distant second on the list with 979 rebounds.

Vermillion pursued rebounds so vigorously a columnist for The Spokesman-Review called him "one of smartest, toughest reboundingest basketballers the Zags ever had."

Vermillion owns four of the top five single-season rebounding totals in program history, interrupted only by Domantas Sabonis, who is third on the list with 426 boards in 2016.

“It’s not how big you are but where you are, and timing,” Vermillion wrote in his book, “Jerry’s Ledger: A World Gone By,” released in 2012. “You must be in constant motion for position.”

Vermillion’s name is still prominent throughout Gonzaga’s record book. He ranks in the top 15 in career points (1,547) and his 21.2 scoring average in 1954 is ninth on the single-season list. He poured in 44 points against Whitman in 1953, tied for fourth in program history.

Doctors didn’t allow Vermillion to play high school basketball in Montana until his senior year because he injured his back in a horse-riding accident. He helped lead Fort Benton to the state championship game before joining Gonzaga’s program under first-year coach Hank Anderson.

In 1991, Vermillion was inducted into two Halls of Fame, Gonzaga’s and Saint Martin’s. Vermillion, a teacher and coach for nearly three decades at several schools in western Washington, compiled a 94-40 record as Saint Martin’s head coach from 1963-70.

“He carried the load in my first four seasons,” Anderson, who passed away in 2005, said prior to Vermillion’s induction into GU’s Hall of Fame. “Jerry’s right up there among the best players in my 21 years at Gonzaga.”

Vermillion stayed close to Gonzaga’s program, returning annually for alumni events until the last few years.

Vermillion sold his oyster farm about three years before the release of his book, and prior to that he sold his RV park near Chehalis, according to a 2012 Saint Martin’s news release.

“It’s been an interesting journey,” Vermillion said in the release.