

AOG Honors Longtime USAFA Golf Coach

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Gene Miranda

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Gene Miranda was inducted as an honorary member of the Air Force Academy's Association of Graduates (AOG) during a ceremony Aug. 21. In accepting the honor, Miranda said he felt privileged to coach so many cadets of high moral character through the years, and he is grateful to join them as a member of the alumni association.

"You did an awful lot in four years," he told USAFA graduates and former golfers in the audience, "and when you graduated, you joined the Association of Graduates. It took me 55 years to join, but it was worth the wait."

In front of a crowd of family, friends, colleagues and former players, Miranda recounted numerous stories from his long USAFA career.

He recalled the pride he felt in one golfer who penalized himself by two strokes when he reportedly saw a few grains of sand move in the trap during his backswing. Players are not allowed to ground their club inside a sand trap.

"Ordinarily, walking off the green when your top player starts the tournament with a triple-bogey seven, I wouldn't be a happy camper," he admitted, "but in this case, I felt so good. My player had the integrity that if there was any doubt, he was going to penalize himself."

Miranda shared a few funny stories, including the prank the team

would play on him at every airport — summoning him to pick up the white paging phone in each terminal.

"That was the duty of the freshmen on the team," he reported, "and they would do it in Spanish. I don't even speak Spanish. All those little things like that they did to tease me ... it was fun."

Miranda laughed while recalling a story about one player who accidentally left his putter in his hotel room. The coach drove back to retrieve the forgotten club in time for the tournament.

Miranda found the putter under the covers of the player's bed, with the head of the putter resting on its own pillow.

"I take it back and hand him the putter," Miranda recounts, "and I told him 'you gotta get yourself a girlfriend.'"

Miranda thanked the AOG board of directors for the honorary membership and thanked his former players for his many fond memories.

"There aren't enough words to describe how I feel about this award," he said. "I'm honored."



AOG board member Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Hans Mueh '66 (left) and Association of Graduates and Air Force Academy Foundation CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Gould '76 (right) present Lt. Col. (Ret.) Gene Miranda with his honorary membership.

In 1963, Miranda entered the Air Force and served 20 years on active duty, retiring in 1983 as a lieutenant colonel.

He served three different stints as USAFA golf coach — 14 years on active duty and 14 years as a civilian. He compiled a phenomenal dual meet record of 185-5, with his players qualifying for the NCAA finals 14 times. Miranda coached 10 All-American golfers, and his teams won more than 50 college tournaments.

His primary job was as a tenured associate professor of physical education at USAFA, teaching combatives such as wrestling, boxing, judo and unarmed combat.

During his career, he is credited with starting golf camps at USAFA in 1980. The camps continue today, with 150 children participating each summer.

Miranda was inducted into the Golf Coaches Association of America Hall of Fame in 1997 and the Colorado Golf Hall of Fame in 2010. In 2015, USAFA honored Miranda by inducting him into the Air Force Athletics Hall of Fame.

In 2003, then-USAFA Director of Athletics Col. Randy Spetman '76 renamed the Falcon Invitational, the Academy's annual golf tournament, the Gene Miranda Falcon Invitational in his honor.

"Obviously, Coach Miranda goes well above and beyond meeting the requirements of outstanding and conspicuous service to the Academy," said Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Gould '76, CEO of the Association of Graduates and Air Force Academy Foundation at the induction. "He personifies what we stand for and who we are as the Long Blue Line. Gene, thank you for all you have done and continue to do for our Academy."

Gen. Gould noted that Miranda's connections within the golf industry on the West Coast allowed Falcon players to experience some of the finest courses during spring break trips. Those opportunities to play the challenging courses led to success in various tournaments.

"You've been like a father to so many of us," Gen. Gould shared. "Your im-



LEFT: New honorary AOG member Lt. Col. (Ret.) Gene Miranda shares a few stories during the Aug. 21 event.

BELOW: Surrounded by family, friends and former colleagues, Gene Miranda listens to various presenters. (Photos by Ryan Hall)



pact goes well beyond some of the statistics and all the halls of fame."

Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Hans Mueh '66, former USAFA athletic director and longtime friend of Miranda, shared a few stories from his decades of knowing the golf coach.

In particular, Gen. Mueh said Miranda was well known for the high standards he set for his golfers — expecting all to follow golf rules and golf etiquette, plus paying attention to personal appearance, behavior and sportsmanship.

"His long, positive impact on future leaders in our Air Force is obvious," Gen. Mueh said. "Gene was my golf coach, too. I took off 10 strokes in the time that I knew Gene. He was an amazing teacher, but more than that he was a mentor, an amazingly patient listener,

a brilliant philosopher, and the perfect inspiration for these young and impressionable future officers. I'm so deeply honored to be part of this very special recognition for you. It's long overdue."

Honorary membership is among the highest honors that the Association of Graduates awards and is reserved for individuals who have rendered outstanding service to the Air Force Academy and the Air Force.

In the entire 58-year history of the AOG, fewer than 50 individuals have been designated an honorary member. Just 25 living individuals can be designated as honorary members at any given time. Among previous honorees are Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Mal Wakin, Gail McComas, Sen. Barry Goldwater and football coach Fisher DeBerry. 