

Gordon Boettcher

Ann Arbor Huron

???? - 2024

Nobody who was there will ever forget; it is the stuff of which legends are made. At a very tense MHSAA boys seeding meeting in 1978, one which included any coach who wished to attend and thus was rife with irritable bickering and abounding in both literal and figurative headaches, Gordon Boettcher, in promoting one of his players for a seed, declared, after a pause, “and he’s a swell fellow!” His remark totally broke up the room in laughter.

In a workshop presentation entitled: “How to run a tip-top tournament,” Gordy told so many good stories and jokes that coaches were wiping tears from the eyes. He was a man who could simply take over a room and “hold court.” He was warm, gracious and genuinely funny.

And he certainly knew what he was talking about. After all, Gordon had been hosting tournaments for a good long time. He started running his own Ann Arbor Invitational for the boys in 1980 amidst the prompting of Dale Greiner, then-coach at Pioneer. They used 24 courts and after Dale stepped down, Gord assumed responsibility for all the details.

He was the sole director of that tournament for 41 years. He always invited teams about five months before the season and was careful about whom he selected. “I found out that I did not want certain teams,” he said. “Bad behavior and poor coaching habits were not tolerated by me.”

Indeed, it soon became a privilege to be invited to his tournament if for no other reason than to hear his opening speech. Coaches were eager to listen to his opening remarks (you need to pause to think about the statement) regarding procedures and rules. They were astonishingly hilarious but amidst much laughter, it was clear later on that he was strict about enforcing good behavior. He was a wonderful blend of good will and no-nonsense. Players looked forward to returning the next year just to hear him talk. One of them is on Youtube.

He took over the girls tournament in 1984 and completed the 36th Annual Girls Invitational in the spring of 2019.

He says that it is amazing that there were only six rainouts (three for the boys and three for the girls) in all those years. The most frustrating part was getting certain schools to pay their entry fees.



Class A state team tournaments run by the folks in Midland under Dennis Margoni, Glenn William, Dennis Royal, and Jim Krimball were models of efficient organization and rules enforcement but Gordon matched them. He can’t remember when he started hosting final tournaments but knows that the first one was at Pioneer and Saline high schools. He got help from Saline’s Don DiPaolo who was the one who cajoled him into taking on this arduous task. Later Gina Massolini asked him to start doing the tournament at MSU using its 20 courts and Okemos’ 12. For the last two years, he administered the tournament on the 24 courts at Novi – 12 at the high school and 12 at the middle school.

He also wrote exceedingly well. Once Gordy took the reins of the newsletter in Sept. 1980, he expanded it with a variety of features. He initiated an Outstanding Coach segment in which he would highlight the feats of distinguished coaches in that era. They were in-depth essays that sometimes stretched beyond a single page. In doing so, he established a formidable benchmark for those of us who wrote Coach of the Year articles in the future. He also put into his newsletter a lot of additional information: lists of state champions from 1971 to the present, lists of state championship teams over the years, etc. He called himself “your little editor,” an ironic appellation given his physical stature.

This was in the not-so-good ol' days in terms of pagination, printing and mailing. Gordon actually typed the newsletter on a stencil and then reproduced it on at his wife Sandy's Cleary College machine using his own paper. He did the mailing by himself. That involved four editions per year: one preseason in the fall, one post fall season, one in February after the workshop, and the last one in June or July. Any of us who do similar work but with only a button push or two have to be aghast at the amount of time and effort. He had to affix mail labels and stamps for hundreds of documents, and then make a trip to the post office to do a mass snail-mailing. It might have been fun the first time but many of us know how wearisome this procedure would get over time.

When Gordon wrote the third Hall of Fame banquet program in 1988, he authored the same in-depth work with regard to the inductees and then added Coach of the Year and Distinguished Service Award articles. He received a DSA for his work up to that point. "He set the standard for future writing," said Ed Waits who ought to know. "His newsletters were models of fluent, engaging, informative, and absorbing journalism."

"You could also set your calendar by when he mailed his membership renewal," continued Ed who as Membership Chairperson received those envelopes for 20 years. "He was as exact as Bob Wood, and that's quite a compliment."

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weekend, again "holding court." The same applied to his appearances at our workshop. Where he sat down, we gathered.

If you took a phone call from him, you needed to make sure you allocated an hour. Many coaches will testify that conversations with him were lengthy and wide-ranging. He asked a lot of questions and he told a lot of stories. You didn't want to hang up. It was a good thing that we are no longer charged for long-distance minutes.



Gordon, giving one of his famous pre-tournament speeches at Salem High School in 2008. Note the reaction.

Gordon was our first Class A Coach of the Year and then repeated the honor four years later. After all, he had five state championships to his credit, one under the individual format and four team titles. He traded state titles with Herm Kiewiet's Loy Norrix squads throughout the late 70s and early 80s. He put together some of the best ten-man squads in history up to that point.

One of Gordon's fondest memories of MHSTeCA's first president Charlie Partin was at a Saturday tournament when in the midst of a heated battle between the state's two state championships teams that year, Charlie turned to his colleague and said: "You know, what we need here is a little more fellowship."

Well, Charlie, over these many years, we got plenty of that --- and much more -- from Coach Boettcher. He joins Charlie who passed ?????

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