



Family, friends, alumni, Florida State fans and others attend the celebration of life for legendary FSU baseball coach Mike Martin at Dick Howser Stadium on Saturday. See more photos at tallahassee.com. PHOTOS BY ALICIA DEVINE/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Thousands pack FSU memorial to bid farewell to coach Mike Martin

Jim Henry Tallahassee Democrat | USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Eduardo Perez couldn't have asked for a better baseball coach, mentor, and role model than Mike Martin.

Perez, in fact, said those lessons instilled by Martin in him more than 30 years ago remain part of his life.

"For me, it was perfect," Perez said.

"Not only instilled in us the discipline on the field, but also off the field. How to treat people, how to be a caring person. He wanted it always done the right way."

An estimated crowd of 2,500, including more than 350 former players and the current FSU baseball team, filled the grandstands at Howser Stadium at noon Saturday for Martin's Celebration of Life.

Martin, the winningest coach in college sports history, died Feb. 1 after a diagnosis with Lewy body dementia three years ago. He was 79, just shy of his 80th birthday Monday, Feb. 12.

The hour-long ceremony on the field named after Martin was somber, reflective and uplifting. It featured prayers, songs, memories and video tributes played on the scoreboard beyond the left-field wall.

Martin, known as Eleven for the jersey he wore as the Seminoles' coach for 40 years, was remembered for his strong faith, love of family and FSU, competitiveness and desire to shape his players beyond the diamond.

Among the former players in attendance were three-time World Series champion Buster Posey, former No. 1 overall selection Paul Wilson, Olympian Doug Mientkiewicz, Golden Spikes Award winner Mike Loynd and Perez.

Perez signed with FSU in 1989 out of Puerto Rico, spent 13 seasons in the majors and now is a baseball analyst at ESPN.

Perez has repeatedly said over the past nine days that Martin "meant

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Carol Martin sits in the front row for the celebration of life for her husband.



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Martin

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the world to me.”

Fans had the chance to say goodbye to Martin, who retired after the 2019 season with a career record of 2,029-736-4, on a perfect day for baseball with a sunny sky and temps in the low-70s. Entering the stadium, guestbooks for available for signing and bags of Crack Jack and drinks were offered.

Even though a national championship eluded him, Martin directed the Seminoles to 19 conference titles, 40 NCAA tournament appearances and 17 berths into the College World Series.

As the song “Seminole Wind” played over stadium loudspeakers, a procession of vehicles entered Howser Stadium from centerfield. The caravan slowly drove on the outfield warning track, down the first-base line in front FSU’s home dugout and stopped behind home plate.

Martin’s casket, placed between the pitcher’s mound and home plate, was adorned in roses and a flower arrangement shaped as a cross. A pair of wreaths with No. 11 flanked the casket.

Carol Martin and the Martin family, including a large contingent from Mike and Carol Martin’s native North Carolina, were seated in rows of chairs on both sides of home plate.

Also in attendance were FSU President Richard McCullough, ACC Commissioner Jim Phillips, former FSU President John Thrasher and former FSU and Texas A&M football coach Jimbo Fisher.

Speakers included Bill Smith, one of Martin’s best friends and the Chairman, President and CEO of Capital City Bank Group; local Rev. Bob Tindale and Pastor Mike Fordham; and FSU team chaplain Clint Purvis. Songs were performed by former FSU pitcher Gage Smith (“I Can Only Imagine”) and Ashly McCall (“Amazing Grace”).

Pallbearers were former assistant coaches Randy Gailey, Mike McLeod, Chip Baker, Steve Winterling, Mike Bell and Clyde Keller.

Winterling, athletic director at Pasco-Hernando State College in New Port Richey who was at FSU from 1986-91, said, “the setting was so perfect to honor Eleven. You are controlling the emotional side as best as possible. It was hard to believe you can be gone for 33 years, but it felt like you never missed a beat. It (service) was beautiful.”

One of the featured videos was a nar-



Legendary Florida State baseball coach Mike Martin is carried by pallbearers onto Mike Martin Field for his celebration of life on Saturday. PHOTOS BY ALICIA DEVINE/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

ative and written heartfelt letter from Carol to Mike, sharing how the newlyweds fell in love with FSU and Tallahassee and embarked on a 60-year journey side-by-side.

Steve “Mongo” Budnick, in attendance, also led the crowd in his signature Noles cheers to honor Martin.

In his remarks, Smith recalled when Martin made a mound visit to take out pitcher Richie Lewis following a barrage of hits, including a home run.

Martin instructed Lewis, an All-American and future FSU Hall of Famer (1995), to walk with him back to the dugout in case FSU fans booed Lewis. Lewis told Martin if anyone booed, they were probably directed at Martin for leaving Lewis in the game too long.

As the service concluded and the caravan headed down the left-field line to exit, the song “Centerfield” by John Fogerty was played across stadium loudspeakers.

Martin was buried in a private ceremony Saturday at Culley’s Meadow-Wood Memorial Park.



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