



# **Roxana says goodbye to Coach Welker**

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
January 25 2015 1:15 PM

An estimated 2,000 turned out to say goodbye to Roxana teacher/coach Jeff Welker on Saturday and there were many positive memories shared of a man whose community members will not forget.

Bill Smith, former head Roxana football coach, was one who will never forget his close friend, who coached for many years alongside him and also established the weight-training program at Roxana High School. Smith became head coach at Roxana after the legendary Charlie Raich.



“Jeff and I were first together in the early ‘70s in Roxana and coached together and hung out together for lots of years,” Smith said. “He was a great person. He cared about kids probably more than 90 percent of the other coaches and teachers. We were very good friends.”

Smith said his relationship with Welker was more like a brotherhood.

“We taught together, coached together and did everything together,” he said. “I talked to Jeff last week and he was setting in on retiring in another year or two at most. He kept asking me things to start checking in about on and was looking forward to retirement.”

Smith described Welker as an amazing history teacher.

“He was Mr. Military, even though he never served in the military,” Smith said. “The kids loved the classes. He spent many of his summer vacations visiting Civil War battlefields and bringing this back to the kids. A lot of times during my free period, I would sit in his class because it was so interesting. He also worked hard in sending World War II to the monument in Washington, D.C.; he was far above the textbook in the things he taught these kids.”

Roxana head football coach Pat Keith said he had the deepest of respect for Welker.

“From my perspective, Jeff was a great guy and great with the kids,” he said. “He identified with every single kid and didn’t want any kid left behind. He is a big part of Roxana football tradition. He helped build the weight room and wanted every kid to get stronger. He had a great gift for the kids.”

Smith agreed that every child that came in contact with Welker became important to him, Smith said.

“He was completely dedicated to every kid, and he wanted them all to succeed,” Smith said. “He would make you think he had 50 hours a day of spare time if you needed something. Jeff was always right there.”

Smith and Welker were both close to one another’s parents and when they died, he said he felt he became even closer to Welker.

Smith said losing Welker did have a significant impact on him.

“He was always someone you could talk to and to have something like this happen, you really don’t believe it. This did take everybody by shock.”

The Roxana, South Roxana and Rosewood Heights police and fire departments led the funeral procession after the funeral at Roxana High School to Welker’s final resting place at Roselawn Memory Gardens in Bethalto.

Smith had a way of describing the loss of Welker that probably fit nearly everyone in attendance at the funeral: “It was like losing a brother,” he said.