

**Dick Ernst: The cheers may fade, but memories endure**

**By Dick Ernst / Special to The Journal**

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My career has ended and all the games, wonderful players and parents are gone. But my dreams were not denied me. The great memories are so vivid I get chills reflecting on them.

After coaching an unprecedented 115 hockey and tennis teams during 54 years in the Rhode Island Interscholastic League and in college, I’ve retired completely.

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After playing my final hockey game for Cranston High, I dreamed of being a coach.

Four years of education and playing hockey and tennis at Providence College prepared me for teaching and coaching at North Providence in 1962. In 1964, I was offered the Providence College hockey job. I didn’t take it. I hoped to someday get married and have boys who would play for me in high school. I had no steady girl or wife then.

Destiny led me to my wife, Rollie. In August, we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary. She’s been the foundation I lean on. Her love, help and support enabled me to realize my dreams.

I loved pond games and skating for miles, rising at 4 a.m. to go to the rinks for practices. The joy, anticipation and adrenaline rush in packed arenas, facing formidable coaches and players as well as the whoops, hollers, scowls and laughs motivated my teams with determination to win. Helping players to be better people, coaching average players, All-Staters, future college players, future NHL players or someone like Jack Capuano, currently coach of the New York Islanders, are just some of myriad hockey memories.

Coaching tennis challenged me to teach players to overcome their weaknesses, to control their nerves and to believe in themselves in crucial match situations.

Foremost in my coaching was sportsmanship — my teams winning two Providence Journal Dick Reynolds Sportsmanship awards and five Rhode Island Referees Sportsmanship awards. All great honors.

Winning more than 600 hockey games and winning championships at four different schools in both boys and girls leagues are unique accomplishments that I’m proud of. After coaching tennis at Providence College, winning two undefeated state and New England championships at Cranston East, and four men’s and four women’s titles at Rhode Island College, I can reflect on one uniquely exciting experience.

My wife, Rollie, went back to college at RIC and played for me at ages 49, 50 and 51, compiling a 17-11 singles record. In 1994, we played Plymouth State for the Little East title. Rollie outlasted her 19-year-old Maria Sharapova look-alike opponent for the decisive title point. She was named Little East scholar-athlete for tennis that year.

After college, she coached the Roger Williams University women’s tennis team, registering a win over my RIC squad. She had coached, calmed and never criticized while taking our sons to games and tournaments in New England and Canada after college.

Memories of coaching family members are most vivid. My sons Bob and Gordie helping Cranston East upset Bishop Hendricken to go to the state hockey finals before losing to Mount St. Charles; my son Andy, a sophomore, joining his older brothers on the top line and scoring two goals before Gordie notched the winner to upset Mount — their only loss of the 1985 season — were tremendous achievements.

When the boys were young, we remortgaged our home, took down a garage, stone wall, fireplace and six trees to edge in a singles court allowing them to play every day and improve.

Gordie and Bob were key members of our 1983 and ’84 undefeated Cranston East and New England champs. Gordie is the only four-time schoolboy champ. He and Bob played for the state singles title in 1984 and ’85. Gordie finished his high school singles career with a 97-0 record and was the 1984 Athlete of the Year and 1985 Journal Honor Roll Boy. He was the first athlete inducted into the Rhode Island Interscholastic Hall of Fame.

Gordie, Bob and Andy earned 15 Journal All-State awards in hockey and tennis. Gordie and Bob played hockey and tennis at Brown University. Andy, the 1987 state and New England top scorer, played hockey professionally.

Of all the hundreds of matches I coached, the most exciting, grueling pulsating one was when Bob defeated a terrific Doug James in the semifinals of the 1984 school singles. After splitting sets, darkness encroached and they had to play the third set (won by Bob) the next day enabling him to meet his brother in the finals.

Fame is fleeting and glory fades, but I savor the memories. I taught my players that no matter how battered or broken they were, regardless of odds, never to alibi or quit and to keep coming back from failure and disappointment.

It’s over. I’m still not satisfied. Coaching was what I needed but I have to move along. Love is all that will remain and grow from all these years.

*Dick Ernst lives with his wife, Rollie, in Cranston.*