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JIM VALVANO

Voices

His players at NC State called him Coach. The sports world knew him as Jimmy V. Millions of others saw him as a symbol of courage in the face of adversity. But to his three daughters, he was just Dad. One of them, Jamie, 30, shares some memories of Jim Valvano as Father's Day nears.



Everybody in North Carolina knew my last name.

As a Valvano, I often watched in amazement the swirl of excitement that surrounded my father's every move.

Dad missed one of my dance recitals—even though he was sitting in the first row. The line to get his autograph stretched to the entrance of the auditorium.

I can recall walking to my car after school one day and finding it toilet-papered because the Wolfpack had lost the night before.

It seemed that no one was immune to the frenzy: The day my sister fell off her bike, the doctor apologized because he used Carolina blue to stitch her up. My father quickly responded, 'That's okay, doc. She bled State red!'

I often resented the constant intrusion into my private world. Oh, to go to the mall or a movie and have his undivided attention! But my father thrived on the energy of others. He loved interacting with fans, even the less-than-polite ones.

As if the name weren't enough, my dad was sometimes mistaken for Joe Namath.

I'M VERY GRATEFUL MY DAD SHARED SO MUCH OF HIMSELF WITH THE PUBLIC.

One particular fan simply would not give up. 'Look at this body, I can't be him,' my dad protested. Assuming that he just did not want to be recognized, the guy winked and said, 'Don't worry, Joey baby. Your secret is safe with me.' I wonder if Joe Namath ever had to convince anyone that he wasn't Jim Valvano.

On the day I gave birth to my son, a woman with an unmistakable Southern drawl greeted me at the hospital. She identified herself as a huge NC State fan and decided to spend the next five hours at my side reminiscing about past Pack glory. I didn't mind so much until I got into hard labor. Then she urged me to 'push one for the Pack.' I'm as big a hoops fan as the next gal, but there is a time and place for everything.

Ignorantly, I used to believe that the more my father gave to the world the less would be left for me. But now I am very grateful that my dad shared so much of himself with the public. I am comforted each time someone tells me their favorite 'Jimmy V' story. I am thrilled when I turn on ESPN Classic and see my dad stomping wildly on the sideline doing what he loved most—coaching.

This Father's Day, nine years after his death, I'll spend hours looking at old photos, reading every card he ever gave me, watching the '83 national title game one more time. I can think of no better way to honor and remember the man I called Dad.

-JAMIE VALVANO HOWARD

