JOHN CHEFFERS:
Athlete, Coach, Academic
SED professor emeritus brought people together

By Madeline Rosenberger
(COM’14)

JOHN CHEFFERS, a School of Education professor emeritus of curriculum and teaching, was an authority on crowd behavior, focusing his studies on the behavior of sports fans. He advised the International Olympic Committee and the New England Patriots on crowd control techniques, and his research on violence in sports was featured in a 1983 Sports Illustrated article.

But Cheffers wasn’t always an academic. He began his career as an athlete and then a coach before joining the BU faculty. Cheffers died on October 28, 2012. He was 76.

He grew up in Melbourne, Australia, with dreams of competing in the decathlon at the Olympics, according to the Boston Globe. Just weeks before he was to compete in the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne, he tore his anterior cruciate ligament, ending his athletic career. It was then he turned to coaching and teaching.

He coached the Carlton Football Club in Australia, the team he had played for years earlier, and continued coaching various sports teams in South Africa in the early 1960s. He became the track and field coach for the Olympic team of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1968, but Mexico refused to recognize the athletes’ passports and denied them entry into the country.

In class, John Cheffers would sit at a large round table and stroke his beard while discussing the essentials of great teaching with his graduate students.

In 1970s, and his office was legendary among students. In the small space crammed with treasures from all over the world, including a boomerang, Cheffers always welcomed students. In class, he would sit at a large round table, stroking his beard and discussing the essentials of great teaching with his graduate students while classical music played in the background.

“His methods changed the behavior of everyone who had the good fortune of being his student,” says Leonard Zaichkowsky, a retired professor of counseling psychology at SED and the School of Medicine.
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