

Marty Snoap

1950-2024

At one point in Marty Snoap's career as tennis coach at Lakewood High School, the girls team chose as their slogan – proudly proclaimed from the backs of their sweatshirts – the declaration: “Service with a Smile.” In addition to the obvious pun, perhaps these kids recognized in the phrase the most telling attributes of their coach, the quality which has provided far more for his kids than lessons in how to hit a forehand volley or the number of championship trophies brought home. Indeed, both words *service* and *smile* barely scratch the surface with regard to what Coach Snoap gave to the kids and community of Lake Odessa over 33 years.

For over three decades, Marty was a coach's coach, a father figure who led what quickly became a team family. In addition to stroke fundamentals, he taught his kids etiquette and social skills. More importantly, he created a positive and fun environment which earned him the respect and gratitude of kids and parents. And he did the extras.

For instance Marty would travel with his boys to Florida for spring break to practice tennis. In August he would take the girls and many of their parents to Holland State Park for a few days of camping, sharing, and practicing. **He instituted “story time” at the beginning of practices, an opportunity for kids to share concerns, vent frustrations, and celebrate daily triumphs.** “On our last day of practice for every season, he would bring a stereo out to the courts and line dance, have an egg toss contest, and special story time,” said former player Cindy Kruisenga. “He arranged trips down to Florida where we would practice during the day, but at night he would take us to a restaurant to sing karaoke.”

Marty's players quickly learned that they not only had a coach who made the game fun but who used tennis as a vehicle to make them better people. Indeed, testimony from his kids about the way he coached them often began with the words: “I am one of the privileged people to have been coached by Marty Snoap.” Examples are numerous.

“My senior year in high school, I broke my wrist shortly after the season began, and once the injury healed enough for me to play, I was no longer a threat to opponents,” said Travis Williams. “Coach knew this, but he let me play my final high school match anyway. He knew that I couldn't pull out the victory, but that didn't stop

him from giving me advice and encouragement when I was really down. He gave me the chance to finish my high school tennis career on the court with a racquet in my hand.”

“One thing that remained constant from the first day until the final match at Lakewood High School was Marty's enthusiasm for teaching the game of tennis,” said Brian Reed. “He shared this joy with ankle biters up through the top players in the varsity ranks. He was the reason I wanted to take up the game at a competitive level.”

Coach Jim Niebling of Portland echoed this sentiment. “While many coaches know the better players on the teams with whom they compete. Marty knew all of my players, good, bad, and otherwise,” he said. “He was a gentleman in a world of all-too-often competitive coaches.”

There are only six tennis courts in Lakewood district which covers 250 square miles, yet Marty annually carried boys and girls teams of 25-30 players, and his influence extended even further. For years he organized a summer program



which often brought in future opponents who would eventually go on to compete for rival high schools.

Marty himself told a story about how a couple of East Grand Rapids parents approached him at the state tournament several years ago to thank him for inspiring their daughter to keep playing tennis five years prior. Instead of changing her lessons from tennis to piano, that little girl was now at the state tournament beating a Lakewood Viking. "We got hammered by my own self," he said chuckling.

In addition, for several years Marty was the commissioner of the Ralph E. Ellis Inter-City (now USA Team Tennis) League that boasted teams in over 30 communities. As such, he ran yearly "level" tournaments that affected many young players in a positive way. **Gary Ellis of Allegan says, "My daughter has many memories of her junior tennis career and among her favorites are the times she played in Snoap-run tournaments. Each year Marty ran a tournament, she entered. He had a way of making all the players feel special."**

Robert Kruisenga says: **"Each of my daughters has carried on their tennis careers in college. One of them received the Sue Little Award for sportsmanship at the MIAA tournament held at Albion College. Although I would like to take credit for this as a father, I must say that much of the credit goes to Coach Snoap because that's the way he teaches the game."**

At the end of "tennis nights," recalled Marty's daughter Carrie, "I remember hearing my dad tell my mom all about his matches. Sure, frequently he had to report that his team hadn't won the match, but I seem to remember him always putting in several 'buts.' For example, commenting on how a certain player didn't double fault any of her serves or how a player from another team had bullied one of his kids and how great his player had handled it."

"I was so proud because everyone always commented on how great my dad was. Some kids would comment about how they wish their dads would teach them to play a sport or make up fun games to learn, like he did. His love of coaching and emotional investment in the program and his players radiates in his personality. He demonstrated to us how to love your job." ----- Carrie Snoap, Marty's daughter

"I was so proud," adds Carrie, "because everyone always commented on how great my dad was. Some kids would comment about how they wish their dads would teach them to play a sport or make up fun games to learn, like he did. His love of coaching and emotional investment in the program and his players radiates in his personality. He demonstrated to us how to love your job."

"My dad even let me help coach some of his younger players," continued Carrie. "We attended USTA umpire classes together so that I would be official. **What I saw as the best part of his coaching, was not only how he affected his players, but how he affected his family. My dad's love of coaching and emotional investment in the program and his players radiated in his personality. He brought his job home with him.**"

Although Carrie claims that she didn't inherit her dad's athletic genes (Marty was a four-year starter in both basketball and baseball at Hope College, captaining both squads his senior year), the same cannot be said for son Chris who won the Division 3 singles title in

1997, earned a tennis scholarship to Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida, and continues to play numerous USTA adult events. Thus, it should be no surprise that the Snoap clan was named Tennis Family of the Year by the Midwest Tennis Association, a branch of the USTA.

"He more than glowed when he stepped onto a tennis court and began coaching," said former player Noelle Williams.

"This joy and enthusiasm is evidenced at the annual February clinic where Marty had always been an eager volunteer to help a clinician demonstrate drills," says Ed Waits. "His story was so inspirational that I used part of it in my Hall of Fame induction speech in 2007."

"He was a great guy who was good for grass-roots tennis players," says Gary. He was inducted into our Hall of Fame in 2006.