

LAMORINDA SPORTS

Dell'Aquila retires after 26 years at Miramonte

By Karl Buscheck



Coach Vince Dell'Aquila gives advice to some of his baseball players.

Asked to name the person who most impacted his coaching philosophy, former Miramonte Athletics Director Vince Dell'Aquila, who just retired after 26 years at the school, didn't hesitate to answer.

"The very first coach that I had – and he only coached me for a year – was my dad," Dell'Aquila said, recalling his father Fred. "My dad is probably – whatever positives you might have about Coach Dell – my dad was that on steroids."

In his more than a quarter of a century at Miramonte, Dell'Aquila donned a variety of hats, serving first as an assistant coach, then as a head coach and P.E. teacher and finally as the AD for the past 19 years.

"Everybody said the same thing (about my dad)," Dell'Aquila continued. "'Coach Dell'Aquila was fair. He was kind. He was compassionate. He taught things the right way. He didn't talk down to you.' So, I'd hear all those things (growing up)."

The younger Dell'Aquila's tenure at Miramonte all started with a barbecue back in the fall of 1991.

His son, Brian, had just joined the football program, and the long-time head coach, Floyd Burnsed sought out Dell'Aquila knowing he'd played center at Cal Poly

Pomona. Burnsed asked if he wanted to help coach the team and Dell'Aquila jumped at the opportunity.

That spring, the head baseball coach, John Buschini, made him the same offer – knowing that Dell'Aquila had also played that sport collegiately – and like that, he was in.

In 1996, Dell'Aquila took over the baseball program that would go on to win six NCS titles under his stewardship and produce a 366-202-1 record. Shortly thereafter, he took over as the AD, all the while continuing on as a P.E. teacher and offensive line coach for the football team.

Whether he was conducting a class, standing in the dugout or patrolling the sidelines, Dell'Aquila was always eternally optimistic, wearing a perpetual smile and entirely unflappable.

"I try to pick out the best of everyone," Dell'Aquila said, explaining that he's always possessed a calm demeanor. "Sometimes when I see the worst, I go, 'Okay, that's not where I want to go.'"

The 2002 State Coach of the Year was never simply worried about teaching baseball fundamentals or football techniques – like so many of his peers.

"Most of those people don't touch on life skills," Dell'Aquila

explained. "That's what I've always felt. I've always treated players like professional players. I've taught them like professional players. I've coached professional players so I know what it is that they need and how to make them better."

When asked to highlight the most memorable teams that he worked with, Dell'Aquila speaks of winning four section titles with the football program, and most notably coaching the line that protected future two-time Hesiman Award finalist and NFL quarterback Ken Dorsey.

He also singled out the 1999 baseball setup – the first to win North Coast under his management.

"I think we we're 12-12 to get into NCS as the last seed and we kind of ran the table on the top seeds with just a good group of guys," Dell'Aquila said. "Fast forward to this year, same thing (it was) a great group of guys. We don't have a Division I player, but just a really, really good group of kids and they were really determined and this year was obviously a very special year."

"There were many teams in between that had their own personalities and successes and it's just been a great run," Dell'Aquila added.

Believed to be the longest-ten-

ured employee in the district at the time of his retirement, Dell'Aquila said there is nothing better than seeing his former charges excel later in life – regardless of the stage they choose.

"That to me is the ultimate compliment. It's the ultimate satisfaction in coaching," Dell'Aquila said. "The wins and the losses, they're going to come."

Long after he forgets the win-and-loss records, Dell'Aquila will still remember the kind words his ex-players have shared with him.

"When you get kids that come back and there may have been things that I said that I don't even remember, but kids say, 'Hey, remember when you told me this ... It's made me the father that I am today. The son that I am today. The business person that I am today,'" Dell'Aquila said. "That's really the satisfaction that I think a coach gets from coaching young men."

Even though he's retiring, Dell'Aquila isn't leaving the game all together.

He plans to stay on as the offensive line coach with the football team, will coach one set of grandkids in tee-ball and little league and will now have far more flexibility to visit his other set of grandkids in southern California.

"I'm not going to really realize that I'm retired because the teacher dynamic is that you have all summer off," Dell'Aquila said. "So this is just normal for me."

The only difference is there won't be the annual summer countdown to the first day of school.

"Somewhere after the Fourth of July I go, 'Oh my gosh, already a month has gone by.' So, I won't have to worry about that," Dell'Aquila said with a chuckle.

Before departing his post at Miramonte, Dell'Aquila was celebrated at a retirement party on May 20 on the football field. Initially, the coach, AD and teacher was planning to go out quietly, but the community – and his own family – insisted otherwise.

"It was just very special," Dell'Aquila said. "There were a lot of decades there. Kids from the 90s and the 2000s and up to now and I guess I don't feel like I need to be validated because I know what I've done and I know how hard I've worked to try to make things better for kids, but when you have an event like that it really echoes to hear people say certain things or come up to you and say certain things."

"It was a very good feeling."

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Eighth-Graders star at Volleyball Nationals

Submitted by Lee Baldwin



Back row, Stacey O'Connor (#12), Erin Meade (#14), Molly Mitchell (#18); front row: Brianna Lee (#10).

Photo Greg Lee

Fighting through Northern California's qualifying season, Lafayette and Moraga eighth-graders Brianna Lee, Erin Meade and Molly Mitchell helped guide their Nor-Cal Volleyball club team to a spot

in USA Volleyball's Junior Nationals. The team is helmed by head coach Stacey O'Connor, alumna and stand-out volleyball player at St. Mary's College. The team, which has qualified for nationals

three years in a row, is looking forward to the upcoming trip to Minneapolis, Minnesota, where they will play from June 25 to 28.

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