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PHOTOS BY DAN CONDON
 Tom Schuller has coached several levels of six different sports, but is best known as the head coach of the Jackson County Central football team, which he has coached to 177 wins.

Schuller's list of highlights nearly endless in 35 years

(Editor's note: In the absence of sports, a Jackson County Central coach will be featured each week with a series of questions and answers. The series continues this week with head football coach Tom Schuller.)

Where did you grow up?
 I grew up in Titonka, Iowa, a large city of about 700 people at the time.

What sports did you play in high school?
 I played football, basketball, baseball and golf in high school.

What were some of your and your team's accomplishments in high school?

Our biggest accomplishment was making it to regions in basketball. Individually, I was the runner-up medalist in the State Line Conference my 10th-grade year in Golf. You would never know it now as bad as I am in golf now! I gave it up for four years when I played college baseball. Then it gave me up!

Where did you go to college?
 I went to Iowa Central Community College for a year-and-a-half, then transferred to Upper Iowa University.

Did you play sports in college? If so, which ones?
 I was very proud to have been a four-year starter in baseball in college. My claim to fame in college would probably be that I was a college teammate of Rick Heller at Upper Iowa. He is currently the head baseball coach at the University of Iowa.

What is the most memorable game you ever played in and why?
 My most memorable game was probably in amateur baseball with the Jackson Bulls in 1990 or 1991. Tyrone Wacker had put in a lot of time working with me for the opener of the season. We were playing the Worthington Cubs. The Bulls were not very good at this time. I struck out 17 and walked three in six innings. We still got 10-runned, which is nearly impossible!

What did you learn from playing sports?
 I learned to compete and overcome adversity in many forms. It helped

teach me to sacrifice for the good of the team. We play on many teams (God's team, family, work, friends to name a few).

What coach or coaches have had the biggest influence on your life and why?

Paul Krohn in high school. He could draw every ounce out of you. It was unacceptable to be out-competed. Tyrone Wacker is the best teacher of football and baseball I have seen. He has the great ability to make you be your very best and want to keep getting better. He always emphasized taking a good, hard look at what we were doing coaching-wise before being critical of players. Everything we have accomplished in the football program here we owe to him. I am very fortunate to have him as a mentor and friend.

Who was your favorite athlete growing up?
 Greg Landry (quarterback for the Detroit Lions) and Barry Sanders

Who is your favorite athlete now?
 Matt Stafford

What sports have you coached and where?
 Volleyball – ninth grade (no, that is not a misprint)
 Baseball
 Girls' softball – head coach
 Girls' basketball – junior high, ninth grade, B-squad and head coach
 Boys' basketball – ninth grade
 Football – Ninth grade, B-squad and head coach

Why did you get into

coaching?
 My dad always said if you love what you do you never work a day in your life. I love helping and working with kids. What better job than teaching and coaching is there to get these? I love the Jackson and Lakefield community. It has been a great place for my family to live in.

What are your favorite things about being a coach?

I get to coach with my son, my best friend and other close friends. I also get to work with awesome kids in these communities. Working with these students keeps me young. I greatly value being able to coach kids to compete hard. I want our kids to succeed. To do this, it's our job to not allow our guys to be a bunch of cake eaters.

How would you describe your coaching philosophy?

Number one is to assemble great, competent, hard-working assistants around me. I have an incredible staff. We have to be very flexible with our coaches with their different jobs, as well as the players with the summer schedule.

I try very hard to reward players who have put the time in to become good players.

I believe in being very honest with players, even when it could be a little painful.

I let players know that when they give it their best, it is always good enough for me.

Last of all, we play football; there is plenty of room for fun!

What has been the biggest highlight of your coaching career?

A nearly impossible question when you have coached 35 years in one place!
 The 1997, 1998 and 2015 Prep Bowl appearances and the 2001 state title in football.

Winning the state baseball championship in 2004.

Making it to the girls' basketball state tournament in 2011.

Being the No. 1 seed in my first year of being a head softball coach in 1987.

This year's run to state football with most of these guys being three-year starters and awesome kids.

Breaking Louis Swearingen's win record and coaching in the High School All Star Game.

What is your favorite memory as a coach?

My favorite coaching memory is actually when Scott Kruse and some parents and I were eating supper after a basketball tournament. Steph Bot's family had left JCC to farm by Marshall. While eating I said, "I sure hope we can get a basketball coach hired." Scott, matter-of-factly, stated the parents had decided I was doing it! Turns out he was right! I am glad they did. I really enjoyed coaching those girls. Those scrawny girls were the toughest kids I ever coached! Even bus rides were fun with that team.

See **SCHULLER** on B2



Tom Schuller says one of his favorite things about coaching is the opportunity to coach with his son, Nolan (right). Tom Schuller also got to coach his son at Jackson County Central.



PHOTO BY JEN TEWES
 This year's Jackson County Central graduation ceremony had a much more celebratory feel, as evidenced by the smile on Haley Tvinnereim's face after receiving her diploma.

Graduates get a pretty awesome parking lot party

The Jackson County Central Class of 2020 got robbed of a lot of things the last few months.

Sure, everyone has been affected by the coronavirus, but this year's seniors lost out on the last chance to do a lot of things.

Go to school. See friends. Attend prom. Play sports. The list goes on and on.

This year's senior boys lost out on a chance to play at the state basketball tournament in the winter and a chance to return to the state golf tournament this spring.

This year's senior girls didn't get to show off their hard work on the diamond, track or golf course.

And that's just in sports.

There was no play this spring. Concerts were canceled. Daily interaction with teachers and classmates — things we all take for granted — were snatched away.

But not graduation. The chances of a graduation ceremony looked pretty bleak for a while, but, man, did JCC pull off a good one.

When plans were announced for an outdoor ceremony in the parking lot, I thought it might be kind of neat.

When we found out graduates got to walk across the stage to get their diploma, it added a special touch.

What I didn't expect was just quite how awesome it would be.

Horn honking was encouraged.

Air horns were perfectly fine.

Cheering was a must. Hundreds of people showed up for a mile-long parade.

Simply put, it was a celebration.

And that's exactly what it should be.

Graduation is a huge accomplishment, whether it came easily or required plenty of extra help and tutelage.

A normal graduation ceremony is fine, but they're all kind of the same.

The band plays, a few seniors speak and everyone gets a diploma — while holding the applause until the end.

This year's was different.

Sure, the band was missed and so were whichever family members couldn't cram inside the graduate's vehicle.

Hopefully that can change in the future.

I've heard a few parents say a parking lot graduation — or some sort of outdoor celebration — should be the new norm.

Whether that is the case is yet to be determined.

But what is certain is all members of the Class of 2020 will remember their high school graduation. I hope they all thought it was as great as I did.



FROM WAY DOWNTOWN
 Dan Condon

Weiss wins in return to racing

Race at Jackson Motorplex was the first in 77 days for World of Outlaws Late Model drivers

by **BRIAN WALKER**
 Special to the Pilot and Standard

One mistake. One tiny slip-up. One window of opportunity to strike. That's all Ricky Thornton Jr. needed on Saturday night. He got just that on the 53rd lap of the \$20,000-twin Drydene Double Down Invitational at the Jackson Motorplex.

After battling with Chad Simpson all race long, a costly error in Turn 2 sent Simpson over the cushion

and the race lead landed right in the lap of Thornton. Controlling the final seven laps with the previous night's winner, Ricky Weiss, and two-time champion Brandon Sheppard hot on his tail, Thornton fought off the nerves and held on for his first career World of Outlaws Morton Buildings Late Model Series victory.

"This is huge," Thornton said in Victory Lane. "I've always wanted to run a Late Model and Todd and Vicky Burns have made this dream come true for me. I swear I have never gotten nervous in a car, but that was for sure the most nervous I have ever been those final seven laps."

From the jump of Saturday's 60-lapper, it was all about Thornton and Simpson. While Simpson

See **RACE** on B2