

# Bedesem returns to labor he loves

By Ray Parrillo  
Inquirer Staff Writer

The gruff voice pierced the steamy, summer-morning air like a thunder-clap, and it delivered a precise message to 83 football players, a message that practice might be winding down, but it certainly wasn't finished.

"If that's all the zip I can get, then we can practice for another hour, you know," barked the squat man with legs as thick as telephone poles and arms to match. "This is no rest period, so let's get something out of it."

The players snapped to attention and then whisked through their stretching exercises. Afterward, Dick Bedesem, the squat man with the gruff voice, walked off the field with a smile brighter than the mid-August sun. For three years, he had been a general without an army, but now he was coaching again — and he was cherishing every minute of it.

No, Bedesem, 52, wasn't preparing Villanova for a big game against Temple or Boston College, as he used to do. This time, he was honing players for Neshaminy High so they would be ready for their September opener against neighborhood rival Bishop Egan.

Bedesem had gone from Division I to Suburban One, but he could handle that transition with no problem. What he could not handle was being a coach without a football team — something he became in April 1981, when the board of trustees at Villanova dropped the sport without warning.

"I was going crazy," Bedesem said. "I spent a lot of time doing crossword puzzles, reading books. My son, Vince, played at Council Rock last year, and Walt Snyder, the Council Rock coach and a good friend of mine, asked me a few times to attend practice. But I just could not go to a football practice. No way. I went to all the games to watch Vince play, but that wasn't so bad, because I could sit in the stands with everyone else.

"Now I'm happy as can be. After our first practice [on Monday], I went home, and my wife asked me how I felt. I told her, 'Are you kidding?' Smelling that grass again, seeing those kids work out... What a great feeling."

Twenty years ago, Bedesem was considered to be among the brightest young minds in area scholastic football. He built a dynasty at Egan, where his teams won Catholic League championships in 1963, 1966, 1967, 1969 and 1970, and city championships in 1966, 1967 and 1969. In 1963, Egan tied Roxborough for the city crown.

"Those days are great for remembering, but they won't help me win my next game," he said.

Bedesem moved on to become an assistant under Wayne Hardin at Temple, then took over as head coach at Villanova, his alma mater, in 1975. He had his best season — 6-5, with victories over Cincinnati, Temple and Boston College — at Villanova in 1980.

Then, on the night of April 14, Bedesem was stunned by the news that Villanova had decided to drop football.

"We really felt we had turned the corner in 1980, and we had just completed a great recruiting year," he recalled. "Then ...

"But I'm very happy they're bringing football back to Villanova. It's a great university, and, besides, I played there, so, sure, I'm happy. But I never was interested in going back there to coach — because of what they did and how they did it.

"Thankfully, a lot of the players I had there went to other schools and

did well. Of course, some were left in a lurch. But the people I felt most sorry for were the coaches who gave so much time for very little money. But now that's all in the past."

Bedesem clung to hopes that he would land a college job somewhere. He even served as an unpaid assistant under Jackie Sherrill at Pitt for a year, and he subsequently was interviewed for coaching positions at Navy, Virginia, Toledo, Central Connecticut and Texas-El Paso. But none of those jobs came his way, so he and his wife, Mary Anne, opened the Goal Post Restaurant in Levittown.

"The business is doing well, all because of Mary Anne," Bedesem said. "She does all the buying and scheduling, and I just greet people at night. Otherwise, I'm just an anchor around her neck. But because of the business, there was no need for me to relocate, which I really didn't want to do anyway."

Still, there was a vacancy in Bedesem's life that had to be filled. He has the personality to be a maitre d', but he is at his best with a whistle in his mouth and a clipboard tucked under his arm.

His frustration finally ended in February, when he was named to succeed Bill Crozier, who resigned after Neshaminy labored through a 2-8 season.

Bedesem proceeded to assemble a staff dominated by men he used to work with.

Among his assistants are Eddie Neumann, head coach at Truman last year and an assistant under Bedesem at Archbishop Wood and Egan; Jack Techtman, who played under Bedesem at Egan; Walt Techtman, Jack's father and an assistant under Bedesem at Villanova; Bill Heller, another Bedesem assistant at Egan, and Dan Bedesem, one of Dick's five sons and a former graduate assistant at Villanova.

Bruce English, who assisted Snyder at Council Rock last year, and Andy Cunningham and Bill Ferraro, who were at Neshaminy last year, are also on the staff.

With such a staff — and with Bedesem's name now stamped on the program — is it any wonder that Neshaminy fans are recalling the glory years of the early '60s, when the football team ran off a 51-game unbeaten streak?

"Neshaminy's program was hurt when the school split in half," Bedesem said. "Last year, the two schools [one in Langhorne, the other in Maple Point] joined together, and the staff here had to deal with two different cliques. That's not easy.

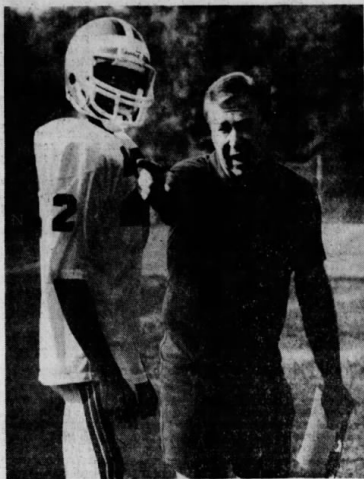
"If we're successful, people will say it's because of me. But last year's staff laid the groundwork. I may have a little advantage, though, because I know I'd be enthused if I was a youngster being coached by an ex-college coach."

"My dad told me about coach Bedesem and the great teams he had at Egan," said Tony Dougherty, a senior defensive tackle. "But I had heard about him before that. What I've noticed about him and the other coaches is they're great teachers, and they're patient. I think it'll be better than last year."

Asked to differentiate between coaching on the college and high school levels, Bedesem related a story.

"We've had about 40 of my former players from Egan come to the restaurant, and my wife remembered all of them," he said. "About 17 of the players I had at Villanova have come to the restaurant, and my wife knew two of them.

"At this level, there's more of a family atmosphere, and there's more of a feeling that you're molding kids. It's a great feeling of satisfaction. It's just great to be back."



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