

Coach marks end of thrilling season, career

Yerkovich leaves Judge with long list of wins and memories

By Bruce Smith
MatchupUT.com

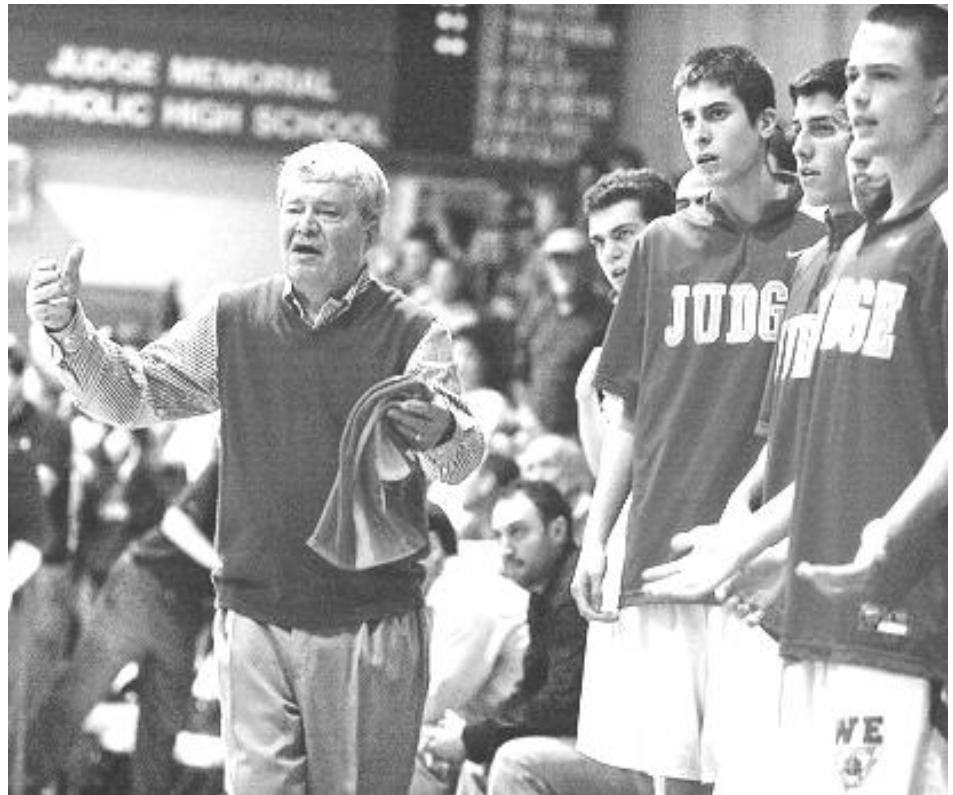
When the 2009-10 Judge Memorial boys basketball season ended, the team and the school celebrated a great season, which included a runner-up finish at the 3A state tournament.

A month later, they celebrated Coach Jim Yerkovich's 44 years at the school.

The team's Region 11 championship and remarkable finish was overshadowed by the coach's retirement. With 635 wins, 16 region titles and three state tournament trophies, Yerkovich was already a legend at Judge and the local prep basketball community. He was named 3A's Coach of the Year and recognized even further at the Alhambra National Catholic Invitational Tournament in March and at various school events.

Yerkovich said he had been having health issues in recent years, and felt this was the right time.

"I wanted to see Judge get into the 50th year of the ACIC Tournament," he said. "We had been there 13 times, so we were part of their history. They said this would be



Coach Jim Yerkovich's wins, traditions and expertise resulted in memories that will last a lifetime to thousands of Judge players and fans.

a special year, and the way they treated me was unbelievable."

While Judge won just one of three games at the Cumberland, Md., tournament, Yerkovich and the Bulldogs were prized representatives. Yerkovich said he only liked to attend the event when he has a talented team, and Judge's 19-6 overall record, region title and furious finish gave him confidence that it could compete against some of the best Catholic schools in America.

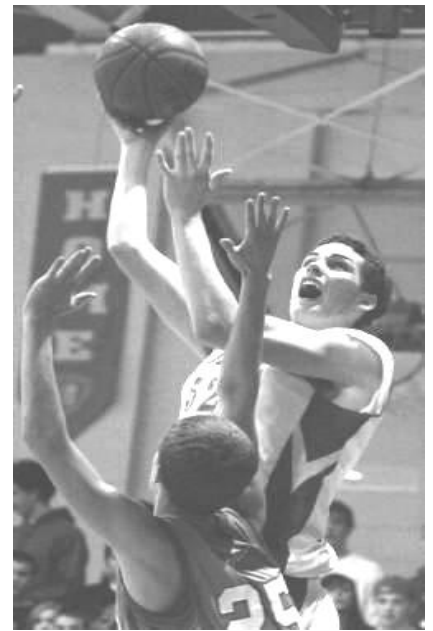
"The team was very successful," Yerkovich said. "They played as close to their

potential as possible."

About the only disappointment during the year was the team's 40-36 loss at home to rival Juan Diego. After that, however, the Bulldogs rode the scoring of 6-foot-10 center **Will Whitt** and guard **Zach Myaer**, as well as the timely efforts of **Daniel Shiramizu**, **Basil Vetas**, **Ben Cook** and a host of others to win 11 straight games.

The Bulldogs avenged the Juan Diego loss by beating the Soaring Eagle 44-33 on their home court, and then

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ABOVE: The Judge bench cheers after a teammate's big play. RIGHT: Center Will Whitt

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steamrolled through the rest of the season and the 3A tournament at Utah Valley University. The dream season ended when Judge fell to Wasatch in the championship game.

"It was our fifth region championship in a row," recalled Yerkovich. "It was a real 'We' group of kids."

By that, Yerkovich meant the team played a style of basketball that stressed teamwork to reach its potential.

The Bulldogs also benefited from its vocal student cheering section in its snug gymnasium, where it won 10 of 12 games this year. Judge played a difficult preseason schedule filled with 4A and 5A basketball powers, but used that to improve as the season progressed.

The Juan Diego loss came during Judge's semester-exam week and Yerkovich said a lot of players were "burned out" at game time. He said the 45-24 loss to Wasatch that decided the title was also one for his memory books.

"The last game was the weirdest game I've ever been involved in," said Yerkovich. "They held the ball and they had the guards to do it."

The second-place finish didn't dampen the Bulldogs' season. When Yerkovich announced his retirement less than a week later (and longtime

assistant coach **Dan Del Porto** promoted), Judge made news in the prep sports circle nationwide and ACIT officials began making plans to honor him accordingly.

While all of that was going on, Myaer and Whitt were honored by the *Deseret News* and *Salt Lake Tribune* for their season-long heroics. Myaer was named to the first team by both papers. Whitt, who was 3A's top rebounder, was tabbed to the first team by the News and second team by the Tribune.

Myaer and Whitt also were obviously placed on the All-Region 11 team and Shiramizu made the second team.

"Zach was really quick, especially on defense," said Yerkovich. "Will was our most improved player and has intriguing potential."

Myaer, Whitt, Vetas, **Ben Zanolli** and **Colin Murphy** were the seniors on the team, so Del Porto had players with experience - like Shiramizu, Cook, **Kelton Quinn** and **Michael Olive** - scheduled to return for his inaugural year.

Del Porto will likely continue many of the traditions that have led to so many successful seasons for Judge basketball. The obvious missing one will be Yerkovich.

Only time will tell how much he'll be missed.