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## IU's '68 Rose Bowl coach dies

By Terry Hutchens

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Doug Crusan and his Indiana University teammates knew their former football coach had been in and out of hospitals in Ohio and Texas in recent months, struggling in his fight with leukemia.

Still, the news early Tuesday that John Pont — who took IU to the school's only Rose Bowl following the 1967 season — had died at 80 in Oxford, Ohio, hit his former players hard.

"I knew he wasn't doing well; however, it still hits you in the stomach and drops you back a bit," said Crusan, the captain on that 1967 IU team.

"When I think of him, I'll think of him as he was back then. It was my youth and he was young and full of energy. I was nothing but an 18-, 19-, 20-year-old kid, but he filled me with a lifetime of memories."

Pont came to Indiana in 1965 and his teams finished 2-8 and 1-8-1 his first two seasons. In 1967, however, IU won its first eight games, lost to Minnesota, then stunned third-ranked Purdue 19-14 to finish 9-1 and advance to the Rose Bowl.

There, the Hoosiers lost to eventual national champion Southern Cal 14-3. Pont was named national Coach of the Year.

"We had a good senior class but coach Pont just stuck with us after we had a few tough years," said Ken Kaczmarek, a third-team All-America linebacker in '67. "In 1966, we had a pretty good team and we were in most games, but we just always found a way to lose.

"In 1967, a lot was the same but we just always found a way to win."

Kaczmarek said he talked to Pont a little over a week ago, and could tell his former coach was having a difficult time.

"We talked for a long time and we even talked about dying," Kaczmarek said. "I felt like he had started to give up. But it still hurts when you get that call. Today, I lost a friend, kind of my second father. ... He took me from being a boy and made me into a man."

Harry Gonso, IU's quarterback in '67, saw Pont for the last time in November at the Old Oaken Bucket game, where the '67 team celebrated its 40th anniversary.

"I can picture his persona, which will be etched in my memory forever," Gonso said. "He was a guy who had incredible passion about everything he did and that was infectious. He made you really believe in yourself and what you were trying to do, and he brought the best out of us."

In a statement, IU president Michael McRobbie praised Pont's leadership, success and commitment to academics.

"I was pleased that he could attend the ceremonies last year celebrating the IU Rose Bowl team," McRobbie said. "It was an honor for me to meet him. Indiana University mourns his passing and extends our condolences to his family."

Pont coached Miami (Ohio) from 1956-62, then coached for two seasons at Yale before taking over for Phil Dickens at IU in 1965. After leaving Indiana, Pont coached Northwestern from 1973-77. He was inducted into the Indiana and Miami halls of fame.

Pont is survived by his wife Sandy, and children John, Jennifer and Jeff.