



Rex slip in extras

Late Night at Bob Warn Field continued an unexpected run on Wednesday. Unfortunately for the Terre Haute Rex, their third extra-inning home game did not send the 861 fans home happy. On Tuesday, the Rex were able to overcome early struggles to win in the 11th inning. On Wednesday, the Rex spotted Hannibal a five-run lead, but rallied to force extra innings again. This time, Hannibal put two runs across in the 10th and the Rex had no response as Terre Haute lost 8-6.

STEPHANIE SALTER: Never suited up, but she still calls him 'Coach Wooden'

Stephanie Salter
The Tribune-Star

TERRE HAUTE — The first person I thought of when I heard that John Wooden had died was not Bill Walton, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar or any of the hundreds of great players who learned most of what they know about basketball and life from the Hoosier-born coaching legend.

The person who came to mind never even played competitive sports. She's an executive director of a non-profit organization that helps poor, inner city children and women reach for and usually attain an unreachable star.

But do not bet against her if the contest has anything to do with Wooden's Pyramid of Success. She can name and explain each of the Pyramid's 15 building blocks as efficiently as anyone who ever wore UCLA blue and gold. As for being able to quote "the Wizard of Westwood" about



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everything from the value of practice to the futility of using cuss words, my guess is she would lose only to Wooden's official biographers.

Her name is Midge Wilson, and for the past 30 years, she and her Bay Area Women's and Children's Center have occupied a small storefront in one of San Francisco's toughest, grittiest neighborhoods, the Tenderloin. Despite the prevalence of strip joints, rampant drug and alcohol abuse, and a disproportionate number of mentally ill street people, the Tenderloin is home to more than 3,500 children.

Those kids' primary champion is the women's and children's center. Among its achievements is a gorgeous, state-of-the-art public grade school that Wilson and her band of compadres gently and patiently strong-armed the City of San Francisco into building so some of the neighborhood's kids wouldn't have to be bussed miles away.

In 2002, Wilson and 21 other children's advocates drove down to Southern California to spend the better part of a day meeting with Wooden, who had invited them to come talk. The group's members were launching a sports initiative program for the kids of the Tenderloin and wanted to pick up all the wisdom and advice they could from a man they had come to revere through his inspirational writings.

Fifteen building blocks comprise the Pyramid of Success — industriousness, enthusiasm, loyalty, etc. Wooden created the Pyramid during his brief but stellar time at Indiana State (then) Teachers College in 1947-48. He never copyrighted the Pyramid, a deliberate omission of which he was proud.

Wilson had been introduced to the Pyramid and to Wooden's accompanying film, "Values, Victory and Peace of Mind," by former tennis pro Maureen "Peanut" Louie Harper. The two women met through an ice skating school their daughters attended.

A former Presbyterian seminarian, Wilson fairly vibrated to the old-fashioned, straightforward, common sense philosophy Wooden espoused. The Pyramid's building blocks and expanded values system made profound social and spiritual sense to her.

"It was incredible," she later said of the meeting at Wooden's church in Encino. "He talked in this totally humble tone of voice, and everything he said just spoke straight to our hearts."

Wilson says she has lost count of the number of times she's watched Wooden's video. "Sometimes, when I have a little down time to enjoy, I put the video on," she said, a few days ago when I phoned her in San Francisco. "Every time I watch it, I pick up something new."

Wilson also has read and re-read — and given away numerous copies of — the coach's little blue book, "Wooden: A Lifetime of Observations and Reflections On and Off the Court," co-authored by Steve Jamison. Any coach or volunteer who participates in the Tenderloin Youth Sports Initiative — still going with 20 programs for more than 600 kids — is required to watch the video and to use the Pyramid's building blocks.

"You know, I have had some phenomenal role models in my life," Wilson said, "But nobody, other than my family, my parents, had more of an impact on my life than Coach Wooden did."

He has had an impact on Wilson's teenage daughter, Ashley, too. During a 2008 summer creative

writing course at Lewis and Clark College, Ashley chose as her project paper to write about meeting with Wooden in Encino. She titled the paper after one of his "7-point Creed" elements: "Failing to prepare is preparing to fail."

Wilson said she frequently thinks of that bit of wisdom, as well as Woodenisms such as, "Make each day your masterpiece," and "Make friendship a fine art."

Since the first time she read or heard Wooden's many maxims, "his lessons just went to my core." Now, "These things just play through my brain all the time," she said.

The afternoon in Encino still ranks as one of the highlights of Wilson's life. She remembers Wooden, then nearly 92, reciting long, unbroken passages of poetry as well as quoting philosophers and sages. "His recall was amazing," she said. "He could not have been any more sharp."

A couple of years ago, Wilson decided to write Wooden a letter to update him on the success of the youth sports program he had helped create in San Francisco. "I just wanted to let him know about his whole impact on a group of kids he never met himself, kids who are living with their families in single-room apartments," she said.

Also, Wilson said, she wanted to tell the celebrated mentor of fine athletes that his legacy included more than the success of the Tenderloin Youth Sports Initiative. In her letter to Wooden, she echoed a sentiment the old Indiana farm boy, no doubt, had heard often but never failed to value.

"I wanted to let you know that there is probably not a day that goes by," she wrote, "that I don't think about something you said to us, or that is in your book or movie that is inspiring to me. I believe that it helps to make ME a better person."

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