



EDDIE OLSEN

On High Schools

PLAYING Game Is the Top Priority

Paris (Pa.) Allison isn't the sort of guy who goes in for such pastimes as table-top games.

"I'm a poor loser, maybe even a bitter loser," the Neshaminy coach was saying the other day. "This is why I don't play at cards or other small games . . ."

Allison's one weakness, however, is football, a game he lives and breathes. And Allison is in his second season as head coach at a school where winning once ranked second only to breathing in priorities. Or so it seemed.

This attitude started to change about eight years ago at Neshaminy and, according to the 47-year-old Allison, it's been for the best.

"It was about eight years ago when our school board made a commitment to a TOTAL football program, not just a winning program," Allison said.

"There's a difference, you know. Like, seven or eight years ago, we'd get 65 or 70 kids out for football. Now, we get more than 200. And instead of just having two football teams — a varsity and junior varsity — we have three teams, including a sophomore team."

So, of the more than 200 players who tried out for football this season, 175 of them made one of three teams at Neshaminy.

"I'd like to think the ultimate goal of the game on the high school level is for kids to PLAY," Allison said. "Winning shouldn't be the ultimate goal. It's a matter of priorities and I think we've got the priorities in their proper perspective."

Off to Bad Start

Sure, losing gnaws at Allison. And Neshaminy, off to its worst start in 10 years, has lost three out of its first five games.

"I'm a poor loser but this doesn't mean I explode at the kids," Allison said. "After all, I'm old enough and have enough experience to be able to control myself."

"And believe me, the program IS important and I'm not just blowing our horn, either. It's possible, if we didn't have our present priorities—and just picked out the best 25 kids to play football—that we'd never lose a game. It wouldn't be right, though."

Neshaminy has an enrollment of more than 1,400. Next year, the enrollment will decline dramatically when a new high school opens in the district.

"It's possible we won't be able to continue with three teams because of finances," Allison said. "But with our situation now, it's the right thing to do."

What about the followers from Neshaminy's glory days? Are they after Allison's scalp?

No Direct Pressures

"I have no direct pressures on me for winning," Allison said. "Ohhhhh, you always get the subtle stuff but I ignore it. I'm too wrapped up with trying to run a program that's of value to the kids."

"On the sidelines, I don't pay much attention to the people in the stands because I'm concentrating on the game, but I imagine there's some hostility when we're losing. That's only natural, I guess."

During scouting trips when Allison and his assistants sit in the stands to observe another team, the Neshaminy coach said he's noticed more jeering and booing than ever before.

"In fact, this is a frequent subject of our (the coaches') conversations," Allison said. "It's as if people are more frustrated than ever before and they're simply venting their frustrations."

"And what better target is a high school kid?"

Paris Allison, the guy who hates to lose, made his point.