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Dean Fouquette, long-time owner of Dean's Athletic, is retiring from the business he has ran for 35 years.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

For the love of the games

Fouquette exits sporting good business after 35 years

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

Though Dean Fouquette retired this week as owner of Dean's Athletic, he won't be hanging up his baseball glove any time soon.

Fouquette's sporting goods business began 35 years ago as a tiny shop. The store, now at a different location on Main Street with more than double the square footage, caters to young athletes who need shoes, running gear, bats, gloves, balls and such. Along the sides, on Fouquette's vaunted "Wall of Fame," hangs a huge collection of newspaper clippings of local teenage athletes playing football, basketball, baseball, soccer, volleyball, track and other sports. Scattered among them are photos of University of Oregon standouts Steve Prefontaine, Marcus Mariota and Joey Harrington and Oregon State's Roy Schuening — also a Pendleton alumnus.

Fouquette, maybe the best all-around athlete in Pendleton High School history, kibitzed easily with his sports-loving customers. Now, they will have to seek him out in



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Many of the walls of Dean's Athletic serve as a timeline for local sports and are lined with photos and newspaper clippings of local athletes.

the stands among other devoted spectators. Fouquette is selling the business to long-time partner and sister-in-law Cari Broker.

Don't worry about the 61-year-old staying busy in his retirement, though. He will continue to play shortstop on his over-60 baseball team, the Los Angeles-based Hollywood Stars. He'll work to improve his swimming, one of the few athletic pursuits he hasn't mastered. Don't be surprised if you see him coaching a team or two — Babe Ruth baseball, whiffle ball, youth football, basketball or — you fill in the blank. Fouquette has coached baseball and football from kindergarten to college levels and is currently the commissioner of Pendleton's whiffleball league.

Fouquette wasn't a hulk in high school at 5-foot-7 and 128 pounds. His athletic prowess, however, was stuff of legends and Hallmark movies.

At PHS, Fouquette excelled in football as quarterback and punt returner, basketball as point guard and baseball as shortstop. In 1970, he once made 17 out of 17 free throws in a game against Hermiston. In 1971, as a senior, he won State Metro All Star honors

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in all three sports.

"He had incredible hand-eye coordination and was innately tough," said friend and football, basketball and baseball teammate Tom Melton. "He was a great decision maker. He never made mistakes — I don't ever remember him fumbling a football."

Melton lauded Fouquette's leadership skills.

"He was a general on the field and a coach on the court," Melton said.

Fouquette attributed his success to a trio of PHS coaches.

"I grew up in an era when I played for the greatest coaches Pendleton has produced — Don Requa (football), Dale Warberg (basketball) and Lyle Phelps (baseball)."

Fouquette went on to play football and basketball at Oregon State University, intramural sports at University of Oregon and Eastern Oregon State College, city league basketball and slow-pitch softball, the over-40 Oregon Outlaws baseball teams and now the Hollywood Stars.

Oregon State University fraternity brother Kerry Eggers remembers how Fouquette quarterbacked

their intramural football team to an all-university title two years straight and played with him on a three-on-three basketball team that also won all-university honors.

"He wasn't big, but he was very smart and had good coordination," said Eggers, who now writes for the *Portland Tribune*.

Eggers shared a favorite story about Fouquette playing golf, one of the athlete's least favorite sports. On this particular day at the Pendleton Country Club, Fouquette played barefoot, drank a beer every hole for the first 10 or 11 and still ended up shooting an 80.

Eggers revealed that, once anyway, Fouquette didn't have the Midas touch.

"His one year coaching baseball at Crescent Valley in Corvallis resulted in a 1-21 year," Eggers said, "though his 'Win one for the Gipper' pregame speech resulted in a victory over Corvallis High in the season finale to avoid a winless campaign."

Decades after his athletic heyday, Fouquette says excelling as an older athlete takes some humility and discernment.

"It's a mind adjustment,"

said Fouquette, sitting in a chair Tuesday directly beneath the Wall of Fame. "If you go as hard as you can, you'll start straining and pulling muscles and body parts."

He tapped the sidewalls of his Nikes together and grinned.

"Those Texas leaguers I used to dive for, I let them go," he said. "It takes too long to recover."

He brought the same wisdom into the sporting goods business, say those who worked closely with him.

Partner Cari Broker has worked with Fouquette for 23 years and is buying Fouquette's part of the business.

"His knowledge of sports — that's been his niche and why it has worked for 35 years," Broker said.

The sports savvy helped inform stocking decisions and made for easy conversation with customers. It also led him to hire Mark Leach, known as Pendleton's biggest sports fan. Brain damaged at birth, Leach spent 18 years greeting the store's customers.

"He was a sports savant and the most popular person in town," Fouquette said. "He knew everyone's name and everyone knew his name."

Fouquette and Leach attended almost every PHS game together until Leach died in 2003 at age 56. A photo of Leach, wearing a Bucks' football jersey and shoulder pads, appears on the store's Wall of Fame.

"He was my sidekick," Fouquette said.

Broker, a non-athlete who started working part-time at the store at age 19, soaked in Fouquette's love of sports over the years. When he decided to retire, she bought his part of the business.

"It needs to go on," she said. "It's part of the community."

Hannah Boozer, a PHS senior who works at the store, called her experience as Fouquette's employee "eye opening."

"There has not been a day that has gone by without Dean being his friendly self, welcoming everyone who steps into the store," said Boozer, who is a standout track athlete at PHS. "Dean was an amazing boss to me and all the other employees and I could not thank him enough for his generosity and encouragement that he has put towards me in my school, sports and even his wise words on life."

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Photo courtesy of Dean Fouquette

A 24-year-old Dean Fouquette gets ready to bat in 1977 during a city-league slowpitch softball game. The team won the state championship that year.