Remembering Paterno

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It started with a tweet on Twitter.

Joe Paterno is dead.

The tweet went viral, a growing problem that happens all too frequently in this digital journalism world when a supposed news source puts out stories that are not edited, nor checked for facts.

Paterno was not dead. He was not far from it, but for someone to pass it along as news is reckless and classless. It's too easy to hide behind Twitter anonymity.

Paterno would not understand, nor condone if he did understand, today's social media.

He was Penn State, working there as a football coach for 61 years, the last 46 as its head football coach. He won more games than anyone in the history of Division I football.

The obituary will tell us the 85 year-old Paterno died of complications from taking treatments for lung cancer.

It will be wrong. Joe Paterno died of a broken heart.

The school that he so dearly loved turned against him when allegations surfaced that Paterno failed to properly pursue a report given him by one of his young graduate assistants. It was an

accusation that longtime Penn State defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky had been taking a shower with a kid that appeared to be 10 years old and was seen in uncompromising acts.

The assistant told Paterno. Paterno later informed the Penn State Athletics Director, thinking he had done all that was required. The old school thought process Paterno used would not cover his culpability.

While some will choose to remember Paterno for what he didn't do, most will remember him for all the good things he did while on this earth.

He was a legend in the coaching profession. He was to Penn State what Bear Bryant was to Alabama. You will see statues of both men on their respective campuses. Bryant died a month after coaching his final game, eased out against his will. Paterno was barely a month removed from the Penn State board informing him he had coached his last game.

In 2004 they tried to force him out, saying the game had passed him by. The next season his team won 11 games, the Big Ten championship and a bowl game against his closest competitor for career wins, Florida State's Bobby Bowden.

"History will say he was one of the greatest. … You've lost one of the best. He's an icon,'' Bowden said of Paterno's passing.

Florida Coach Steve Spurrier has coached close to 300 games. He was matched against Paterno in the 1997 Citrus Bowl and the legend from the Northeast connected with the brash visor-throwing coach from the South.

Paterno was the only football coach Spurrier ever asked to pose for a picture with him before the game. That picture has a prominent place in Spurrier's den today.

Players who wore the old school Penn State uniform revered Paterno. He was a father figure to

those who needed a father in their lives, and later a grandfather, whose lessons in life were soaked up by those players he shared them with.

He raised his family in the same house he and his wife lived in when he died. On game days Joe Paterno didn't need a police escort to the stadium.

Joe Pa walked to the stadium. It was that close.

He wouldn't want us to mourn his death. Rather, I suspect, he would tell us in his gruff Brooklyn accent to mourn the victims of alleged sexual predator Jerry Sandusky.

He would want a mulligan, a chance to undo the wrong. But, alas, there is no such thing.

by Joe Biddle

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