

One letter from the past defines a coach's purpose

Gaughran humbled by special memories

By **JOHN SHERMAN**
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What kind of teacher was Dick Gaughran in his 30 plus years in the Edina school system?

"Every day, I stood outside the door of my classroom and

greeted every kid," he said. "I realized that not all of them were excited to be at school. But I wanted them to know that I cared about them."

Gaughran found he had the ability to connect with young people, not only in the classroom, but in sports, as well. He joined the Edina coaching staff in 1965 as an assistant in football, baseball and wrestling, and for most of the time he was in Edina, he coached those three

sports.

When Edina High split into Edina-East and Edina-West in the fall of 1972, Gaughran went to the West campus with head football coach Stav Canakes. In addition to coaching football, Gaughran served as head wrestling coach. And a few years later, he became head boys track coach.

"For 30 years, I coached every sports season in Edina," Gaughran said. In 1992, he left

the Edina football program to join Mike Grant at Eden Prairie. Going into the 2020 high school football season, Gaughran, 80, is still helping Grant. The former Edina assistant has quite a collection of state football championship rings, with one at Edina-West in 1978 and 11 since joining the Eden Prairie staff.

"The championships and the records don't mean as much as the relationships," Gaughran said. "I was able to coach a lot of great kids in Edina and Eden Prairie. The sport I was coaching at the time was always my favorite."

Adding up all of his high schoolsportsseasons, Gaughran said the 2020 Eden Prairie football season will be his 144th.

"I began teaching and coaching at Blooming Prairie High School in 1962," Gaughran said. "I heard that Gene Cherne [one of the football assistants] was leaving Edina, so I applied for the job. After my interview, I had a teaching job and three coaching jobs."

For most of his time in Edina, Gaughran taught eighth-grade geography and eighth- and ninth-grade history. He said he enjoyed the classroom experience immensely.

On the coaching side, Gaughran said he was lucky to land jobs assisting two hall-of-fame coaches, Canakes and Grant, along with Edina baseball coach Jim Luther.

"Stav Canakes was knowledgeable on both sides of the ball, and the same is true of Mike Grant," Gaughran said.



Dick Gaughran

"Kids never forget coaches like them."

Not long ago, Gaughran found a special letter in his mailbox at home. It was from a former Edina-West athlete, who had played for coach Gaughran years ago. Gaughran read the letter, and then read it again. The theme was that Gaughran had showed an interest in a boy whom others had ignored or written off. Through his actions, Gaughran helped the boy enjoy football and get through his troubled high school years. The boy grew up to be a prison psychologist and now helps people the same way Gaughran helped him more than 40 years ago.

"I am humbled that he took the time to write," Gaughran said. "I must have made an impression. Every night when I go to bed, I pray that I will be the kindest person I can be. Whenever I am teaching and coaching, I want to connect with kids and treat them with respect."

The Coach Who Made a Difference

Dear Coach Gaughran:

You may not remember me. You were my teacher, coach and driver's education instructor at Edina-West High School [in the late 1970s]. I was a troubled kid back then - from a broken family, caught up in using drugs, hanging out with the wrong crowd and breaking most of the rules. However, I did enjoy football, which may have been the only constructive activity of my life at that time.

I am writing to say thank you for what you did for me. You probably don't realize the impact you had on my life and future. I am confident you have had similar impact on many other athletes and students.

Most of the teachers and coaches seemed to hear about my reputation as a troubled and difficult kid, and would respond in a critical or dis-

tancing manner. You, however, treated me with respect, kindness and patience - like I was a kid with value. While you referred to me as "The Ornerly One," I knew you had some appreciation for my personal struggles and the anger I was wrestling with. When I defied your authority, you rolled with it and patiently redirected my attention, as you knew I wasn't really angry at you, but at life. Your manner of relating to me had a profound impact on me. As I look back on it now, I think of you as an Angel from God, sent to help redirect me from a destructive lifestyle.

You probably don't recall that I became a Christian in 11th grade. I remember once going back to visit you in your classroom, but I am not sure I shared my conversion with you. God changed my life and gave me a purpose. Interestingly, my purpose as an adult has been quite similar to how

God used you in my life - to show concern, care and love to those struggling in life. I am a psychologist and have worked 25 years with inmates in the State Prison and Forensic Mental Health Facility, which is part of the state hospital system. I am still inspired by your role model - loving the seemingly unlovable person, who is often angry, rebellious and ornery. Thank you for caring about me, tolerating my struggles and modeling a manner of relating to troubled youth that inspires me today.

[Eden Prairie High football coach] Mike Grant told me you just turned 80. Happy Birthday! I am inspired, once again, to hear that you are still coaching kids. I can imagine you on the field and hope you are doing well. I am sure there are one or two kids just like me who you are influencing today.

Thank you, again, for all you have done for me! You will never be forgotten.

Royals lose the opportunity to defend state track titles

Coach Nick Lovas sees COVID-19 erase the season

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After winning the Minnesota State High School League and True Team Class AAA state championships last season, Hopkins High boys track and field coach Nick Lovas had high hopes for 2020.

Unfortunately, for the Royals and every other high school track and field team in the state, both state meets have been cancelled, leaving Lovas and others wondering what might have been.

"We were able to practice for one week before the State High School League closed spring sports practices," Lovas said. "I saw great enthusiasm and great possibilities. We had more se-



Coach Nick Lovas

niors than usual - about 20 boys and 20 girls. For six or seven senior boys, it was their first time out."

Prior to the beginning of official practice in April, five experienced athletes led the Hopkins boys team in captains' practices.

"They did a great job in pre-season," Lovas said. "Our captains are seniors Evan Komshlies and Niko Schmanski

and juniors Sam Duffing, Ben Haberman and George Jackson."

Jackson, who specializes in track and field, was expected to compete for individual state titles in the high jump and both hurdles events this spring. He won the 110-meter high hurdles title and placed second in the 300s in the 2019 State True Team Meet.

"After we won the championships last year, our kids were excited to compete for spots on the podium again," Lovas said. "I will miss the joy of seeing the kids compete for each other. We have a unique program at Hopkins, with the boys and girls training as one team. It is a small-town culture. The boys and girls train together, and there is one coaching staff. We have great camaraderie among the Lake Conference coaches. All of them are great colleagues, and one thing I will miss is seeing them at the meets."

The Hopkins girls, with head

coach Andrea Yesnes, were expected to contend for state berths this season with a nucleus of outstanding returnees, led by hurdler and jumper Ktyal Price and sprinters Alyia Brown and Alayna Contreras.

Tonka Track

The Minnetonka girls track and field team, always a state title contender, was in good position to make a run at the title with the return of sprinters Desiree Ware and Ella Roach, who helped the Skippers win the 4x200-meter relay at state last year. Tonka's 2020 roster lists all four girls who won state in the 4x800 relay - Annalise Johnson, Kate LeBlanc, Kylie Melz and Anna Wander. High-jumper Bryn Senske was eager to add points.

Coming off a good season of Nordic skiing, junior Austin Hunter was fit to compete for honors in the 800-meter run. Captain Max Lauerman was gearing up to go to state in the 1,600 and the 3,200.

EP Track

Eden Prairie's boys and girls track teams have several elite athletes on their 2020 rosters.

Start with senior pole-vaulter Ben Sather, who was also an Eagle football captain last fall. He was a good choice to clear 15 feet this spring. Another Eagle standout, senior Jake Derouin, placed fifth in the 1,600 at the prestigious Hamline Elite Meet last spring. Xavier Watson cleared 6-6 in the high jump for section place at 2019 State True Team. Liesl Paulsen was ready to lead the Eagle girls team with her fast 1,600 time. The Eagles have two premier pole-vaulters, Kenzi Kluge and Carolyn Tarpey. Another elite athlete is sophomore Nia Holloway, who runs the 400 and high jumps. Rachel Boelke in the 800 is another Eagle who would have contended for a state berth.

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