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Team can still inspire years later

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Whether athlete, coach or fan, we often lose our perspective on sports, in more ways than one. Years of pampering and special privileges can lead to incredibly self-centered athletes who believe they're entitled to everything, including life above the law of the land and laws of decency.

Pressure to succeed and the thirst for victory - even at the peewee level - can lead to tunnel-vision coaches who compromise their integrity, either bending the rules themselves or looking the other way as assistants and players commit violations.

Emotional highs and heartbreaking lows can lead to overzealous fans who celebrate championships by rioting, or support the home team by verbally abusing the opposition, to the point of physical violence or even death threats. So there's never a bad time to remember that the Joy of Sports goes beyond what we read, see and hear daily. It's most evident in stories that never reach Sports Illustrated, ESPN or sports radio.

Like a small-school football team going undefeated in 1967, and being recognized for that feat almost 40 years later. Kevin Jursinski, a Fort Myers attorney who used to represent Mariner High grad Earnest Graham among other NFL players, has such a story. Along with roughly 25 high school teammates, Jursinski was inducted into the Lorain County (Ohio) Sports Hall of Fame last week.

The Lorain St. Mary football team entered 1967 season with a 15-game win streak, heavy losses due to graduation and new coach. They turned in a dream season, going 9-0, registering five shutouts, and winning by an average margin of 31-3.

But those statistics would be mere sad footnotes had the 31-player team turned out a bunch of misfits, maniacs and miscreants. Athletic excellence in high school means little if it doesn't catapult youngsters into more meaningful, life victories.

"Our team was fairly small," said Jursinski, 54. "But we have 14 coaches and educators. We've had head coaches in college. Five attorneys. One went on to be a doctor.

"Everyone on that team turned out to be - without being too immodest - very successful. I think that's the great gift (Tim Rose) gave us."

Rose was the first-year coach who took over The Fighting Irish, who had won 15 in a row. Jursinski said the team was "very, very cocky," but Rose constantly challenged the group, instilling a sense of unity, work ethic and competitive fire.

"That stays with you," said Jursinski, a linebacker and captain who earned a scholarship to Akron.

Rose, currently the defensive coordinator at Toledo, told The Morning Journal News: "It's part of a great thrill of coaching and teaching to see people you taught becoming good citizens, good husbands, good fathers and good professionals.

"That's really what it's all about," he said. "You teach the players a work ethic that carries over to success on the field, and that work ethic and success carries over in life."

A true Joy of Sports.