Longtime Mesabi Range College faculty member and coach Herschel “Pepper” Lysaker passed away on Friday. Pepper taught in the physical education department and coached football at MRC from 1968-1998. He also coached track & field and softball for the Norse.

Pepper was a three-sport athlete during his time at Crookston Central High School playing football, basketball, and running track. He graduated in 1957.

He then went on to play two years of football at the University of Minnesota and then two more at the University of North Dakota where he was a member of the North Central Conference and National Championship teams.

After graduating from UND, he taught and coached football at Vista High School in California before coaching at North Dakota State University under legendary head coach Ronald P. Erhardt where he also earned his Master’s Degree. During his time there the Bison made it to the Camellia Bowl.

Pepper arrived at MRC in 1968. During his tenure, the Norse played in five state championship games and were the state runner up in 1969 (Rochester) and 1995 (Vermilion). Under Pepper’s guidance, Mesabi won three state championships in 1970 (Rochester), 1972 (Rochester) and 1988 (Normandale). He also led his teams to three Bowl Games – the Aztec, Wool, and Midwest Bowls. His career win-loss record stands at 153-107-1 (59%).

Pepper also coached track and field and women’s slow and fast-pitch softball. He led his slow-pitch softball team to a State Championship in 1987.

Pepper also received many accolades from his peers during his time as a coach. He was the first member of the Mesabi Range College Athletic Hall of Fame and was inducted into the MCAC and NJCAA Hall of Fames. He is a recipient of the Thomas J. Clifford Award from the University of North Dakota which recognizes UND alumni who serve as athletic coaches on the high school or college level and have been notably successful in their sport.

Pepper retired from Mesabi Range College in 1998 and was inducted into the Minnesota Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame in 2002. Pepper and his father, Herschel Sr., are the only father–son combo in this Hall of Fame. Pepper had been a member of the National Football Coaches Association for 48 years.

Pepper is survived by his wife of nearly 60 years Marnie, his son Christopher and daughter-in-law Joni. Funeral services will be held at a later date.