



For The Inquirer / JON ADAMS

Back in football, John Chaump is now defensive line coach for Delaware Valley College, working for new head coach Bill Manlove. Chaump had been removed as Neshaminy High football coach last January.

He heard opportunity's knock

Listening to John Chaump tell the story brought back memories of *The Dean Martin Show*.

A loud knock on the back door interrupting one of Dino's skits. Neither he nor the audience knew who was there. The anticipation ...

Hey, it's Frank Sinatra!

Chaump knows a little about door-knockers, too. A year ago, someone rapped on his door in biology class at Neshaminy.

"It was [Temple coach] Jerry Berndt," Chaump said. "First time ever I had a coach pay me a visit who wasn't recruiting. He said he was just making the rounds, introducing himself to all the suburban high school coaches." Chaump was in his biology class last spring when that familiar rap, rap, rap sounded again.

Little did he realize then, but it was the knock of opportunity.

"Open the door and how do you do, Bill Manlove," Chaump recalled. "He said he was on a recruiting swing and was also looking for a defensive-line coach, would I be interested?"

As they say in showbiz, the rest is history. Chaump, who had been fired as Neshaminy's head coach in January after a 4-7 season, was back in football, this time as Manlove's assistant at Delaware Valley College.

"I've had some real surprises over the years with people knocking on that classroom door, but that was the best," Chaump said with a laugh.

Chaumpy, as folks call him, enjoys his new job. Coaching the defensive line is old hat. That's how Chaump began his career in 1971 at Woodrow Wilson. Then, he was working with 15-year-old sophomores. Today, it's 19-year-old sophomores.

"College athletes are easier to work with," Chaump said. "They're better in terms of ability and attitude. What I enjoy the most, though, is that I can get close to them."

Bonding with your players is a delicate act in high school — especially if you're pulling a full teach-

By TIM PANACCIO



ing load, which Chaump was doing — and still does — during his five years at Heartbreak Ridge. Head coaches tend to wear many badges in high school: surrogate parent, social worker, cop and psychologist.

Things are different for Chaump at Del Val. He doesn't have to be all things to all people. He worries only about nine defensive linemen. They're his boys. And he's their best friend and confidante.

Got a problem? Don't bother Manlove. Go to Chaumpy. "That kind of relationship was something that I really missed until now," Chaump said. "It's one of the most rewarding aspects of coaching."

At Del Val, Chaump says he has developed a renewed appreciation for the game and a better understanding of NCAA Division III football. There are no scholarships. No NFL draft picks ready to declare hardship. No money to buy new sod, let alone shoulder pads.

"It's not a win-at-all-costs situation here," Chaump said. "The players are here because they enjoy football. They're not trying to win a scholarship. No parents around wanting their son to be the star."

The campus is nestled in Doylestown a mile down the road from what is undoubtedly the most envied high school football program around — Central Bucks West.

Truth is, C.B. West is bigger news in Doylestown — even throughout Pennsylvania — than tiny Del Val with its 1,150 enrollment.

"On Fridays, we finish practice, go out to dinner and then over to watch West play," Chaump said. "Sure, things are smaller here, even compared to the way they were at Neshaminy. But in a lot of ways, that's good." Chaump sees familiar faces at Del Val. Defensive backfield coach Ed Place handled the secondary for Chaump at Neshaminy. Inside linebacker Darren Bethke played tight end for Chaump in high school.

"We always used to talk about moving Darren to linebacker," Chaump said. "He had the mentality because we was so aggressive. He's come a long way from high school."

Bethke has gone from a kid who was part of a team at Neshaminy to one who's the defensive leader at Del Val. It makes Chaumpy proud.

He looks at young men such as Bethke and realizes how little separates the Division III athlete, who plays in virtual obscurity, and the Division I superstar. If the linemen were 4 inches taller and 10 pounds heavier, they'd be at Penn State. If the cornerbacks had 4.4 speed instead of 4.9, they'd be in the Southeastern Conference.

"And then you find in a few positions, you have excellent players, like a Steve Wagner," Chaump said. "He could play at some Division I schools." Wagner is a 6-foot, 8-inch, 325-pound senior offensive tackle who sometimes plays on Chaump's defensive line.

That's another thing about Division III. Some players play both ways.

Does Chaump miss Neshaminy football? "Sure, my heart is in Neshaminy," Chaump said. "I live there. I teach there. I have a son [John Jr.] on the JV team. I still feel a part of the school."

"If I weren't coaching, I'd be rammy and feeling sorry for myself. But this has been very rewarding, very positive for me."

When one door closes ... knock, knock ... another opens.