

Memorial Minute for Caryl Newhof
Written by Don Siegel
April 22, 2026

It's not easy to stand here and talk about Caryl Newhof in the past tense. She died in November at the age of ninety-nine. For so many years, she was an enduring presence at Smith College, as a graduate student, teacher, coach, administrator, scholar, and retiree—someone you expected to be there, engaged, thoughtful, and always paying attention to what mattered.

I was fortunate to know Caryl not just as a colleague, but as a friend. And like so many, I came to appreciate very quickly that she was someone special. She was bright, capable, ethical, and had a kind of clarity about what was important, and for what she was willing to fight. I can recall many times over the years of us being on opposing sides of a particular issue, but I also recall that Caryl never was disagreeable and could debate issues while respecting those with whom she disagreed, always listening thoughtfully and engaging with a sense of fairness and mutual understanding.

What we all knew was that her inner compass always pointed toward doing what she thought was best for students. That may sound like something we say about a lot of educators, but with her, it was unmistakable and non-negotiable. It guided her decisions, her priorities, and the way she carried herself every day. But what's important is that she did that while still listening. She respected other viewpoints. She was willing to engage, to adapt, and to find a way forward. That combination—conviction and openness—is not something you see every day. Whether she was teaching, coaching, or helping shape a program, the question in the background was always the same: *What's best for the students?*

Her career at Smith College began with earning a MS degree in physical education in 1951, and until her retirement in 1991, she helped build something that didn't exist when she arrived.

Women's sports and intercollegiate competition, as we know it today, was still finding its footing. Going from a highly under-resourced recreational model to one that we see today, there were questions about its structure, its value, its place, and its future trajectory. Caryl didn't spend much time debating those questions—she moved forward as if the answers were already evident. She understood early on the importance of women's athletics and opportunities for women as coaches and leaders. But she also wanted to build programs that were strong, meaningful, educational, and enduring. As a result, she was instrumental in creating and shaping Smith's Master's Program in Coaching - within which she mentored generations of students and young professionals, many of whom went on to become collegiate coaches, administrators, and educators.

Her influence spanned many roles as an athlete, a coach, an official, a professor, an administrator, and a scholar. As an athlete during her youth in the 1950s, she toured Europe and South Africa with the United States Field Hockey Team and also was an avid rider and skilled golfer. Transitioning to becoming an instructor at Smith she taught classes in field hockey, basketball, tennis, squash, golf and horseback riding. As well, she coached field hockey from 1971 to 1979 and squash during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and oversaw Smith's interhouse – intramurals program. She was also a member of the rules and umpiring committee of the International Federation of Women's Field Hockey Associations and refereed at the highest levels.

Caryl clearly learned how to adapt in her many roles. Over the course of her career, the landscape of women's athletics changed dramatically — Title IX, AIAW, NCAA - all expanded opportunities for women, and with these came expectations that differed from her earlier experiences as an athlete and young professional. Some people might have struggled with that

kind of change. Caryl embraced it. She made sure Smith was not just keeping up, but leading. During the last decade of her time at Smith she also became a researcher, and coauthored five publications related to athletics, physical education instruction, and coaching.

And even after she retired, Caryl never really stepped away. She stayed connected. She cared about what was happening. In her honor the Athletics Department inducted her into its Hall of Fame in 2014, which was preceded by her induction into the Boston University Athletics Hall of Fame in 1985, which was preceded by being inducted into Albany Academies Hall of Fame. At each level in her career, she clearly was recognized for her excellence as a Hall of Famer. Caryl was also honored by our athletics department by having a yearly field hockey tournament named in her honor. That says something about how deeply invested she was—not just in her work, but in the people and the place.

On a personal level, I valued our time working together. We collaborated on many projects over the years, and those experiences gave me a close-up view of her character. She was thoughtful, prepared, and always focused on doing things well. These are what we all want in a colleague—someone you can rely on, someone who brings a sense of purpose to what you are doing, and someone willing to do the work whatever the task may be.

What stands out most to me is that she made a difference—and she did it in a way that lasted. The programs she helped build, the students she mentored, the colleagues she supported—that's her legacy. It's not abstract. It's real, and it continues.

We often talk about people being “ahead of their time.” In Caryl's case, that's certainly true. But she was also very much *of* her time—engaged with it, responsive to it, and helping to shape it in meaningful ways.

I feel fortunate to have known her. She set a standard—not by what she said, but by what she did, and her contributions to Smith were many, significant and enduring.