

COMMITMENT TO THE *Greater Cause*

DC alumnus Obie Mouser's ability to transform lives in and out of athletics has spanned 45 years



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(This article is reprinted with permission. In October, DC alum Obie Mouser was honored by the Alumni Varsity D as a Coach of the Year.)

It was nearly a year ago that Obie Mouser hit the pinnacle in coaching when the longtime mentor led Defiance High School to the Division II state cross country championship.

While it may be the highlight of a coaching career at Defiance High School that spans nearly half a century, it is far from being the most important thing Mouser is about.

Now 68 years of age, Mouser has had an influence on the lives of so many student-athletes that have gone through the halls of Defiance High School while not only teaching, but coaching four different sports during his tenure.

Mouser first came to DHS in 1969 after graduating from Lima Senior in 1964 and Defiance College four years later.

Mouser, who went on to earn a master's degree from Bowling Green State University, taught ninth and 10th grade social studies in his early years at Defiance.

It was at that time coaching entered the picture.

"They were looking for junior high coaches and I said 'I'll do it,'" Mouser reflected. "They had a lot of good kids back then."

Mouser quickly moved up the ladder in basketball, working under Roger Renz in his final two seasons as DHS head coach in 1976-77 and 1977-78.

Renz then took the basketball job at Findlay High School and the Defiance head coach position opened up. Mouser lasted for just three years as the head coach despite a winning record in league play at 15-12.

"In those days there was not much patience. If you lost a couple years they went after you pretty solid.

"I knew the game, but I was not ready for the administration level at that time with all the expectations after Renz."

Meanwhile, he became involved in another sport.

"It boiled down to they needed somebody to coach cross country and I took the job," Mouser said. "I had run and been around it and knew I could help them learn quite a bit."

The first team under the direction of Mouser went 20-0 and just missed going to state. Mark Koenig, a 2014 DHS Athletic Hall of Fame

inductee, was the leader of that 1973 squad.

“Coach always had a driver personality and infected the team with his competitive nature,” Koenig reflected. “In those early years coach still had a strong Lima connection and I think he felt the need to show the big Lima schools that we were just as good or better. The summer before his first season as cross country coach in 1973, he drove us down to Lima to run hills in Faurot Park several times and then to the Lima Distance Carnival at the beginning of the season. He and the team made a statement when we won the team championship, and you could tell he was extremely proud to make the statement in Lima.”

PRIDE

Nothing describes Mouser better than the word pride. It’s a term he has used and continues to use as a coach.

“He had a lot of pride for his school Lima Senior and he brought that over to Defiance,” noted Kirk Lehman, who played basketball for Mouser in the late 1970s and is now head basketball coach at DHS. “He always talked about how athletes playing for Defiance should approach it.

“He taught you to take pride in what you’re doing. The one quote I’ll always attribute to him was ‘Talk is cheap. Show me on the floor.’”

Greg Kampe, a 1974 DHS graduate who has been head basketball coach at Oakland University the past 30 years, also points to pride when talking about Mouser.

“In this day and age the one characteristic a lot of kids don’t have is pride,” Kampe related. “That guy (Mouser) loved being so proud of his school and wanted to teach us to be that way.

“He coached all three sports I was in and he was all about having pride in Defiance and what you do. That’s the guy in my life that taught me those lessons.”

Those are lessons Lehman remembers well. “Like anybody into coaching, as you age and mature you deal with things a little different than in your younger years,” Lehman said. “But the one thing he has always brought is an intensity level and pride about being from Defiance. And he gets across it’s not okay to be second.”

FIERY COACH

While pride became a theme with Mouser, his temperament was also well known - especially in his early days in Defiance.

“After 58 years of life I don’t remember a lot, but the day I met him had an impact on my life,” Kampe said of his first memory of Mouser. “There aren’t many people that 45 years later I can remember the day I met them ... but I do with him.”

Mouser admits to being a bit too fiery in his early years of coaching.

“I got a number of technicals back then,” Mouser said. “One day I got four technicals, two in eighth grade and two in the ninth-grade game and I wasn’t even coaching them.

“That was not one of my better moments.

“We were at Lima South and we were beating them and they hadn’t been beaten. There were students throwing popcorn on the floor. It was a fiasco.”

The sport Mouser was coaching didn’t matter, either.

“He might be the only cross country coach in the history of Ohio to break a clipboard after a cross country meet,” said Jim Windnagle, who went to state in the 1970s under Mouser.



COACHING INFLUENCE

Lehman’s love for Mouser brought his former mentor back to the sport of basketball. When Lehman took over as head varsity coach at DHS in 2003, Mouser came aboard as an assistant.

“He’s a stickler for fundamentals and adamant about doing things right,” Lehman said.

Mouser eventually called it quits on the hardwood two years ago.

But while Mouser retired from coaching basketball after the 2011-12 season, he remains a big part of two other programs at DHS - track and cross country - running the cross country show for all but one year since 1998.

In his career in the sport, Mouser has led the Bulldogs to 15 WBL titles and has had 13 teams advance to state, including 10 in Division I. But no team was able to get to the top until 2013, a big reason being many of his best squads were in D-I.

While time-wise not Mouser’s best, the 2013 squad finally reached the top in winning the Division II state crown last November.

While Mouser is down to coaching just track and cross country now, it doesn’t mean it is time to retire, despite winning that coveted state title in cross country last year.

As he has for nearly half a century, Mouser looks forward to the challenge while making memories for another group of teenagers.

“I’d like to think as a teacher and as a coach I’ve had a positive influence on the lives of a lot of kids,” said Mouser, who lists former Lima Senior baseball coach Joe Bowers along with John Hurley and Roger Renz as huge influences in his life. “As a coach I’ve tried to get across the idea to work hard. When you face adversity you have to deal with it. You win and you lose in life, it’s about making a commitment to the greater cause. That’s important for kids to understand.”

His former student-athletes can attest to that.

“He’s had such an effect on so many guys’ lives,” Kampe said. “He’s coached so many sports and he’s lasted at the same place for so long, that’s very unique. Not many people have done that.”