

A Legacy Carved in Grit and Heart: Remembering Donnell Leomiti

When Colorado State University Pueblo reinstated its football program in 2003, it did more than just bring a sport back to campus—it laid the foundation for a culture of excellence. At the heart of that foundational era stood Donnell Leomiti. As one of the program's original assistant coaches, Leomiti helped transform the ThunderWolves into a powerhouse in NCAA Division II football, etching his name into the bedrock of Pack Athletics.

With his induction into the CSU Pueblo Athletics Hall of Fame as part of the Class of 2026, the university community looks back at a man whose impact transcended the scoreboard, defining what it truly means to be a "Warrior."

Building a Foundation from the Ground Up

From 2007 to 2020, Leomiti served as a pillar of the CSU Pueblo coaching staff, most notably as defensive coordinator and defensive backs coach. Under his fierce leadership, the Pack defense became a perennial force, producing numerous All-Americans and All-Region standouts. His players knew him as a coach who demanded excellence, rewarded hard work, and modeled unyielding integrity.

Reflecting on Leomiti's profound influence, Head Coach John Wristen shared during his Hall of Fame tribute: "Donnell had great character, he had a great work ethic, but he had that 'it' that was really hard to replace... I was just lucky to be a part of it."

That rare "it" was a blend of relentless drive, deep compassion for his players, and an unwavering commitment to the university.

The Warrior Mentality

Leomiti's life and career were defined by resilience. When faced with life's ultimate challenges, including a courageous, multi-year battle with cancer, his attitude never wavered. Wristen recalled a powerful testament to Leomiti's extraordinary work ethic during a critical game week, when Leomiti famously slipped away from medical treatment just to be on the sidelines with his team.

It was this uncompromising devotion that gave birth to the enduring "Be" attitude embraced by CSU Pueblo football: **Be Here, Be Coachable, Be Accountable, Be Tough, Be Optimistic, and Be Engaged**. To this day, the spirit of that mindset lives on through facilities like the Leomiti Warrior Center, inspiring generations of student-athletes to honor his memory through action.

An Enduring Family Legacy

Donnell's deep roots in Pueblo extend to his family as well. He was married to former CSU Pueblo All-American cross-country athlete and fellow Hall of Fame inductee Lauren (Dunsmoor) Leomiti, and together they raised five children: Donnell Jr., Siliaga, Malekai, Kae'ane, and Myalyn.

As family, friends, alumni, and Pack fans gather to celebrate his posthumous induction, Donnell Leomiti's legacy remains timeless. He taught his players how to tackle adversity, how to lead with love, and how to stand strong when times get tough.

For the Pack family, Donnell Leomiti will always be more than a coach—he is the eternal heartbeat of the ThunderWolves.