

Legendary coach who pushed education

By William C. Kashatus

March Madness evokes some pretty nostalgic memories for Philadelphians. Big Five basketball produced many of those moments, along with an impressive procession of athletes and coaches who eventually made it to the NBA. Of course, there are many who didn't see the big time, but have distinguished themselves in even greater ways.

Who, for example, can remember the Philadelphia native who succeeded Bobby Knight and preceded Mike Krzyzewski as head coach at Army?

Here's a hint: He was one of Jack Ramsay's starting guards when St. Joseph captured the first Big Five championship in 1955. Give up? His name is Dan Dougherty and he was, until last week when he stepped down, the head basketball coach at the Episcopal Academy.

Dougherty is one of Philadelphia's basketball legends. During his 21-year tenure at Episcopal, he recorded a total of 380 victories and nine Inter-Academic league titles. Together with the 133 wins he posted previously in three seasons at St. Pius X, five at Malvern Prep, and one at Penncrest, he has more than 500 victories to his credit.



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He also produced a remarkable share of college players, two Division I coaches in James "Bruiser" Flint of Massachusetts and Fran Dunphy of Penn, and an NBA player in Jerome Allen of the Denver Nuggets. Not too bad for a high school math teacher, huh? Yet as impressive as those achievements may be, they hardly begin to reveal the true meaning of Dougherty's contributions as an educator.

As a young teacher at Episcopal, I spent many afternoons in the gym watching Dougherty's practices, hoping to discover the secret to his success. He ran his players nonstop. Those with ordinary abilities could do extraordinary things simply because of the enthusiasm, work ethic and team environment he cultivated.

In the process, he challenged his players to realize their potential, to place the welfare of the team above personal success, and to put their lives into a proper perspective. Rarely, if ever, did he have a team of pure basketball players, taking special pride in his ability to mold a group of diverse athletes into a competitive team and encouraging their participation in other sports as well.

At a time when many high school coaches are defining the success of their programs in terms of victories, league championships, Division I scholarships, and media coverage, our kids are in great need of the Dan Doughertys who take their roles as "educators" more seriously.

They are teacher-coaches who instill important life lessons in their athletes, such as how to act with restraint and control under pressure, to experience and cope with conditions over which the individual has no special control, and to discipline oneself to become a cooperative member of a team rather than a self-centered individual.

Dan Dougherty reminded us that to concentrate on the end of "winning" instead of building "winning attitudes" cheapens the fundamental purpose of athletics in any school that is truly concerned about the education of young people.

Though he is no longer coaching, he will always be the kind of educator that I cherish from my own past and to whom I would cheerfully hand over my own two sons, knowing that they would be better people for the experience.