

Darby Carlson looks back on 25-year coaching career

CARLSON...
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"If you are judging your success based on wins and losses, your focus is in the wrong spot," he said. Instead, his focus is on what is not in the box score or record books. To Carlson, sports provide the best medium for teaching life lessons to kids. "That is what it's always been about for me," he said. "You can learn so much more I think in competition on the field that you learn in the classroom."

BUILDING CONNECTIONS AND DARBYISMS

During Carlson's coaching stint at Osseo, he made an impact on a man who would one day share the sidelines with him, as a fellow coach.

Mark Cook first met Carlson when Cook was a running back and Carlson was the defensive coordinator for Osseo High School in the 1990s. One of the first things Cook felt when playing for Carlson was a deep sense of pride in the work they did and also create some laughter. "The way he got the best out of the kids was amazing," Cook said.

One year, in particular, Cook remembers the Orioles football defense being a brick wall. If you got past the first line of defense, you sure weren't getting past the second. So one day, when Osseo made it to the state semifinals and got to practice at the University of

Minnesota facilities, Cook remembers taking a hand-off and miraculously getting past the defensive line. All of a sudden, a linebacker came out of nowhere and as Cook said, "lit his ass up."

The first person over to check on Cook was Carlson. Although he wasn't knocked out cold, Cook felt extremely woozy. As soon as Carlson saw that Cook would be alright, he uttered one of his famous Darbyisms: "Did you get the number of the train that hit you?!" It made Cook laugh on the spot.

"He had a special way to connect with kids," Cook said.

Talk to any of Carlson's former players and expect to hear a story about some unique Darbyism. Beware if you hear:

"Oh my grandma!" — a shriek of disbelief.

"Catch the picken ball!" — which is as close as players say Carlson gets to cussing.

"Gotta have sand in the pants!" — getting down and dirty.

"The cream rises to the top" — an ode to Carlson's childhood growing up on a farm. When the milk sat, the cream rose to the top, which is the best milk.

Any player of Carlson knows the way he operates in practice. If you commit a mental error, it's either running to the meat shop advertisement in center field, or writing out a rhyming phrase 20 times about how you won't make the same mistake again, and then reading it out loud to the entire team.

Included within the sporadic Darbyisms, though, are nuggets of truth that players latch on to and remember. "It's special to be his very last group to get the last wisdom from him," sophomore Hunter Gerber said. "It's an honor to go out last with Darby. He's a man of high character and he pushes us to be our best in every aspect of life."

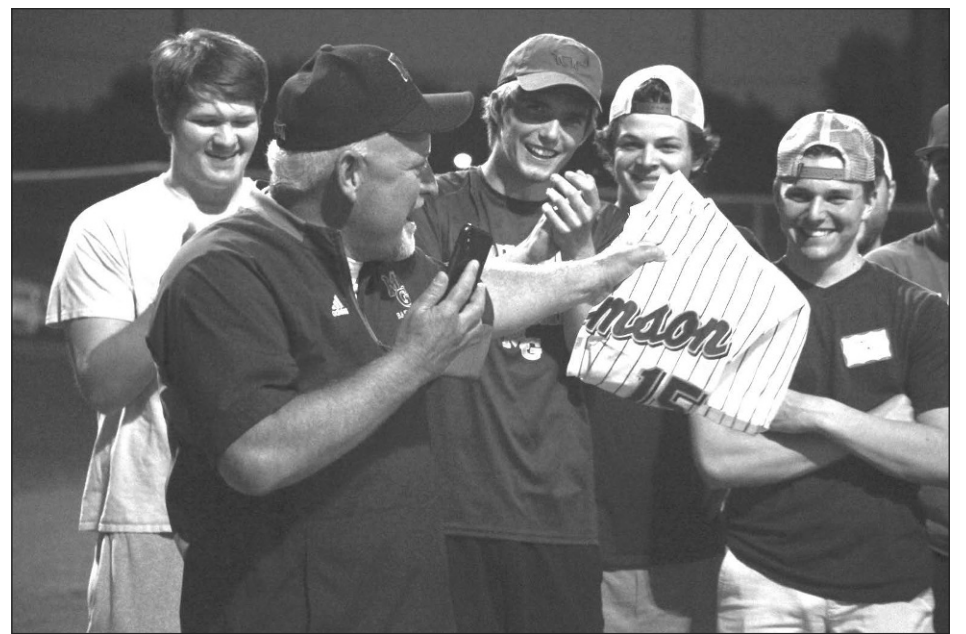
When Cook began coaching and teaching at Maple Grove in 2000, that is the same intention he saw in his former coach. In any season of life, Cook knew that there was one person he could go to with any

question or conversation: Darby Carlson. "Darby was such a huge mentor for me," Cook said. "I always grew up saying I hope my kids got to play for him." Low and behold, Cook's son, Cade, did. The second-generation Cook was coached by Carlson in ninth-grade football and 10th grade basketball.

Off the field, Cook has gotten to know Carlson as more than a coach and colleague, but a spiritual role model, as both men are a part of a Bible study that meets regularly. Early on in Carlson's time at Maple Grove, one of his football players approached him asking if they could start a weekly devotional time. Carlson was all in. Soon, a handful of athletes began to meet on Friday mornings to gather in fellowship and read the Bible, a group they called the Breakfast Club. It didn't hurt that Carlson supplied the donuts and juice for hungry athletes. Eventually, the group got tied in with the organization Fellowship of Christian Athletes and often has nearly 100 kids attend on Friday mornings. Spend a day, a week, a month with Carlson and you'll soon realize there is no off switch for his encouragement. It may not be in the form everyone likes, though. He occasionally raises his voice and is stern at times to players. But that is all in an effort to make them as great as they can be.

For the past three seasons, assistant baseball coach Jeff Peterson has had the pleasure of coaching in the dugout with Carlson, watching how he galvanizes young men to be the best version of themselves. "He cares a lot of every one of his players," Peterson said. "It's not about baseball. He wants them to be successful at every walk of life."

Before taking the field wearing the same uniform, Peterson saw what Carlson was like as an opponent when Peterson played baseball for Park Center in the late 1990s. "He's the face of Maple Grove baseball," Peterson said. "He is not a big stats guy or one to enjoy the limelight. He's more worried about winning the



Darby Carlson cracks a joke towards his current and former players at his postgame retirement ceremony on May 21. (Photo by Sam Johnson)

game." But with built-up passion comes unbridled elation during moments of ecstasy. "There is nothing better than a fired-up Darby Carlson," Cook added.

REPLACING A LEGEND

Attempting to fill Carlson's void at Maple Grove is like trying to replenish the oceans. But in each of the coaches and players he has touched in his long and successful career, a seed of Darby Carlson will live on. And with time, the legacy of the Crimson legend will continue to spread. "Darby is a legend at our school," assistant baseball coach Adam Spurrell said. "Coach C's attitude, work ethic, and passion are truly reflected every day. These kids realize sports are just a part of who they are."

"I'm a better coach and teacher with the time I spent with Darby," Cook said. "I'm a better man, father, husband, and human being thanks to Darby. My hope is that someday someone will say the same about me."

When his time at Maple Grove comes to an end after this season, Carlson is planning to move back home to Parkers Prairie and spend more time with his wife and family. He also has a dream to start an apple orchard on six acres of land that he owns. But what might surprise some people is that he is not yet ready to leave coaching altogether. "It

wouldn't surprise me a lick if I got back into coaching," Carlson admitted, although he said it would be only in an assistant coaching role.

MORE THAN WINS AND LOSSES

It was supposed to be a surprise. Spurrell and other coaches had been planning for a month to honor Carlson at the end of the May 21 primetime game against Osseo. But only a couple of days before, the coaches found out that Carlson was aware of the ceremony. What Carlson didn't expect was the number of people that turned out.

After Maple Grove's 1-0 walk-off win in eight innings, where Carlson called a five-man infield in the eighth inning to quench a bases-loaded, nobody out jam, tens of current and former players, coaches, and family members covered the baseline and foul area, all waiting to give Carlson a handshake or hug. For a man who doesn't love the spotlight, Carlson was the man of the night.

As a self-proclaimed "off-the-cuff guy," when it came to giving a speech, Carlson took the cell phone that doubled as a microphone and talked for nearly five minutes about what it all meant to him.

His million-watt smile went ear to ear when he mentioned his "top-of-the-line" kids and coaches he's worked with and invested

in. His choked-up voice signified his gratitude to his family for all the support they've given him. And his inner baseball fan showed through when he paraphrased New York Yankee legend, Lou Gehrig, by saying, "I consider myself the luckiest man in the world."

When he reflected on that special night nearly two weeks later, he felt the same emotion as he thought about his former players and coaches. "I'm very grateful kids were able to come back for something like that," he said, fighting back tears. "It's pretty meaningful."

All this fanfare and celebration was very un-Darby-like. The man, who doesn't have any social media accounts and compares using Twitter to pheasant hunting, didn't even know he recorded his 400th career win just a few weeks prior until Peterson told him after the game.

No, instead of being on stage, Carlson has always preferred to work behind the scenes. When the lights are off and the crowd is invisible, Carlson shines the brightest.

"It wasn't about the wins and losses," Carlson said after. "The wins and losses are just a result of what we were emphasizing. If you emphasize those life lessons, it results in more success. That is what I hope the program was all about."



Darby Carlson stands on the third-base line during a section playoff game against Wayzata on June 5. Carlson, having amassed over 400 career wins, is finishing up his 25th season as the Crimson baseball head coach. (Photo by John Sherman)

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Testimonials

I am grateful for Shana Bouley, who is willing to sit down with me and my team to help us understand all of the different online media avenues that APG-ECM offers. I am not super "techie" and she is willing to explain things over (and sometimes over) again so that it starts to make some sense. Being in the real estate service industry, it is important for us to have a positive online presence and for our community to know that we are here to help them as they transition into the next chapter in their lives. I feel that in utilizing Digital Targeted Display, Geo-Fencing, Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and ads on their local newspaper website we are able to offer this to our clients and customers. Thank you for all that you are doing Shana and team!

-Michelle Lundeen, Realtor of Team Lundeen-Remax Results

"We continue to advertise with Aaron and APG/Sun Media to market online. He takes care of ad design and comes to the table with ideas. And whether it's our online display ads, Search Engine Marketing with Google or Pre-Roll Video ads - they are all clearly the top drivers of traffic to our website. With challenging times during the pandemic - it has ensured that traffic in-store and online continues to be strong."

-Ron, Appliance Depot

"I continue to be blown away on the creative you design for my online advertising! It fits our brand and is bringing results. Business has been very busy, launching my online campaigns has been the only change to my marketing. Combining that with data from my Google Analytics, I can easily see my digital marketing paying off!"

- Michele, Primp Salon

Advertising with The Anoka Shopper and The Union Herald has provided The American Cooperative of Anoka a platform to inform and promote our independent senior living community to the greater local area. Cindy Brooking has been particularly responsive and creative in her recommendations and support of our efforts. Beyond our print advertising, we have also utilized APG's email blast service to specifically target our key demographic in the area. We know local advertising is key to our success.

-Denise Didier, The American Cooperative

"The digital advertising solutions offered by the APG-ECM County News Review have provided me with great success in reaching those in my target audience who spend a fair amount of time on their smartphones, tablets or computers. Their digital advertising is truly top-notch and diverse, providing a variety of different ways to target your preferred audience, such as by a specific demographic or by zip code. They also provide their digital advertising clients with an interactive and easy to use analytics dashboard, which makes it easy to track your results in real time. My multimedia rep Shana Bouley was knowledgeable about the digital products they offer and extremely helpful in getting our campaign up and running with the trackable dashboard."

-Tony Potter, Marketing/Public Relations, Arrowhead Transit

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Obituaries

David "Chipper" Lee Smith

David "Chipper" Lee Smith (75) of Maple Grove, MN was born in Dolores, CO on 7/21/45. He passed away in his home on 5/29/2021.

Chipper grew up ranching and learning to love the great outdoors. He then went to and graduated from Colorado State University, where he met his wife. He started a career with GE right out of college and then retired after 37 years. Throughout his life he was an avid fisherman and hunter.

Chipper was known for his humor and his unique tall tales. He loved to travel and see the history of our states.

He is preceded by his daughter Brandi Wynne Smith Hunt.

He is survived by his wife Linda (Trophies by Linda); daughters Trista (Matt) and Dori; grandchildren Martina (Sam) and Brok(Cassie); great-grandchildren Chloe, Abrianna and Brynlee.

We will be holding a wake/open house on Sunday, June 13, 2021, 3pm-5pm at his home 6292 Louisiana Ct N #D, Brooklyn Park, MN 55428.



Terry Benson

Age 73 of Osseo and Maple Grove, passed away on June 4, 2021.

She was a loving wife, mother and grandmother and will be deeply missed.

Preceded in death by her parents, Donald and Irene Francis; and husband, Tom Benson.

Survived by children, Tracy Benson, Troy (Juliana) Benson; and granddaughter, Julie Ann.

Private services. Donations preferred to St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Osseo.

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