

# The Valley

A life remembered

## 'Pinkie' Brown, crusader for girls sports

By Shane Frederick  
Free Press Staff Writer

**MANKATO** — When the Minnesota State University volleyball season began last fall, one of the first things new coach Dennis Amundson did was bring in Willetta "Pinkie" Brown as a guest coach.

Brown, a Kasota resident and 1945 graduate of MSU, was considered a pioneer and crusader in the girls sports movement, and Amundson wanted his players to know who she was.

"I think it was important for the kids to understand their history and who paved the way for what they have now," Amundson said. "It didn't happen by accident."

Brown, a Minnesota State High School League, MSU Athletics and Minnesota Volleyball Coaches Association hall of famer, died at her home Thursday. She was 82.

A teacher at Roseville's Alexander Ramsey High School from 1952 until her retirement in 1985, Brown helped usher in the most recent era of competitive girls sports in Minnesota, coaching volleyball, basketball, tennis and track.

"Pinkie was a pioneer, a leader for girls athletics," said



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Willetta "Pinkie" Brown was inducted into MSU's Hall of Distinction in 1985.

St. Peter native Vicki Davis, now an assistant principal at Hastings High School. "They say that the greatest form of flattery is when someone tries to imitate you, and so many girls went into teaching and coaching because of her."

That's what Brown's student, former St. Peter teacher and coach Pat Wilharber did, she said, and that influence trickled down to Davis, too.

"(Brown) battled all of that, financial (issues), perception, all the old myths," Davis said. "It was a constant battle. She

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VICKI DAVIS,  
St. Peter native and assistant principal  
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went toe to toe with anybody. She wasn't afraid of anybody. And yet, she did it smart. She was wise beyond her years. She seemed to know when to pat you on the back and when to kick you in the ass."

Born in Vermillion, S.D., in 1923, Brown graduated from Mankato High School in 1941 before attending MSU. She began her teaching career in Pipestone before moving on to Roseville.

Brown served on the Minnesota State High School League's Women's Advisory Committee, which helped write rules and regulations adopted by the League in 1969 and was one of the

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founding members of the Minnesota Coaches Association for Girls Sports.

She was inducted into MSU's Hall of Distinction in 1985, the High School League's third Hall of Fame class in 1993 and the volleyball coaches' hall in 1996.

Several of Brown's former students and players, fellow coaches and colleagues attended Brown's memorial service Sunday afternoon in St. Peter.

"I had some of her students on my teams, and they were all very loyal to her," said Georgene Brock, former MSU women's athletic director and coach. "She was strict, but they had a huge amount of respect for her because of what they taught her and what she stood for."

Said former Mankato and Mankato West coach Barb Knutson: "She did things that girls in high school now are

benefiting from."

And that's why Amundson, who coached against Brown when he was at St. Paul Harding High School, wanted his players to meet her.

"It wasn't so much what she did for me," Amundson said. "For women, Pinkie was the mentor."