

Just 'ordinary' as runner but what a coach

Bob Bradley thinks of himself only as a spectator. But the assistant track coach from McQuaid stands out in a crowd.

He is the man behind the area's No. 1 program. The 51-year-old English teacher whose name is synonymous with distance running.

He is a former "very ordinary" half-miler and miler in track and an "even more ordinary" high school cross country runner who became an extraordinary coach in both sports.

He credits his athletes for the success McQuaid has enjoyed over the past 24 years. "The kid is doing it. It's all him out there," he'll tell you. But Bradley teaches his athletes what to do when they are out there alone.

"I always thought of Bob as the top coach in the area," said Bill Quinlisk, McQuaid's third-year head coach who ran under Bradley in the late 1960s. "I listen to everything he has to say."

Bradley came to McQuaid after graduating from St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City, N.J., and Fordham University in the Bronx. He took over the cross country program in 1962 and two years later assumed track duties as well.

HE HADN'T BEEN involved with the running game in more than a decade.

"When I thought back on my running I remembered the training being very casual and low key," he recalled the other day. "Maybe that's why I felt I could coach it. It wasn't complicated."

In the beginning he ran with those athletes he was training. "I was young enough," he said. "I thought they were in a little better shape, so if I was close to getting tired I'd push them just a little farther."

He pushed runners like Mike Connor, Eric Kendrick and Tom Horton and made them the best in the Rochester area. Training techniques may have changed, but Bradley's penchant for success did not.

"When you work with a kid and help him train it's terrific to watch him get out and do it," said Bradley. "I just love to watch that happen."

"Many times at a close meet the kids will come up to me and say, 'You don't look worried at all. How come?' I'll just shrug my shoulders and tell them, 'There's nothing I can do now.' Basketball and football coaches have to react to the way a game is going. We're really kind of spectators."

"IT'S FUN TO watch," Bradley added. "Especially when you know what he's trying to do and what he has done."

Bradley has watched his athletes achieve quite a bit over the years. From that first season with Connor and Greg Sloan and Dick Lenhard to the recent state-championship efforts of cross country runners Rob Smillie, Dave Warth, Steve Rapp, Scott Paterson and Chris Lyboldt.

McQuaid has not lost a City-Catholic League cross country meet since 1971. Bradley was named the Region I Coach of the Year by the National High School Athletic Coaches Association in 1983.

Not bad for a man who has only "vague memories of a not-so-illustrious career."

"It was a good social activity for me," he said of running. "It was a good time."

Sports in general, and running in particular, can be more, though. Bradley knows that.

"Sports are a great way to build up general confidence," he said. "To go out and try something. I think runners usually are kids who feel good about themselves."

"A KID CAN finish way back in a race, but he's improved his time by five seconds and he's tickled pink. There are not many sports that make it possible for a kid like that to compete."

"There are so many different kinds of kids who can participate in track," Bradley added. "When I go around and talk to freshmen to talk up track I tell them, 'Track and field is not a sport. It's six or seven different sports.' The activity is so different between the pole vault, hurdles and the shot put. It's great for getting out and trying something."

That's what Bradley decided to do in 1962. He wasn't offered the coaching position until Sept. 10 that year.

"It was a winger," he said. "I figured, well, we'll give it a shot."

He stepped down as the Knights' head track coach in 1982. But his presence still is felt in the program he built. His distance runners are the leaders of this season's top-ranked team. He is the spectator who has taught hundreds of athletes how to win.

Coaching may have been a "winger" for Bradley. But it was a prayer answered for McQuaid.

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