

WHAT ABOUT BOB?

The man behind the McQuaid Invitational

There are a number of intangibles which make Bob Bradley a great coach and a great contributor to athletics. I will try to relate them to you based on my experiences at McQuaid from 1978 to 1982 and on my observations during the almost twenty years since then.

One of the more unique aspects of competing at McQuaid is the travel. Mr. Bradley always makes a point of seeking out the best competition at meets all over Western and Central New York. In addition, two or three times a season we would travel further afield to find new competition at such places as Penn Relays, VanCordlandt Park, various other meets in the New York Metro area, the 1000 Islands, and even the obscure town of Montrose, Pennsylvania, 30 miles south of Binghamton. Travel was always on a shoestring, usually involving stays at Jesuit retreat houses. Until a few years ago, there were no school vans. We drove in Mr. Bradley's station wagon or vehicles loaned by parents or alumni. Mr. Bradley joked that he allowed my brothers and me on varsity only because our parents had a Chevy Suburban. On our trips home, often late at night, my teammates often gave me the job of making sure Mr. Bradley did not nod off while he was driving. There was nothing requiring Mr. Bradley to give up almost his entire weekend for such trips. He did it to give us the best experience possible.

Mr. Bradley's coaching methods also were focused on his student-athletes. No two seasons were the same and no week within any one season was the same. Mr. Bradley did not coach by studying a textbook or by studying the outline of what he did last year. Instead, he studied his student-athletes. And, as each season unfolded, he figured out week by week what workouts would be best for his team. If the team had a bad meet, he would go back to the drawing board and change his approach for the next week. He has a sixth sense for figuring out what works: how to make a team progress through a season together and peak when Sectionals and States come around.

This knowledge of his team was especially evident at the year-end cross-country team awards dinner. After dinner, without use of notes, he would give an elaborate run-down of the season for nearly every athlete on the team and end with up-beat assessments of the things that each athlete could do to improve next season. At the end of that dinner, each parent was proud of his or her son and every athlete knew he mattered.

Mr. Bradley also had an amazing capacity for studying the competition. I do not know how he found the time, but Mr. Bradley always knew our competition in depth. Track rosters for invitationals and, especially, dual meets, were designed accordingly. He knew how to design a roster to play to our team's strengths and play to the other

team's weaknesses. At cross-country meets, he could always tell us which individuals and teams to look for, whether it was important to go out fast or go out moderately and let the pace win the race. The best place to observe Mr. Bradley's knowledge of the competition is to watch him preside with his microphone and amplifier in the middle of the glen at the McQuaid Invitational. Again, without notes, he announces the standout athletes and standout teams in each race, and often from several hundred yards distance, announces the names and teams of the race leaders and lets us know if they are on meet record pace for the category of the particular race. This goes on for nearly seven hours and for 23 races.

Mr. Bradley most important attribute as a coach is as a teacher. I remember one year we gave Mr. Bradley a McQuaid jacket as a thank you gift and our team captain had it monogrammed "Coach Bradley." That monogram just did not seem to fit. He was more than a coach. He taught us very much about the sport, but he taught us even more about perspective, about what is important in life.

As athletes, he gave us a very strong understanding of the fundamentals of our sport: pacing and tactics, team grouping in cross-country, hand-offs in track, the form and techniques involved in the different track and field events and in the different aspects of cross-country. He also explained his approach to our training. All of this made us more savvy and confident competitors. It may also explain why several of Mr. Bradley's athletes went on to the coaching ranks at McQuaid and/or else-

where: Bill Quinlisk '69, Mike Hasenauer '70, Tony Trama '73, Kevin Burnett '75, Pete Glavin '80, Dave Warth '85 among them.

Mr. Bradley has coached over a thousand student-athletes at McQuaid since 1962. But he has taught several thousand students since 1960, nearly all of his athletes and thousands of additional students over the last forty years. We learned prose and poetry, literature (including an in-depth analysis of his favorite book *Catcher in the Rye*), and exposition. He teaches with an infectious love of the sound and feeling of great English prose and poetry. He also taught us the more practical aspects of organizing our thoughts and putting them on paper. To this day, I still use the approach he taught us when I write a letter, a legal brief, a speech, or, indeed, this essay. (He would criticize it as effusive.)

Finally, as if learning the fundamentals of our sport and of the English language were not enough, Mr. Bradley gave us a sense of perspective. He taught us by word and example. The intense work involved in organizing and presiding over the hundreds of teams, thousands of athletes and dozens of races at the McQuaid Invitational each year is not conducive to obtaining a high performance from his team.

