

FOOTBALL

Saybolt surprised to be coaching All-Stars

By Glenn Berkey

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When the game is over, the official record will show that on June 8, in the Bob Sands Memorial All-Star Football Classic at Bensalem, Bill Saybolt of William Tennent coached the North squad.

What no history of the game will ever reveal is how he got the position after only two years at Tennent.

"Well, it was more or less by default," Saybolt said with a laugh. "At the selection meeting, everybody just sat around. One guy said, 'You weren't at the game last year, you take it.'"

Council Rock coach Mike Ortman, who will be one of the assistant coaches on the North sideline, had a slightly different view of Saybolt's selection.

"I think it's an honor," Ortman said. "He did a real nice job with his program; the last two years, he's really brought the program around, and I think everybody recognized that. I think any time you get the chance to be the head coach, it's more or less your peers saying, 'Hey, you're doing a great job, we want you to do

this.'"

Saybolt might not totally agree with that theory or that he's deserving, but he'll take the honor. "I guess you can take it as an honor," he said. "You can look at it as we had a nice season and everything."

For Saybolt, whose Panthers went 7-4 in 1990 — finishing second in the Suburban One League's Patriot Division — the head coaching job might be a little more than he wanted.

"This is my first year in the game," Saybolt said. "I would much rather have participated as an assistant just to learn the politics of the game, what's involved in this game. I really know nothing of the tradition of the game. But it's an honor."

Hank Johns, who coached Truman for the last seven seasons but won't be back next season, will coach the South squad, which has won two consecutive games in dramatic fashion and boasts the speed to make this game dramatic as well, most notably in the form of Bensalem's Edmund Robinson, who gained 1,200 yards last season and will attend Syracuse on a football scholarship.

"What we have to do defensively is try to keep our kids from blinking," Saybolt said. "The South is so fast, we can't blink, or he's [Robinson] gone. We're going to drill keeping our eyes open for long periods of time so we don't blink."

The game is sponsored by the Bucks County Lions, and despite losing by one point in each of the last two years, the North holds an 11-6-2 edge in the series.

"All-star games are fun," said Saybolt, who coached in two during his seven-year tenure at North Catholic: the 1985 and 1989 Philadelphia all-star games.

"The first time, I made a mistake, and I treated the kids like all-stars. The second time I didn't; I treated them just like they were my own team."

The second approach worked: His Non-Public team lost, 33-13, in 1985, but in 1989, it defeated the Public League team, 36-15.

The North and South teams consist of seniors from Bucks County high schools selected by the coaches in the county.

"There's not a kid on the field that you have to worry about putting out there or getting his job done," Ortman said. "They all have the

heart. They were picked because they're that type of kid. You finish up after two weeks [of practice], and you're sorry it's over."

Ortman cautioned, however, that the whole of either the North or the South squads might not be equal to the sum of its parts.

"You don't know what they're going to do until they get together and see what kind of blend there is as a team," Ortman said. "You could have 100 great athletes and if they don't blend, if you don't get them to work together, you don't have a winner."

The Lions are distributing 1,000 free tickets for youth football players age 12 and under, to be used when accompanied by a paying adult. Tickets, which will cost \$5 and \$3, can be purchased through the Lions or participating schools.

Saybolt was happy to be participating in a game where the real winners would not be decided by which points on the scoreboard.

"In a game like this where the money goes to a charity, I think the winners are the [blind, hearing-impaired and handicapped] people that benefit," Saybolt said.