

# THE LEWIS PIPELINE



Kenny Raymond, Tom Dedin, Tom Kennedy, and Matt Senffner.

By Kenny Raymond



Coach Palmasani and the 1979 state championship team.



I mentioned in the past the link between Providence, Tom Dedin, Lewis College, and Gordie Gillespie, and the link between Lewis, myself, and how I arrived at Providence. I knew of others coming from Lewis College but I had no idea the influence was so great.

When I arrived at Lewis, the Christian Brothers had recently taken over the administration of the College. I had great respect for the Brothers and that was one reason I chose Lewis. It was a school of about 400 in the fall of 1961, with about 200 off campus students and 200 residents on campus. When we graduated in 1965, the school had doubled in size to about 800. From the late 1960s through the early 1980s, besides Tom and myself, there were at least 10 other Lewis grads that impacted Providence Catholic academically and athletically. I'm going to write about these gentlemen and their contribution here.

Tom Kennedy would spend a year at Providence assisting Tom Dedin before moving on to coach at JJC and work in college administration. What he remembers is the vitality of the staff, their energy and commitment to both teaching and coaching.

Pat McInerney became one of Matt Senffner's first paid assistants in football and one of mine in track. He then went on to start the wrestling program, and teach in the Social Studies Department. He also became the first full time dean. He later became principal at three parish schools before returning to teach again at Providence.

Mike Slovik, another Lewis grad, assisted Coach Senffner in football and taught history. He later went on to coach at the University of St. Francis and St. Xavier University in Chicago.

Don Butch Markelz played for coach Dedin and was on the 1975 National Championship team at Lewis. He earned All-Tournament and Most Valuable Player honors that year as well. Coach Markelz came back to teach, coach and became dean before moving on to Lockport.

Jim Walzak was a longtime assistant in track and football. He coached a number of state qualifiers in the field events. He later became the girls golf coach where he had the pleasure of coaching an individual state champion. He taught in the Business and Social Studies Department before retiring and moving to Texas.

Joe Rodeghero taught in the Social Studies Department and coached baseball and football. He brought baseball teams deep into the state tournament. He taught and coached at both JCA and Providence and ended his coaching career at Lemont High School.

Jamie Garcia was hired by Coach Dedin to assist in baseball. He taught Spanish and took over the baseball job after Dedin left. He also became the first Director of Development. He was an excellent coach, winning the state tournament. He coached professional baseball for nearly 30 years after leaving Providence.

Frank Palmasani followed Pat Sullivan as head basketball coach at PCHS. He started with a record of 2-22 but within a few short years he coached the 1979 state championship team. He began working in college admissions at Hinsdale South, later returning to Providence. He is a noted author, writing about the college admissions process, and is a consultant to WGN - as well as being featured in the Boston Herald and the Chicago Tribune.

The plan was for Providence to be co-institutional, but that soon changed. It was more practical to be co-educational. For a time, the Christian Brothers dropped football in their high schools but Brother Dan and Coach Dedin thought football would be an attractive option to draw young men to the once all-girls school. Matt Senffner's biology major was a good fit, so Dedin called his brother-in-law and asked him to start a program from the ground up. Senffner agreed to come to Providence and the program was born in 1966. There were 25 freshmen that year and Coach Senffner had no paid assistants, but only occasional help from two volunteers.

The following year, a coach with college experience was brought in to coach the sophomores, but he lasted only one year. In the fall of 1968, Matt Senffner was named the first varsity coach. Dedin had helped to create the South Central Prep League but there was no football competition in the league. Everyone knew the tenuous situation the school was in, but we all pressed on anyway.

Bob McAlpin, an experienced Catholic League coach, joined Coach Senffner's staff and a sophomore coach was hired as well. When Fr. Kaffer became principal, he and Coach Dedin petitioned to join the Private School League and were accepted. It became important to be in a competitive league with defined goals to work for since the IHSA didn't begin the modern state playoff program until 1974. The team won its first playoff game in the 1970s but it wasn't until the mid-1980s that the program began to really take off.

Under Senffner's guidance, the team won its first state championship in 1987 and then went on to win eight more state titles.

He led the team to a total of 26 state appearances and 300 wins making him the winningest football coach in state history at that time. He had seven nationally ranked teams, has received a number of "Man of the Year" awards, and been elected into four Halls of Fame. He also served on both the Joliet Diocese and St. Mary Nativity School Boards and the City of Joliet Planning Commission, retiring in 2006.

The final Lewis grad I'm writing about is Pat Sullivan, a Lewis classmate of mine. Sullivan first worked at Loras College. He came to Providence to teach Spanish and take over the basketball program since Dedin's responsibilities as athletic director increased upon expansion of our other athletic programs. Sullivan also coached soccer and baseball. He brought the basketball program their first winning season in 1968, highlighted by a stunning upset victory over state-ranked JCA.

His value to the school went far beyond the basketball court. He echoed Coach Dedin's belief that a coach must be an excellent teacher first, and he certainly was that. When Fr. Kaffer was named Principal, Sullivan's responsibilities expanded. He was named Harvest Drive Director and accompanied Fr. Kaffer on fundraising meetings with prospective donors. He was promoted to Assistant Principal and began to hone his motivational skills as well. One year, the basketball team lost to Chicago Christian by 40 points. After the game, Sullivan told his players that one day we will beat that team. The next year, with both teams 10 and 1, the team beat Chicago Christian and went on to be conference champions.

Sullivan taught and coached for 10 years at Providence before going to the College of St. Francis. At St. Francis, he had over 500 career wins. During one 18 year period, he led his teams to 15 first or second place finishes and advanced to the NAIA national tournament in 1994 and 1996. He believes that one of his most important accomplishments was having seen 172 of 176 of his players graduate.

He authored two books on motivation and his motivational and public speaking resume includes engagements at IBM, Nike, and Notre Dame's "Play Like A Champion Program". From 1986 -2009 he conducted basketball camps and clinics in Greece, Belgium, Austria and Ireland. He has been inducted into eight different Halls of Fame, and was named coach of the year on multiple occasions from the CCAC, NAIA District 20, NAIA Region IV and the National Basketball Tournament.



WELCOME! — Two 1962 graduates of Lewis College have been named to the staffs of two Christian Brother High Schools in the area. Thomas Dedin, 2433 W. Center St., (second from left) will teach at the new Providence High School and is being welcomed to the staff by Brother J. Edmund, F.S.C., Director of Providence. Thomas Kennedy (right) of Beardwood is to join the Christian Brothers High School at Aurora. Brother H. Steben, F.S.C. Director of the Aurora school, does the welcoming honors. Both young men will be in coaching positions.



Tom Dedin Jr., Head Varsity Baseball Coach Mark Smith, and Tom Dedin before a football game this year.

He became Athletic Director and later was appointed a special assistant to USF's President. The current indoor athletic center at USF is named for him.

I don't know what it was about Lewis and those early years at Providence. Was it the Christian Brothers? Or perhaps Gordie's influence? Maybe it was a mythological pioneer spirit or the fact that we saw and were part of Lewis as it grew and expanded? Perhaps we were just young and energetic. As Sullivan observed during the late 1960s, if the school closed we would all be out of a job, but no one mentioned that - we all just kept working. We worked together and had great students to work with. What a wonderful group and what a wonderful era.

As Coach Sullivan also observed, it's amazing to look back at all the success we've had athletically beginning with a gym that had no backboards, the baseball team with no field, a track team with no track, and a wrestling team with no gym mats. It didn't bother any of us or the athletes. I have been blessed to work with so many dynamic people.