

Robert Samuel "Doc" Behnke '62

was born on May 8th, 1938 in Waukegan, IL to Roy and Bernice Behnke. He married Carol Jean Kearney in Davenport, Iowa on December 28, 1963, at Saint Paul the Apostle Catholic Church. They were blessed with five children: Mike Behnke (Anita), Jim Behnke, Kelly Alford, Suzy Pinkston (Mike) and Tom Behnke (Heidi). They also have thirteen grandchildren, five great-grandchildren and another on the way. The birth of Beau Robert Behnke on November 2nd, 2025 will keep the Behnke name alive for many years to come.



He had been diagnosed with lymphoma in November 2025 and had a negative reaction to the chemotherapy which led to hospitalization and unfortunately was unable to recover. He died on April 6th, 2026, at Gibson Center for Hospice Care at Union Hospital in Terre Haute, IN.

He was member of the Phi Kappa Chapter of Alpha Chi Rho fraternity and a proud graduate of the University of Illinois (1962) and later earned a Master's degree (1965) and a Doctorate from Indiana University (1974). He was a teacher/athletic trainer at Moline (IL) Senior High School from 1961-65' and at Morton West (IL) High School in 1965-66'. He then held faculty/athletic trainer positions at Illinois State University (1966-69'), the University of Illinois (1969-75') and Indiana State University from 1975-1998. Dr. Behnke retired from Indiana State University in June 1998.

Dr. Behnke's contributions within the field of athletic training are noteworthy. Over the years he has served as a clinical athletic trainer to high school, collegiate, and professional athletes. He also served as an athletic trainer during the Pan-American Games, a sabbatical semester as an athletic trainer at the United States Olympic Training Center (USOC) in Colorado Springs, CO, National Sports Festival, World University Games, and the USA Men's Olympic Basketball Trials. Perhaps his most noteworthy clinical athletic training experience was during the 1978-79 Indiana State University men's basketball season when the Sycamores went 33-1

and advanced to the NCAA Championship game before losing to eventual champion, Michigan State.

Dr. Behnke was also extensively involved at the state, district, and national level in advancing athletic training education. He served as the District IV Director and subsequently served as the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) vice-president. He was also involved with establishing criteria for gaining licensure of athletic trainers at the state level. Probably his greatest contribution to athletic training was serving as the chairperson for 11 years of the NATA Professional Education Committee (PEC). During that time he initiated a petition to the American Medical Association (AMA) that eventually led to national accreditation of undergraduate entry level athletic training programs. If you wanted to see fire in his eyes, all you had to do was challenge what he believed to be the best strategy for advancing the profession.

Dr. Behnke was a staunch advocate for his students and left his mark on so many. He loved his students and was passionate and convincing in defending what he believed. Students had great respect for Dr. Behnke and he wanted nothing more than for them to be the best athletic trainer possible and to be prepared to handle any situation presented to them on the court or field of play. He was the consummate professional and served as an active role model for his students. He was an upstanding individual and friend who was a visionary, fought hard for what he believed and did so with honesty, integrity and humility.

He has been inducted into the Illinois Athletic Trainers' Association (1987), the Indiana Athletic Trainers' Association (1992) Hall of Fame and also received the NATA Educator of the Year Award. He received the highest honor and accolade as an athletic training professional when he was inducted into the NATA Hall of Fame in 1990.

A man who was ever so humble, Dr. Behnke aggressively avoided the spotlight. He was dedicated to his family, his faith, and his profession. Rest in peace.

Per his request, there were no services. Memorial contributions can be made to the Robert Behnke Scholarship for Athletic Training in care of the ISU Foundation or to Catholic Charities of Terre Haute.