

## Aasen's legacy continues on today He stills touches peoples' lives, 25 years after his death

BY KEVIN MERTENS  
Register Staff Writer

*The grass is green, the sky is blue, it's a great day to be alive.*

If you recognize the saying in the previous paragraph, then you were probably a friend, fellow teacher or an athlete who played for or knew David Aasen. They were words Aasen said and lived everyday.

Those words said so much about the man who, along with his older brother Erik, lost his life 25 years ago due to a car accident on a slippery, icy road near Rochester. The brothers had been following their parents on their way to a family Thanksgiving celebration in Chicago.

David Aasen was a math teacher and a head tennis coach at Blue Earth Area Schools when the accident occurred. Though it has been 25 years since his death on Nov. 24, 1994, his legacy lives on through the people he touched through teaching, coaching and being a friend.

"When he spoke those words, Dave did not rattle them off," his assistant girls tennis coach Sue Frederickson says. "He took time to give the words meaning."

Arlette (Pilcher) Dutton was a senior on the last Blue Earth Area tennis team Aasen would coach, a team which finished third in the State Tournament.

"As a coach, you could not out-hustle him," Dutton explains. "He had the most energy of any person I have ever met. He would always be out on the court conditioning with the players."

However, Aasen's coaching skills were so much more than getting his athletes in good physical shape.

"He was always positive and placed a lot of emphasis on attitude," Dutton comments. "I rarely recall him being frustrated."

As an assistant coach, Frederickson saw first hand how Aasen would pump up his players' attitudes.

"Maybe an opponent hit



David Aasen loved coaching tennis and helping players be their best. Pictured above is the girls tennis team who won the District 2AA title in 1994 and went on to finish in third place at the State Tournament.

a great shot that our player could not handle or maybe our player hit a bad shot, but Dave would always be encouraging the kid, saying 'next point, next point,'" Frederickson explains. "His point was to keep them from dwelling on the last point, let's get the next point."

The tennis courts and other sporting venues were not the only place where Aasen had an effect on those around him.

"We welcomed him into the math department as a young, positive teacher," BEA teacher Tom Plocker says. "He took over teaching calculus right away. He had a lot of unbridled enthusiasm he carried into the classroom and his students responded accordingly."

Aasen embraced the challenges coaching and teaching provided him.

"His last year of teaching in the fall of 1994 he had a math class he said was different, the kids learned in different ways," Frederickson recalls. "But he figured it out and was able to reach them."

Aasen was born in Iowa but his family - his parents

and two brothers - moved to St. Peter when he was in third grade.

He loved tennis and played in the National Junior Tennis League and attended the Tennis and Life Camps (TLC) at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter.

The highlight of his high school tennis career came when St. Peter broke BEA's 111 match winning streak. The same year, the St. Peter team finished second at the State Class AA Tennis Meet, losing to the Buccaneers.

Aasen graduated from St. Olaf College in Northfield in 1992 and, in a bit of irony, his first teaching job was at Blue Earth Area.

"Hal Schroeder, the former BEA tennis coach, had written a letter to the School Board imploring them to hire Aasen," Frederickson says.

Now the director of educational services at New Prague Area Schools, Tony Buthe had been a special education teacher at BEA for one year when Aasen came on board.

"He was kind and compassionate," Buthe recalls.

"He did not think bad about anybody. The guy was an inspiration. He brought kindness, happiness and a breath of fresh air to the school in both the classroom and the sports arena."

And then there are the selfless personal acts he shared with others.

"It was the Saturday before Thanksgiving and we were setting up a foam block floor for the gymnastics floor routine," current BEA activities director Rob Norman explains. "David shows up, volunteered his time and helps us put the floor together."

Another story Buthe shared was from Christmas one year.

"David dressed up as Santa Claus for my one and two year old kids," Buthe comments. "He did not have to do it, but it was just who he was."

Aasen had a sense of humor and used his costume skills to have a little fun on a tennis trip.

"It was our Brainerd tennis trip and we stopped in Hutchinson at a Shopko to stretch our legs and take a break," Frederickson re-

calls. "When the girls returned to the bus, David had put on a Halloween mask and totally scared the girls. Everybody had a good laugh."

Those who knew David Aasen remember where they were when they received news of his passing. They also remember the events which occurred during the following days.

"His parents were amazing," Dutton says. "Anything we (the tennis team) wanted to attend we were made very welcome. I believe the tennis team members were honorary pallbearers for his funeral."

Tom Plocker recalls vividly the last time he saw his friend.

"I was leaving for the Thanksgiving break and he was coaching ninth grade basketball in the Unity Hall area," Plocker notes. "I remember a very deep and profound sadness when he passed. The staff took a bus to St. Peter for the services. It was a very somber day."

But Aasen's legacy lives on in many ways.

"When he died, the coaches got together and said we need to do some-

thing to keep his memory alive," Norman says. "It is when we came up with the Aasen award."

Aasen award winners must be seniors and participate in at least one sport. They must have a positive, enthusiastic, and fun loving attitude. They must dedicate themselves to the program in which they are involved. Finally, they must practice hard and go the extra mile in helping teammates and coaches.

There is also an award given out at the Tennis and Life Camps to the instructor who has best embodied the teaching characteristics associated with David Aasen. Some of those characteristics include boundless enthusiasm and energy, a wonderful sense of humor, the highest standards of sportsmanship, a love for teaching and learning, the ability to make people feel good about themselves, a genuine concern for others, patience, and an optimistic outlook on life.

But Frederickson says the kids were not the only ones who learned from Aasen.

"Even when the wind would be a factor in a tennis match, Dave would stress during the week's practices, 'the wind is our friend.'" Frederickson remembers. "He would then teach strategies to cope with the strong winds. It is amazing how preparing for a situation and having a controlled positive outlook affects your game, and your life."

Aasen's legacy also continues to live on in the kids currently playing tennis.

"I smile when I think of Dave because I am now watching the children of his former athletes play with tenacity, good sportsmanship and having a love of life," Frederickson says.

Buthe remembers his friend this way.

"He touched people's lives, he cared about kids and would come early and stay late," Buthe states. "He exemplified what you want in a young teacher and coach."

## Six honored from BEA football team



Koby Nagel



Caelan Sanders



Cameron Anderson



Gavin Storbeck



Zac Murphy



Anders Fering

## Four players named All-District, two receive honorable mention

BY KEVIN MERTENS  
Register Staff Writer

Four Blue Earth Area football players were named to the All-South Central Red District team and two players received honorable mention.

Koby Nagel, Caelan Sanders, Cameron Anderson and Gavin Storbeck received All-District honors. Zac Murphy and Anders Fering were the honorable mention recipients.

Nagel was also named the running back of the year and Sanders was chosen as the defensive back of the

year for the sub-district.

Nagel rushed for 1,301 yards this past season on 213 attempts, an average of 6.1 yards per carry. He also scored 28 rushing touchdowns. The versatile senior had 25 receptions for 296 yards and two TDs.

Nagel accounted for 192 kick return yards, 54 punt return yards and 60 interception return yards. He totaled 1,903 all-purpose yards.

On defense, Nagel had 44 tackles and three interceptions.

"Koby is tough, has great vision, is durable and makes plays," head coach Randy

Kuechenmeister said. "He is a gamer."

Sanders led the team with 45 receptions totaling 660 yards. He had eight receiving TDs and averaged 14.7 yards per reception.

The fleet-footed Sanders had 187 yards and four TDs on 24 rushing attempts. The senior receiver piled up 198 kickoff return yards and one TD. He had 117 punt return yards. His all-purpose yards totaled 1,157.

Sanders also recorded 27 tackles and had three interceptions while playing defense.

"Caelan is a playmaker with excellent hands. He is

a game changer," Kuechenmeister commented. "He is a great cover guy on defense."

Anderson had 41 receptions for 643 yards and six TDs. He averaged 15.7 yards per catch. The junior speedster also carried the ball five times for 65 yards and one TD.

Anderson had 91 kick return yards and 44 interception return yards for a total of 843 all-purpose yards.

He had 38 tackles on defense and returned one of his two interceptions for a TD.

"Cameron makes plays with his hands and feet,"

Kuechenmeister remarked. "He has big play ability and can go the distance every time he touches the ball. He has excellent speed."

Storbeck completed 127 of his 172 pass attempts for a 73.8 percent completion rate. The junior signal-caller threw for 17 TDs while throwing only seven interceptions.

"Gavin is smart. He is an accurate and pure passer," Kuechenmeister said.

Murphy was selected to the honorable-mention team with 42 tackles and one interception. The senior linebacker missed four games due to injury.

"Zac is a tough, hard-nosed kid. He has one speed - full go," Kuechenmeister stated. "He is not big in size but is a very physical player and was the leader of the defense."

Fering had 41 tackles and three sacks from his position as a defensive tackle. The junior had three receptions for 23 yards as a tight end.

"Anders is a very versatile athlete. He is strong, tough and a player you can count on," Kuechenmeister said. "He was a fixture in the middle of our defense."