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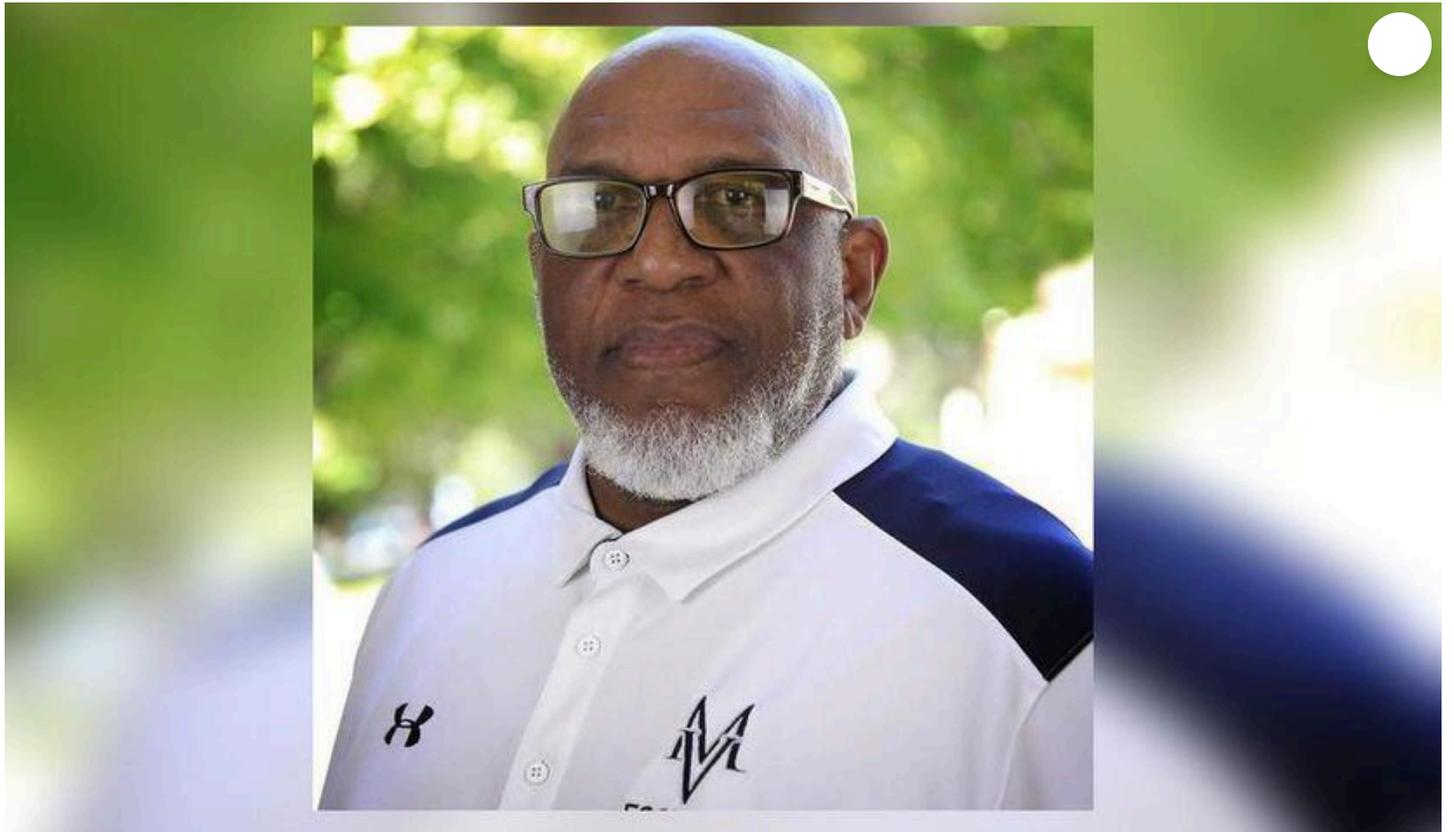
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NEWS

North Fulton coach who died from coronavirus known for personal touch



Ron Hill, 63, an athletics coach at a North Fulton County private school, died Tuesday, March 24, 2020, after contracting the coronavirus, his family and friends said. He is survived by seven children and 16 grandchildren.
FACEBOOK PHOTO

By Ty Tagami

March 26, 2020



Ron Hill, an athletics coach at a school in Fulton County, had seven children, 16 grandchildren and relationships with countless adoring students, yet he died alone this week.

Infected with the coronavirus, the hospital would not let his daughters near him. They had to say goodbye through a window as he lay sedated.

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“He wasn’t even aware we were there,” said Kyndria Hill, 41, his oldest child.

Ron Hill, 63, grew up in Staunton, Virginia but lived in Milton and would likely have called The Mount Vernon School in Sandy Springs his home. It was there that he mentored girls and boys and coached them in football, basketball and track.

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He died Tuesday at Wellstar North Fulton Hospital, according to family and friends. Kyndria Hill, who had rushed to the hospital from her home in Charlottesville, Virginia, last weekend, said her father was diagnosed last Friday with COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

She was born at Fort Sill, an Army post in Oklahoma where he was stationed at the time. He had played football and basketball in high school and worked as a coach after the military. It was a role he held for as long as she can remember, first in private leagues and then at a high school in Virginia.



Ron Hill, second from right.

He came to Atlanta with his wife at the time, moving here because of her job. He started working at Mount Vernon, a private school, in 2013, she said.

There, he met English teacher Nikki Rucker.

“He was the bright spot for everybody,” Rucker said. “You think of the school, you think of Coach Hill.”

She described him as a mentor to many of the students and a father figure to her own daughter, who was a student there. “The boys loved him,” said Rucker, who left the school two years ago.

He was a substitute teacher and filled in for her Advanced Placement language class. He often stopped by for no reason other than to ask how she was doing. He always paid for both their lunches, though she had to go get them. “His thing was ‘I buy, you fly,’” she said.

Chick-fil-A chicken sandwich meal, no pickles with a Coke. That was his favorite.



Ron Hill with Jake Bloodworth, 19, UGA freshman who played football at The Mount Vernon School in Sandy Springs. Hill was both a confidant and defensive line coach for Bloodworth.

Jake Bloodworth, 19, played football there his senior year and Hill was his defensive line coach. Bloodworth, now a freshman at the University of Georgia, said he'd known Hill since starting at the school his freshman year. "Coach," as people there called him, went out of his way to get to know students, Bloodworth said.

"He always made sure everybody was doing alright," he said. "Everybody at that school knew him as family." Bloodworth said Hill also coached his twin sisters in basketball, and they had a similarly close relationship with him.

Hill was a no-nonsense coach and teacher, but he was also a jocular fellow, given to “talking smack” with students. “Oh Bloodworth, you want a piece of me?” he’d taunt the boy in the hallways. When he’d fill in as a substitute, the students knew it would be a fun day.

The coach had a profound effect on people outside of the school, too. Kabir Tompkins, founder of the Sigma Alpha Gamma military fraternity, watched a veteran in a hospital turn tearful and lean on another man’s shoulder after Hill spoke quietly with him. Another time, a fraternity brother posted a troubling message on Facebook. Hill called the man, who later told Tompkins about that conversation: “There’s so much more to life than you,” Hill had told him. He had urged the man to consider the consequences for those around him if he were to commit suicide.



Ron Hill was sworn in as president of Sigma Alpha Gamma Military Fraternity on March 6, 2020. Hill’s fraternity nickname was “Miracle”.

Tompkins said he has a master’s degree in counseling, yet Hill, lacking such training, still knew what to say, either because of instinct or experience. “He had that impact because of wisdom,” Tompkins said.

Everyone who joins the fraternity gets a nickname. Hill's was "Miracle."

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Like anyone, he still had difficult relationships. Estranged from his wife, he moved out of her house five years ago and lived in his car for a few weeks before Darryl Singleton, a friend and neighbor, took him in.

Hill had coached Singleton's son in football about a dozen years ago, and a friendship had blossomed. It was Singleton's son, now grown and home after finishing law school, who took Hill to an urgent care center two weeks ago.

Hill had a number of health problems, including asthma, and typically had difficulty breathing when spring pollen filled the air. A couple days before, he and the elder Singleton, a member of the same military fraternity, had returned from a fraternity conference in Washington, D.C. where Hill was sworn in as president. The men of the fraternity had been in close quarters, even holding hands in a circle at one point.





Ron Hill, middle, with military fraternity brother and roommate Darryl Singleton, right. Both were members of the Sigma Alpha Gamma Military Fraternity, Inc.

Hill had first complained of difficulty breathing during the MARTA ride from the airport. He was told at the urgent care center that he had pneumonia and should see a doctor. He declined, until a few days later; on March 14, he woke up and asked his friend to call 911. “I cannot breathe,” he told Singleton.

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At the hospital, he was fed oxygen through a tube to his nose and then, a few days later, he was moved to intensive care. He sent a text message to his sister: “I’m not going to lie but I’m scared,” it said, according to his oldest child, Kyndria Hill. “I’m going to fight but my body’s tired.”

Kyndria Hill said only two members of the family at a time were allowed to see him, and only through a pane of glass. She and her sisters, including the 16-year-old twins, couldn’t touch him or talk to him. They had to stay outside the room because of his infection.

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When he first called her about his trip to the urgent care center, they had joked about the coronavirus. He told her she would have to come get him if he had it, and she assured him he didn’t.

“And here we are, two weeks later,” Kyndria Hill said Wednesday, the day after he died. It seemed to her that many people weren’t taking the pandemic seriously and weren’t taking the recommended precautions, such as avoiding large groups and staying at least six feet away from others outside the home.

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Ron Hill, an athletic coach at The Mount Vernon School, died Tuesday March 24, 2020, after contracting the coronavirus.

“If you don’t need to be out, don’t go out,” she said. “There are people alone in the hospital and their family can’t get to them. People need to think about that.”

Hill is survived by 16 grandchildren and seven children: daughters Kyndria Hill, 41, of Virginia; Erica McCauley, 38, of Virginia; Dana Green, 34, of Maryland; Megan Bell-Hill, 28, of Virginia; and twins Sydni and Symone Hill, 16, both of Milton; and son Jerrell Taylor, 35, of Maryland.

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About the Author

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Ty Tagami



Ty Tagami is a staff writer for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Since joining the newspaper in 2002, he has written about everything from hurricanes to homelessness. He has deep experience covering local government and education, and can often be found under the Gold Dome when lawmakers meet or in a school somewhere in the state.

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