

Press Enterprise

November 20, 2018 / Columbia County, Pennsylvania



Millville Boys' Soccer team, 2018 PA State Champions (Class A) Season Record: 22 wins, 2 losses (7-0 conference)

Front row, left to right: Zachary Althouse, Trevor Hartman, Tyler Stone, Josh Spangenberg (co-captain), Griffin Bower (co-captain), Zachary Kremer, Koltan Smith, Tyler Johnson ; Middle row, left to right: Nick Arnold, Caden Temple, Nicholas Phares, Patrick Stefan, Hunter Bacon, Eli Klinger, Blake Evans, Mason Huff, Landon Evans, Cameron Laubach, Caleb Temple; Back row, left to right: Chris Bower (assistant coach), John Zayas (Trainer), Anthony Failla, Coleman Hayman, Dyllan Klinger, Ian Comly, Aaron Hack, Bill Kashatus (goalkeeper's coach), Leslie Berger (bookkeeper) and Anthony Preston (head coach).

Millville soccer was about more than winning a state championship

By William C. Kashatus

When the Millville Boys Soccer team won the Pennsylvania State Championship against a heavily favored Avonworth team in Hershey on Friday, my faith was restored in high school sports. I knew that winning could be achieved with integrity and that the twenty-four young men on the team had earned something much more valuable than a gold medal.

Twenty years ago, I left high school teaching and coaching because I was tired of the politics. I had spent the previous two decades building a career as a teacher-coach in Philadelphia and New York private schools. I had always believed that schools had an obligation to provide youngsters with a meaningful education based on academic rigor and meaningful extracurricular activities. That the mission of the school was to cultivate the educational skills and moral code to prepare students for good citizenship. And that the administrators, teachers and coaches had an ethical obligation to serve as role models for the students. But I was mistaken, especially when it came to high school sports.

Private schools were just beginning to recruit talented young athletes, sometimes as early as the eighth grade. Many of the youngsters came from modest circumstances and were given athletic scholarships disguised as “need-based financial aid.” There was pressure from parents, alumni and administrators to produce conference titles, state championships and Division I prospects.

Both public and private schools began to hire “outside” coaches who focused on the end of winning at all costs. Travel teams began to take precedence over school team practices and community service activities. The most talented student-athletes were not made accountable to team rules and policies, resulting in a culture of entitlement. The schools, both public and private, looked the other way as long as their teams won.

I had not signed up for any of this when I went into teaching. I grew tired of challenging a broken system and, in 1998, left the only thing I ever wanted to do with my life in order to preserve my integrity.

When I decided to take another shot at high school coaching this year, it had to be at a school that respected the educational process. A small school where there would be greater opportunity to interact with the kids and one that was competitive in their league. At the age of sixty, I wanted coaching to be a *meaningful* experience; not a burden. I was truly fortunate to find Millville.

Anthony Preston, the head soccer coach, welcomed my expertise as a goalkeeper’s coach, and I quickly came to respect his approach as a teacher-coach. Anthony places a greater priority on the educational value of sport than winning. He is extremely effective at cultivating the personal growth of each player as well as the team’s success.

Once, during a game against a challenging opponent, one of our key players disrespected our assistant coach, Chris Bower. Although Chris, also wonderful teacher-coach, understood the frustration and dismissed the incident, Anthony sat the offending player for the remainder of the game. We barely held on for the victory, but the point registered with the team – respecting the coaches is more important than winning.

There were no short-cuts. No recruiting. No “athletic scholarships.” No interference by club teams. No entitled players. No physical altercations with opposing teams. But there were “no profanity” and “no trash talking” rules and all players had to remain academically eligible. In short, there was accountability. Senior co-captains Griffin Bower and Josh Spangenberg reinforced the policies and provided excellent leadership on and off the playing field.

No, our kids weren’t perfect. Nor did we expect them to be. They’re teenagers, who can be the most sensitive as well as insensitive creatures on earth. But that’s what made this team so special. Our kids were not only talented soccer players, but they were by nature hardworking, respectful and appreciative. They also learned some very important life lessons along the way to earning a state championship.

They learned the importance of never quitting on themselves or each other; how to conduct themselves with poise under pressure; to rise above the egocentrism of adolescence to be part of something much bigger than themselves; to be humble in victory and graceful in defeat; and to chase a dream with heart and soul having the courage to accept the outcome, win or lose.

These are the life lessons our schools should be teaching our youth. That a small, rural high school soccer program like Millville teaches them so effectively was one of the greatest joys of my career as a teacher-coach.

I know that our kids are too young to realize the magnitude of their soccer achievement. That will only come with age. But the lessons they learned on the pitch will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Thanks, Anthony, Chris and all the Quakers for restoring my faith in high school sports. You will always hold a special place in my heart.