



## PROVIDENCE AND THE LEWIS COLLEGE PIPELINE

By Mr. Ken Raymond

My first association with Providence came in the spring of 1965. I had just finished student teaching at Lockport West, had no classes and because of a medical issue, was unable to compete in track at Lewis for our outdoor season.

The Christian Brothers gained control of Lewis College during the school year of 1960-61. They also staffed a number of high schools in the Joliet diocese. One of those schools was Providence - an all girls' school that would become co-institutional with newly constructed facilities in New Lenox, Illinois. The Sisters of Providence would continue to teach the girls in the east wing of the school while the Christian Brothers would teach the boys in the west wing. In the center of the building was a commons area used as a gym, and a café used at separate times by the girls and the boys.

Tom Dedin became the first athletic director for the boys and there were no sports for the girls except for a GAA day once a year. Tom was a graduate of Catholic High and played

basketball and baseball for Gordie Gillespie at Lewis College. Tom coached the three sports that were formed - soccer, basketball and baseball. The Christian Brothers wanted more sports for the boys and thought track and field would be a good option. Tom called Gordie and asked if he knew anyone who would be interested in building a program. Gordie, knowing my medical circumstances, approached me and asked if I would be interested - and I said yes. I met with Tom and became the second Lewis grad to be at Providence. This incredible journey had begun of being associated with so many great peers, nuns, priests, the Christian Brothers, lay people, students, and athletes.

Tom was one of those dynamic people from that era. Tom insisted that all his coaches concentrate on being a teacher first or you wouldn't coach for him. Pat Sullivan noted that the one thing that impressed him about Tom was, as Pat put it, "Perhaps his greatest achievement may have been on the academic side. He made it very clear that every coach better aspire to be great classroom teachers. If someone put coaching above teaching he would never be accepted." Pat believed Tom taught by example.

Besides teaching English, Tom was responsible for creating the sports program at Providence. He coached soccer (without any prior knowledge), basketball and baseball (which he played at Lewis). When he started these programs there were no athletic facilities. What is now the IHM gym was a commons area with no backboards or hoops and a slick tile floor. He arranged to take the team to the Cathedral of St. Raymond's gym two days a week. What he did the other days, I can only imagine. Backboards and hoops came the following year. In order to develop soccer and baseball, parents trucked in dirt

to level a soccer field where Bishop Kaffer Stadium is now. Dirt was also trucked in to level an area for the baseball field. I believe Tom heard that St. Francis was going to redo their facilities, and he got permission to haul away the posts and fencing, setting the posts in the ground and welding the fencing to them. A few years later, a microburst or high winds destroyed the structure and the insurance was enough to create new facilities. He was instrumental in forming the South Central Prep League. He felt it was important to create competition among schools to help stabilize the programs among schools close to being equal in size.

Dedin taught and coached at Providence for 12 years. During that time he had winning seasons nine of those 12 years. He amassed a record of 249-150 which amounts to 623%. His 1971-1972 season recorded 34 wins and only six losses.

Tom replaced Gordie at Lewis as athletic director and head baseball coach for two years. He brought both teams to the NAIA Tourney with a 4th place finish in 1977. He was hired by the University of Illinois for the next nine years. His record was 274-230-5. He took Illinois to the playoffs in 1981, 1982 and 1985. Over 50 of his players played professional ball with six making the majors and two of those players in the majors for at least a decade. After leaving Illinois he went to Regis College and coached another 12 years. He continued coaching on an individual basis, working with local Denver athletes and instructing them in the fundamentals of pitching, hitting and catching. He expressed perhaps his greatest joy was working with his son and together coaching his grandson.

Dedin is part of at least three Halls of Fame including the Illinois High School Hall of Fame







and the Lewis Academy of Coaches.

I doubt that Tom imagined the program he started would be as successful as it has become. While track had some early milestones, with Mike Carruthers in 1971 becoming the first Provi athlete to medal in state competition and the state championship 440 yd relay team in 1975, it was the next wave of coaches from Lewis that would elevate the athletic program to a whole new level. Tom and I would be joined in 1966-67 by more Lewis grads: Tom Kennedy, Pat Sullivan and Matt Senffner. A few years later Pat McNerney would join us followed by Frank Palmasani and Jamie Garcia.

#### JUST THE FACTS:

- Celtic Tom Dedin – Baseball Coach (1962-1976) & Athletic Director (1962-1968).
- Providence Catholic's baseball field is named for Dedin.
- According to former Providence coach and teacher Pat Sullivan: "Tom Dedin began the athletic program at Providence Catholic High School. Tom was as hard a worker as anyone I have ever worked with. One of the principles he believed in was that academics and athletics go hand-in-hand. He did not have to preach it because he lived it. He was an outstanding baseball coach at four schools: Providence Catholic High School, Lewis University, the University

of Illinois, and Regis University in Denver. While coaching and teaching at Providence, I believed he was the best classroom teacher in the building. As the Athletic Director, Tom expected that his coaches follow his example. They had to work at their coaching, but they had better be the best classroom teachers that their abilities would allow. I spent ten years at Providence with Tom and the tradition that he established of hard work and the integration of athletics and academics still exists at the school. In my years there I can never remember a coach in our program who did not work hard at his coaching and his subject matter." Read more at <https://coachpatsullivan.com>.

Join us for the next edition of Kenny's Corner in the Fall 2022 Annual Report. Is there something you'd like to know more about at Providence? Let us know via email at [celtics@providencecatholic.org](mailto:celtics@providencecatholic.org).

