

HIGH SCHOOL

North Jersey's 25 iconic coaches of the last 25 years



Darren Cooper

NorthJersey.com

To mark 25 years since start of the new century, [columnist Darren Cooper selected North Jersey's 25 iconic coaches of the last 25 years](#), and commissioned special portraits to be taken by our photographers.

To add to the honor, NorthJersey.com reached out to individuals who know these iconic coaches best to write a personal essay about each icon, revealing a side of them that is usually hidden.

These honest, heartfelt essays demonstrate the impact each of these 25 coaches has made in our community since 2000.

Note: Submissions have been lightly edited for brevity and clarity.



Evan Baumgarten

Evan was my business partner and rival coach for nearly 40 years, and he's still working his magic.

As the winningest boys soccer coach in North Jersey history, he's earned countless championships and coaching awards, but what truly drives him is his love for the game and for his players.

Off the field, Evan holds everyone to a high standard, and anyone who's watched Ramapo play can attest to the consistent team chemistry year after year. This is a testament to the dedicated, hard-working, and caring coach he is, both on and off the practice field.

Our shared soccer journey has been truly special, and I'm grateful to call Evan my friend.

<Former.Don.Bosco.soccer.coach.Roy.Nygren



Dave Bell

Dave Bell is an icon in North Jersey, not because of his boisterous presence or loud commands, but because of the quiet, steady and relentless way he built a legacy.

I had the privilege of working alongside Coach Bell for almost 20 years – first as a wrestler and later as his assistant coach. From the moment he arrived at Bergen Catholic, he exuded a calm confidence. He wasn't a man of yelling or flash. Instead, he was the type to pull you aside, ask about your life, and genuinely listen.

When Coach Bell came to Bergen Catholic, the program was far from a national powerhouse. But he had a vision to turn Bergen Catholic wrestling into a national force. It wasn't immediate, but through years of hard work, dedication, and his unwavering belief in the potential of every wrestler, he built one of the most successful programs in the country.

His legacy is written in the names of legendary wrestlers like Nick Suriano, Shane Griffith, Joe Trause, Johnny Sebastian, Joseph Grello, Kevin Mulligan, Robert Howard and Jacob Cardenas, to name just a few who etched their names in North Jersey wrestling history.

What makes Coach Bell so special is not just his success, but the relationships he built along the way. He mentored, guided, and cared for every single athlete, regardless of their talent.

For me, Coach Bell was more than a coach. He's a mentor, and most importantly, a friend. His legacy is alive in the culture he built, one that will continue to impact generations to come.

<Current.Bergen.Catholic.wrestling.coach.Dom.Santoli



Rob Brady

It's hard to figure out how Rob Brady has time to breathe at times, never mind coach one of the most successful small-school sports programs in North Jersey history.

He thought he was destined for law school after college, but instead came back to his hometown of Hasbrouck Heights when then Coach Jeff Kresch asked him to help out during his sophomore year at Seton Hall. Kresch had been a coach and mentor when Brady lost his father years earlier and Brady couldn't say no.

When Brady graduated in 1993, he eschewed the law to start a business and substitute teach so he could keep coaching. In 1996, he was named the youngest track coach in Bergen County. He never left.

His boys and girls teams have rarely lost, winning more than 90 league, county and sectional titles combined, as well as the 2023 and 2024 Group 1 girls state titles.

In 30 years as the girls head coach, he's never lost a dual meet, with a current winning streak of 250 meets, believed to be the longest such streak in American history. The boys last lost in 2005 and have a current streak of 144 in a row.

He did all this while leading the Hasbrouck Heights Senior Citizens and Recreation programs for most of the last 25 years, and for the last three years serving as the Borough Administrator for his beloved hometown. If you've ever seen Brady at a track meet, you know why. He runs a well-oiled machine with all of his assistants knowing their jobs. He's an Aviator icon and one for North Jersey as well.

<.NorthJersey;com.track.and.field.reporter.Paul.Schwartz



Danny Brown

Have you ever walked into a gym and immediately felt hated? Coach of the Year. Three group championships. Six state sectional championships. Seven county trophies. What Danny Brown stood for, people despised.

The program at Saddle River Day was built from ashes, and its rise demanded a price not everyone was willing to pay. With a hate that big, the only way to tear down a dynasty was to create lies and spin untrue stories with the media.

What set Coach Brown apart was his belief in potential. He saw not just who we were, but who we could become. Coach always believed his strongest players weren't necessarily the starters, but the ones he trusted to close – the finishers. Those were the players who had earned the right to be on the floor when it mattered most. He would remind us in those moments: "Basketball is a game of runs, do not take your foot off the gas."

Most people hated him, but the truth is, most of them never even knew him. Everyone wanted to dislike him because he demanded so much. But deep down, everyone wished they could accomplish the things he had. He taught me that at the top, it is very lonely. His drive, his vision, his relentless pursuit of excellence—that's what made him unforgettable.

You didn't always love how he pushed you, but you couldn't help but respect the results. And truthfully, if you don't stir up that kind of reaction, then you probably aren't doing anything worth noticing.

Those truths continue to guide me, reminding me that success is built in the quiet, unseen moments of hard work and sacrifice. And when that work leads to something great, it will always be met with both admiration and criticism. In the end, that's how you know it made a difference. How you are remembered carries on through what you leave behind.

<Former.Saddle.River.Day.assistant.basketball.coach.Megan.Thomas



Jacob Brown

Over 50 years ago, when I was a young reporter, Jacob Brown – who went by Jock at the time – was a young coach. A Penn State graduate, he ended up in Ridgewood in 1971 almost by accident, a self-described "farm boy" from outside of Pittsburgh who ended up in a place he'd never heard of.

Jock gave way to Jacob, and he lifted girls track and cross-country in Bergen County at the outset of state competition, pioneering events such as the Ridgewood Invitational and Ridgewood Girls Relays, as well as coaching some of the greatest teams in both seasons that the state had ever seen.

He founded both sports at the school in the 1971-72 school year and by the time he retired in 2015, his teams had won more than 150 league, county, sectional and state championships.

His 1992 and 1999 cross-country teams are the only North Jersey girls teams in state history to win the State Meet of Champions, and the 1988 Group 4 state-title track team is among the greatest teams in state history. The 1983 four-mile relay team of Margaret Scutro, Beth Pringle, Mary Ellen Mileski and Patti Mileski set a national record that stood for 17 years is still the Bergen County record.

But it's the passion that stands out to me. The passion that showed in his final three years of coaching, after the Maroons had failed to medal in the SMOC for nine years, provided three consecutive top-six finishes in his final three years of cross-country. His distance medley and 4-x-800 relay teams won national championships in 2012, 40 years after his first year with a clipboard and a whistle.

Jacob turns 80 on Aug. 27 and is still active in running his website, helping run several of the most important invitational meets each year, and teaching skiing in the winter. All with the same energy and passion he showed when he first started more than a half century ago.

<.NorthJersey;com.track.and.field.reporter.Paul.Schwartz



Mike Campanile

My "Dad" aka "Coach Campy!"

For my entire life, those two names have been synonymous. His influence on our family has played out on multiple levels. As Coach Campy approaches his 80th birthday and is in his seventh decade coaching football, I think of two words: Legacy and Impact.

He started out as a Pop Warner coach and built a dynasty. When he finally received a high school head coaching opportunity, he quickly turned around two programs, taking Paramus Catholic to the state championship, ultimately winning a ring in 1997.

But that's not his legacy. His legacy is influencing thousands of players and hundreds of coaches, both directly and indirectly. He's had an exponential impact on the world because so many of us who played and coached for him followed in his footsteps. He taught us to love our teammates, to play hard for each other, to be fearless, "to never back up an inch," and many other things that have been the guiding principles of my life and my career.

Coach Campy is the definition of old-school tough, but he ran a new-school offense that was way ahead of its time. Still to this day, he challenges his players and demands their best. He never minces words, and you never have to doubt how he feels about you.

His demands and criticisms are never about performance; they're always about effort and toughness. There is no worse feeling than to let him down, and no better feeling than to know he's proud of you. Regardless you always know he loves you.

The same principles that were taught at Center Rec in Fair Lawn hold true at the highest levels of high school football, the Big Ten, the ACC and the NFL. My brothers, my sister and I are all extremely proud to represent Coach Campy's Legacy and we all hope to have a fraction of his Impact on the world.

<Syracuse.assistant.football.coach.Nunzio.Campanile



Stan Fryczynski

Go to a cross-country meet where Secaucus High School is competing. Look for a light blue bucket hat. Then say hello to one of the best people in high school sports and a guy who understands his purpose better than almost anyone in the world. That's Stan Fryczynski.

He's coached for more than 50 years, starting right after he graduated from Saint Peter's in 1974 and coached his brother Kevin at St. Peter's Prep. In 1978, he found himself at Secaucus as the school's first head boys and girls cross-country and track coach.

He's really never left, serving as the Patriots' athletic director from 1989-2011, when he retired from being both track coach and athletic director. He still coaches cross-country at the school, where he's won more than 500 dual meets and 13 conference titles, winning sectional and Hudson County titles as well.

There's a lot more to Fryczynski. He has been the executive director of the North Jersey Interscholastic Conference since its creation in 2010 and has been a guiding force in North Jersey sports for even longer. In 2023, Secaucus made official what had been evident for decades, naming the Track and Field Complex in his honor.

It all comes back to the smiling man in the light blue bucket hat, which he adopted early in his career to keep from roasting in the sun while coaching summer track. Find it at a cross-country and make sure the guy wearing it has a well-groomed beard. Then say hello. You'll be glad you did.

<NorthJersey;com.track.and.field.reporter.Paul.Schwartz



Drew Gibbs

I miss coaching against Drew Gibbs and his teams.

High school football is a game of styles. Ramapo-River Dell. Ali-Frazier or more like Ali-Ken Norton. Smooth vs. unorthodox. Ramapo and River Dell. On paper, no two programs could be more different. Ramapo was metronomic. River Dell was syncopated. Ramapo and its Hall of Fame coach Drew Gibbs were a gourmet meal – precise ingredients of players with a master chef. River Dell was at best a dumpster dive of leftovers that nobody else wanted, including the coach.

Coach Gibbs could lead an orchestra (I think he did do that). I am not sure I could even open the door for a garage band. River Dell used Ramapo game film, highlighting Ramapo to instruct players on how to do things properly in every phase of the game. Drew's teams

prepared and displayed schematic and fundamentally-sound football every game. They were my absolute favorite team to watch on film – even in some games when we were playing them. When they had it rolling, it was like there was no opponent on the field.

There was no week in the offseason where I did not spend at least two hours watching Ramapo film. Not only to prepare for them – we played them 10 times in a 58-game stretch spanning five years – but to learn how to coach the game at a higher level.

We learned that the only way we could stay in the game was to possess the ball. Not counting scoreboard clips on a film, we needed to keep the game to 139 plays or less. Get it to the fourth quarter within seven points. We would have a puncher's chance to win the game. One-hundred-forty plays or more and our team was no longer participants in the game. We became part of the audience.

<.River.Dell.football.coach.DJ.Nimphius



Tony Gonzalez

Tony and I have been best of friends for more than 50 years. We first met in the freshman football locker room; he was from Little Ferry and I was from Ridgefield Park, and have been friends ever since.

Tony has always taken sports, either playing or coaching, very seriously and gives his best in whatever matters to him. He always wants to do the best job he can do. Not being the biggest or strongest person in the room, he'll work harder than anyone else to be the best.

We played football and baseball together in high school. Our football team was small and tough and had great coaches, Pete Natale and staff, who got the most out of us. That's one of the things Tony kept with him when he became a coach.

After we graduated high school, we both went to college at Glassboro State College (Rowan University). We played all four years. We had a pretty successful career there under coach Dick Wacker and staff. The two football coaches, Natale & Wacker, were the most influential people in his life. They installed into Tony what hard work, dedication and preparation can do to be successful in whatever you do, and Tony never forgot that.

I had the pleasure of coaching with Coach G (that's what the kids called him) as a volunteer coach on the varsity baseball team at our alma mater. Here is where I got to see him work with the players. He was tough and demanding. He was a disciplinarian and teacher, while also being a fatherly type of coach.

Tony always had a special sense with the way he treated players and students. He is able to sense if a student or athlete was troubled and would find a way to try and help them work through it, and there are a lot of students who love seeing him after they graduate and thank him for his guidance while in high school. Some still call him today. Being he didn't have children of his own, all the students and athletes he coached are his children.

If I were in a "foxhole" fighting for my life, Coach G is the one I want next to me. I've been blessed to have Tony in my life. We've helped each other and will continue to help each other through our lifetime.

<.Former.Ridgefield.Park.assistant.coach.Matt.McArow



Jim Jacobsen

After coaching Bergen Catholic in the 2004 state football championship, I was ready for my next challenge. I approached Coach Jake with a passion for golf and expressed an interest in helping with the golf program. I was able to get a firsthand look at a legend at work.

Coach Jake amassed 1,239 wins with only 43 losses. His teams won 11 state titles and 25 county titles and was named Team of the Year by *The Record* 38 times during his 43-year coaching career. I cannot remember all the accolades, but I can remember the look on the kids' faces from the Eastside golf team when they showed up at High Mountain GC and found that Coach had collected clubs, balls and bags for their team.

I recall Coach waiting in the Echo Lake CC parking lot for a St. Joe's player who arrived late, getting him to his assigned hole just in time saving the Green Knights from disqualification. I remember the team staying to watch the playoff between Don Bosco and Wall because Coach felt it was important to support one of our local teams and it was the right thing to do.

Coach created an end-of-the-year JV Tournament, named after his late father-in-law and JV coach, Jay A. Oberdorf. The numbers have grown and more than 100 JV players participate annually.

Above the exit door of the golf simulator room at BCHS, dedicated to Coach, is a plaque with Coach's favorite saying: "It is nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice." A motto I live by today. A motto embodied every day by Coach Jake.

<.Former.Bergen.Catholic.assistant.golf.coach Ben.Tonon



Jeff Jasper

My guess is that more has been written in New Jersey newspapers about the "iconic" Jeff Jasper over the last half century than about any other pro, collegiate, or high school coach. But here's the secret: You don't know Jasper. You've seen the wins, the championships, the awards. But if that's all you focus on, you'll miss who he really is.

Jasper is a person forged by his parents' values, the hell of Vietnam, and the influence of friends and colleagues like Joe Poli and Ken Harrison. At his core is Lois; his wife, his compass, his constant.

You might wonder how, after 50-plus years of coaching and teaching, he still connects so deeply with each new generation of students and athletes. The key? He knows who he is, and he wants to know who they are. Great coaches are great teachers, and great teachers

are great listeners. For Jasper, inclusivity isn't a trend; it's a foundation. Everyone is welcome. He's never cut a player. If you show up, there's a role for you.

He's also a fighter. Early in his career, he sued the Board of Education to demand Title IX equity for female teams and coaches. In the classroom, his teaching is dynamic, challenging, full of guest speakers, real conversations and learning that sticks. The basketball court is simply a continuation of that classroom.

He never stops learning or mentoring. He still attends coaching clinics, meets with peers, and recently completed an intensive summer course on AI in education. At PV, he's woven into the school's fabric; whether having his students collaborate with students from Finland or performing in the talent show, he's there when called upon.

Jasper shares what he knows. He's sought by teachers of all levels for guidance and input.

His practices are open to coaches of all levels. In any given year, you might find a former coach observing, learning, preparing for their own return. Coaches seek his recommendation. Athletic directors call him for references.

Maybe that's the final part of the secret: He gives. Freely. Generously.

And at the end of the day, he's still Jasper.

<.Pascack.Valley.social.studies.teacher.and.podcaster.Ken.Sarajian



Tony Karcich

Coach Tony Karcich was not only a high school football coach, but a mentor and a guiding force in my life. His leadership extended beyond the field, and his influence shaped my character in ways I will carry with me forever. Under his tutelage, I learned what it truly meant to give my best – no matter the circumstances.

From the first practice, Coach Karcich made it clear that mediocrity was never an option. His passion for the game was contagious, and his drive to see his players succeed pushed us all to new heights. However, what set him apart was how he led by example. He didn't just talk about hard work, he lived it.

Whether it was staying late to watch game tape, leading team discussions, or working through his own challenges, Coach Karcich showed us that commitment wasn't just about showing up – it was about giving everything you had, every single day.

He demanded excellence, but in a way that made us respect him rather than fear him. He had an innate ability to understand each player's strengths and weaknesses, and he used this knowledge to push us to perform beyond what we thought was possible. He wasn't just building a football team, he was shaping young men who would go on to tackle life's challenges with the same discipline and perseverance he instilled in us on the field.

Coach Karcich taught me lessons that extended far beyond football. He showed me that success comes from consistent effort, resilience in the face of adversity, and, above all, an unwavering commitment to personal integrity. His impact on my life is immeasurable, and I'll always be grateful for the role he played in shaping the person I am today.

<Current.St;Joseph.football.coach.Augie.Hoffmann



Melissa Landeck

When Melissa Landeck took over the volleyball program at Old Tappan, it might have seemed like the gates to beating Old Tappan had opened. But Coach Landeck had other plans for her future there. She took over the reins and never looked back.

There would NEVER be an easy win vs. a team coached by her, and her teams are ALWAYS well prepared. Every time you play an Old Tappan volleyball or softball team, you have to be ready for a tough battle. She has won the Bergen County Tournament in both volleyball and softball. Not many people can say that.

What makes Coach Landeck tremendously successful are her high standards and commitment to excellence. She grew up playing high school sports during an era in Bergen County that celebrated discipline and hard work, and rewarded the success of your

efforts. She continued her athletic career as a catcher for Seton Hall. She has taken that experience and become arguably the hardest-working coach in the area. Her commitment to her student athletes is unparalleled.

Coach Landeck puts in the time and effort to build a program. She can be found much of the summer in the gym or out on the field, coaching girls as young as third grade, cracking jokes and sharing ice pops during the breaks.

Aside from the time she puts in coaching two sports, Coach Landeck has run the Bergen County girls volleyball tournament for 25 years while always being a contender for the title. She helps with the BCWCA softball tournament and she also served six years as BCWCA President.

There may not be anyone as dedicated and willing to put in all of the extra time to make Bergen County women's sports grow and flourish as Coach Melissa Landeck.

<.Former.Demarest.volleyball.coach.Beth.Powell

More: [North Jersey's All-Quarter Century Girls Volleyball Team](#)



Joe Leicht

The three words that come to my mind when I think of Coach Leicht are intense, passionate, and WINNER! I have now known Joe for close to 30 years and have worn different hats during that time: friend, peer, fan, assistant football coaches together, players' parent, and now coaching rivals with tremendous respect and members of the softball 600-win club.

The first time I coached against Joe was in the 1998 Bergen County tournament. His daughter threw a perfect game against us and earned Athlete of the Week. Since then we have had many intense games. Ironically, we have enjoyed tremendous success on each other's fields in neutral-site games.

Before the 2020 season, when I was offered the Ramapo job, I reached out to Joe to get his thoughts. He told me he thought it was great and I really valued his input. He asked me if my daughter Gia would be staying at Hills as she had just completed her freshman year, and I told him yes you're stuck with her for three more years!

COVID wiped out the first year, then the realigned the leagues put us in the same division. Playing Joe and your own daughter for the league title her senior season honestly was not fun, especially when she led off with a triple. I got the side eye in the third-base dugout as she was high-fiving Coach Leicht. Under his tutelage, she had an amazing season, they won 20-plus games, made the sectional finals, and she earned first team All-County.

Coach Leicht has a way of doing things that consistently produces winners and has stood the test of time both on the softball field, basketball court and football field. He is truly one of the greatest coaches in North Jersey history.

<.Ramapo.softball.coach.Darren.White

More: [North Jersey's All-Quarter Century Softball Team](#)



Sue Liddy

Sue Liddy is truly an icon who has made a huge difference in Bergen County athletics.

Her legacy spans a remarkable 50 years. She started at Holy Angels in 1974 as an assistant athletic director and PE teacher. She has coached basketball, soccer, volleyball, and softball, and she actually coached cross-country for one day... until she lost a runner who took a wrong turn.

Under her guidance, AHA's varsity basketball teams tallied nine league championships, a state championship, five county championships, a Bergen County invitational championship and an amazing 822 wins. Many of her players have gone on to play college ball with great success.

Her tenure as the varsity softball coach spanned 40 years and 334 career wins.

As the JV tennis coach for 18 years, her undefeated seasons are legendary.

Without question, her coaching resume is stellar. She has been honored with numerous state, league, county, *Bergen Record* and *Star Ledger* Coach of the Year awards.

But all of the awards, championships, and victories cannot define what Coach Lid has meant to Holy Angels. Her leadership, integrity, compassion and love for her school, her athletes, her students and her colleagues has created an athletic program highly respected in our county and state.

Besides building a strong athletic tradition, Sue Liddy has inspired and changed countless lives along the way. I doubt there will ever be another coach like her.

<Former.Holy.Angels.athletic.director.Patti.Gorsuch



Tara Madigan

As a person, Tara is the coach and friend that none of us knew we all needed.

She is intensely passionate and fiercely loyal, and has the self-discipline and clarity to set, pursue, and achieve goals without hesitation. If something is meaningful and needs to get done, it was already done two days ago.

As a coach, she ignites that same fire and resolve within her athletes because at her core, she finds her purpose in empowering those around her. She has this incredible ability to challenge others to break through discomfort and complacency to reveal the inner

strength, discipline, motivation, confidence and leadership ability they didn't realize was within them.

I have witnessed it in her players and myself. There were so many small but instrumental variables that were integral to her transformational leadership at Northern Highlands, but at the core was the indisputable fact that the team, and never the individual, was of the utmost importance.

Her hallmark leadership style thrived on balancing high expectations and attention to detail, which was often seen and heard on the sidelines, while forging meaningful and lifelong bonds with her players. Relentless work rates, personal sacrifices, difficult conversations, honest self-reflection and courage during the most challenging moments on and off the field were all possible because her players knew they were never alone, and that the Highlands program, their teammates, and "Mama Mads" were family.

As the saying goes, "The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. [S]he is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things" (Reagan). Madigan has always been a strong force, but leading young women to embrace and thrive on challenges, and be fearless, bold, selfless, reliable, and undeniably strong women of character. That is why she is an icon.

<.Former.Northern.Highlands.assistant.coach.Chriissy.Rabadan

More: [North Jersey's All-Quarter Century Girls Soccer Team](#)



Jay Mahoney

Everything I believe to be true about hard work, accountability and building relationships, I believe because of my dad.

Plenty of outsiders only saw the sideline antics. They thought he was crazy. And well, he is. But what they missed was 40 years of year-round dedication to changing the lives of thousands of kids. The summers and springs of getting to know kids, their family lives, what they're dealing with, and giving them a safe space to learn and grow.

Being his athlete was anything but easy, but if you stuck with it, it was a rewarding and transformative experience for so many people, and they carry those lessons into their adult lives.

It changed our lives, too. Bogota was a second home for my sister and me. She married a Bogota alum. My dad's impact will last for generations.

He made the impossible possible through sheer hard work and unwavering commitment to his teams, and his athletes reciprocated by giving everything they had every time they touched the court or the course.

We all know the accomplishments – we may never see another Group 1 school win the Jamboree, let alone win it twice. But his legacy is the lives changed. No amount of wins (even 704) could leave a better legacy than that.

<Jay's son.Kyle.Mahoney



DJ Nimphius

DJ Nimphius hails from Miller Place on Long Island and competed for the Panthers in football, basketball and track. The son of two educators, it is no surprise that he became a teacher and a coach. He often attended his father's practices and games while he was coaching high school football.

After playing football collegiately at Moravian, DJ's first teaching and coaching experience came at Wallkill Valley. He considers himself lucky to have spent his formative years professionally there with many outstanding mentors including Dr. William Librera, who would go on to become the Commissioner of Education.

Coach moved onto Glen Rock to continue teaching social studies and coaching, and he was a part of several sectional titles as the offensive coordinator on the football staff led by

head coach, Alan Deatt. He was one of the head coaches for a track program that won multiple sectional and state championships at Glen Rock.

In the fall of 2004, he took the reins of the River Dell football program as the head coach. In 21 seasons, he has compiled a 166-67 record while qualifying for the state playoffs in 16 of those seasons (that includes one season when no state playoffs were held due to COVID), winning 10 league/division titles, reaching the sectional finals 10 times, winning sectional championships three times.

Most importantly, while at River Dell, Coach Nimphius has helped to take the football program, overall school culture and athletic department to new heights of unprecedented, sustained excellence. His work ethic is unmatched. Preaching the importance of preparation, accountability, sportsmanship, toughness and multiple sport participation always, he is hyper-competitive and extremely honest.

All of this is usually delivered with a dry, quick wit befitting of his intelligence and keen sense of humor. Countless students have reaped the benefits of his passion for learning, reading, teaching and coaching at River Dell, Glen Rock and Wallkill Valley over the past 40 plus years. If you've met Coach Nimphius, you already know he is one-of-a-kind and among the best to ever teach and coach anywhere.

<Former.River.Dell.athletic.director.Denis.Nelson



Jon Nochese

Most people would probably agree that there's a relatively simple formula for a coach to be considered an icon. *Longevity + Wins + Impact = Icon*.

If you look at Jon Noschese's 28-year head-coaching career at Waldwick, you could say the numbers speak for themselves. But they don't tell the whole story. I submit there is one other part to this equation: *being genuine*. I have had the honor and pleasure of being Jon's assistant coach for all of his years at Waldwick, and I can say, without a doubt, that the trait I would associate most with his success is his genuineness.

What you see is what you get with Jon. He is a man who is devoted to his family, his friends, his faith, his students and his players with unwavering conviction. He works tirelessly to improve his craft so that our players – as individuals and as a team – can reach their fullest potential, both on and off the field.

When student-athletes feel that kind of support, there is nothing they wouldn't do for their coach, their teammates and themselves. That is what Jon has done for the generation of young men who have donned the blue and white for Waldwick. In our program we call it "The Waldwick Way."

The Waldwick Way goes far beyond wins and losses. It's about how the experiences on the pitch can transcend the game. And even though he would respectfully disagree, being able to instill that in others is what makes Jon Noschese truly iconic.

<Waldwick.assistant.soccer.coach.Joseph.Kelly



Beth Powell

The impact Beth Powell has had on New Jersey volleyball, her players, and the Bergen County volleyball coaching community has been tremendous.

With her retirement at the end of 2023, much was said about her impeccable coaching resume – the wins, the championships, the Coach of the Year accolades, etc. What wasn't mentioned was the purity of her love for the game of volleyball and how it influenced so many other people. She passed on her passion for volleyball for more than three decades, as evidenced by the many former players who went on to play in college, become coaches, or now have children who are playing.

During her tenure at Demarest, she set a standard that many of us sought to match. As she drove her teams to be the best time and again, she raised the level of coaching of those of us who either watched or coached against her teams.

Why did you call that time out? What did you say to your team? Why do you have her in that position? These are but a few questions I asked or heard other coaches ask her over the years. She always answered.

As much as she accomplished, she always remained a student of the game who sought to improve it in our area. She loves to watch and analyze it at any level from middle school to international play. She will talk volleyball and share her knowledge with literally anyone, from former players, to new coaches and yes, even rivals. I never met a coach more sought after for their advice and equally eager to share their knowledge.

Although she may be “retired” from being a head coach, I don't see Beth retiring from volleyball any time soon. She remains busy influencing volleyball in our area through the countless relationships she has with her alumni and the coaching community.

<Old.Tappan.volleyball.and.softball.coach.Melissa.Landeck



Gus Schell

Coach Schell is a legend at Hawthorne High, known for his quick-witted coaching style that left a lasting impact on every player who passed through any of his programs.

He has a unique ability to keep athletes on their toes, both physically and mentally. He never misses a chance to slip in a clever remark or zinger during practice, often turning tense moments into opportunities for laughter.

Behind the humor was a deep understanding of the game and an ability to adjust on the fly. Athletes quickly learned that Coach Schell's jokes were never distractions; they were, in fact, part of his genius. He'd say something off-the-wall just before a pivotal play, getting his players to loosen up and think more clearly.

His wit also served as a teaching tool. Using playful sarcasm to point out mistakes in a way that didn't demoralize, but rather motivated his athletes to do better. His playful banter was matched by a razor-sharp focus when it counted, especially during competition time.

On the bus, his one-liners were legendary, and no one could forget the way he could turn a crummy day into an opportunity for growth, all while keeping spirits high.

Coach Schell didn't just teach his players how to win. He taught them how to think on their feet, laugh at themselves, and always stay ready for the next challenge.

Coach Schell was one of the biggest influences on me becoming the coach I am today.

<.Hawthorne.four_time.state.champion.and.current.Bucknell.coach.Katie.Salisbury



Greg Toal

You could say that Greg Toal isn't just one of the North Jersey coaching icons, he is The Coaching Icon of the last 25 years.

Raised in Hasbrouck Heights, and dang proud of it, Toal never lost his Bergen County swagger, and he proved it to the world.

Before Toal, coaches took North Jersey high school teams all over the country to play, but no one did it better and with greater stakes than Toal. He showed the world that this small part of it was tough, smart and well, better than you. And if you wanted to try your luck against North Jersey, just name the time and place, he'll be there.

Success followed Toal wherever he coached: Saddle Brook, River Dell, Hackensack and then at Don Bosco, where his team won two national championships. The number of young men he helped is immeasurable, and you know it when you meet one. They're direct. They're confident. They're ready to go. Whether than means being leaders in politics, business or athletics, they all carry a piece of Greg Toal with them.

His contemporaries called him ‘crazy like a fox’ because things would always seem to work out his way. But it wasn’t luck, it was rooted in deep preparation and the knowledge that every moment and every play mattered, so you better be giving it 100 percent.

Covering Toal’s teams is a highlight of my career. The night Don Bosco beat St. Thomas Aquinas in Florida, when St. Thomas Aquinas easily had the best eight players on the field, I walked up to him after the game and, totally flummoxed at what I had seen just said, “How?”

Toal just gave me a friendly smirk and shrug of his shoulders. It didn’t need to be said how. North Jersey had Greg Toal. That was all we needed.

<NorthJersey;com.columnist.Darren.Cooper



Benjie Wimberly

My father, Benjie E. Wimberly, is an icon because his impact stretches far beyond the football field.

At Paterson Catholic High School, he built a dynasty, winning seven state championships in 15 years, including a remarkable 70-3 record over his final seven seasons. His teams produced NFL talents like Victor Cruz, TJ Clemmings, and Al-Quadin Muhammad. More than 50 of his players earned college football opportunities.

At Hackensack High School, he continued his winning tradition, securing multiple league titles and helping more than 25 athletes earn scholarships. Off the field, he rose to serve his city as a Paterson Council Member At-Large and now as a New Jersey State Senator.

He remains a mentor to former players who have become leaders in every walk of life. As a devoted husband and father of four sons, he is a pillar in our community, leading with integrity, love, and a lifelong commitment to uplifting others.

<Former.Hackensack.football.player.and.Zone2x.founder Justin.Wimberly



Stan Woods

What makes an icon? Coaching for 55 years. Starting a youth program in 1976. Establish traditions. The impact you have giving to people for a lifetime. Team Comes First: Stan Woods. Born to Be Wild! The entrance song to a home match at Emerson/Park Ridge since 1976. Young wrestlers still dream to run out for varsity.

The icon always prepared his team with conditioning, strength training and the EPR wrestling style. Having the athletes understand dual matches are for the team, schools and families. Tournaments are for the athletes. Preparing them with scoring strategies in competition. The whole program is about preparing to wrestle. Know your role on the team. That's what coaches here coach.

The past 25 years, EPR has won 22 of 25 league championships. EPR won the 2016 Group 2 state championship, the only Bergen County team to win a state title. In 2016, EPR went 28-1. We always say it's about the team. In 30 years, when you come back with your children and point to the walls in the school gymnasiums and tell them you were on that team and that team. That's the great memories Coach Woods has instilled in the alumni.

Effort. Never give up and work hard. If you do those three, win or lose, that's what a champion is. Have great assistant coaches and you will be a great coach. Always Team! Stan Woods.

<Current.EPR.wrestling.coach Joe.Mazzeo? a longtime Woods assistant



Jeff Yearing

A great coach is so much more than their wins and losses. Coach Jeff Yearing has not only become one of the top soccer coaches in Bergen County, but he has also shaped the way so many young ladies in the area approach both the game and life.

Beyond imparting his limitless soccer knowledge on his players, he created a high-performing culture that values structure and focus, as well as team camaraderie.

Yearing taught by example. His practices were never thrown together; every drill was carefully thought through and intentionally planned. He would show up early to set up for practice and sometimes spray-paint practice grids on the sidelines. When his players arrived, they knew just by the sight of them that coach meant business that day. They would end up sweaty and exhausted, but they would come out of practice that day more skilled and proud of their accomplishments.

Coach Yearing taught that success comes from not only work, but from a balance of effort, consistency, and fun. I recall one practice in particular, when the team had been working hard on an offensive drill and we had reached the point of exhaustion and could no longer give the drills 100-percent focus. Instead of chastising us for this, Coach Years picked up the lids of two Gatorade water jugs and marched around the field with his “cymbals.”

Players joined in on this parade, marching behind him, some twirling corner flags and others creating instruments with plastic cones and other random items at hand. He made soccer more than a competition; Yearing made it an experience to be enjoyed and remembered.

Coach Yearing’s legacy lives in every athlete who was fortunate enough to have learned from him. Countless players were taught to love the game, bring their best effort to the field, push themselves to be better, but most importantly, to enjoy the ride.

<.Former.All_County.player.and.Ridgewood.assistant.Kristen.(Fletcher).Rosolanko