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THE HILLERY LEGACY LIVES ON AT MOUNT MERCY

The name Hillery is well-known and well-regarded throughout Buffalo, but particularly in South Buffalo. James R. Hillery's influence in South Buffalo athletics has been well-documented. He taught physical education in Buffalo for 33 years, along with coaching numerous baseball, basketball and hockey teams. He also found time to officiate basketball for 35 years.

He was a familiar face not only at the Cazenovia Golf Course where he served as the starter for 17 years, but also at most of the innumerable athletic contests that his 31 grandchildren participated in.

Previously two of John's, Jim's third oldest son, children have followed their grandfather's footsteps into coaching in the Buffalo schools. A third member of John's family, his oldest daughter Brittany Hillery Myers has also joined the "family tradition". Brittany a 2004 graduate of Mount Mercy Academy has returned "home" to coach varsity soccer at her alma mater.

"I love coaching at Mount Mercy Academy. I love everything about Mount Mercy and what it represents. It has brought back so many wonderful memories for me. I love the fact that my sister now attends MMA. I am privileged to be able to coach at my alma mater," Hillery-Myers remarked.

Myers played soccer all four years for Mount Mercy, including three on the varsity level. As a junior she attained Second Team All-Catholic honors and her senior year she was the captain and a First Team All-Catholic. She was also awarded the Coach's Award for soccer as a senior. Her grandfather James Hillery was at most, if not all of her games throughout her four year high school career. She continued her soccer career in college, playing junior varsity for Division I Niagara.

At Niagara Myers received her first exposure to coaching competitive soccer. She served as player-coach of the JV team during her senior season. "Although it was a great deal of work going to school full-time while coaching and playing, it was a great learning experience," Myers commented.

Despite the fact that many of her past coaches told Myers that she should coach soccer, she was too involved with playing soccer year-round. Ironically it was at her grandfather's wake last April where the seeds of coaching at Mount Mercy were planted. "At my Grandpa's wake, John Glose (MMA's most recent soccer coach) approached me about the coaching opportunity at Mercy. I finally decided it was time to become more selfless and give back to the community and be more like my Grandpa," Myers stated.

Although he is no longer physically present for Brittany Myers, his influence is entrenched in her life. "I try to live the lessons he taught me every day of my life, not only in coaching, but at work or at home with my husband," Myers said.

James Hillery taught Brittany many important lessons about athletics through his example. His great love of competition and athleticism and the sense of team that he so enjoyed for his many years of coaching have been passed on to his granddaughter. "The best advice he ever gave me was to be a good teammate," Myers recalled.

"He also taught me to have respect for my coaches and teammates," Myers continued. "I know it is hard to teach someone to hustle, but I practiced and played every game with my whole heart and I know that I got that from my grandfather."

Watching the Mount Mercy Magic soccer team play this season, it is obvious that these lessons have been passed on to her team. No matter what the score or how much time remains; the Magic never quit or stop trying.

Coaching is a high pressure occupation, but there is extra pressure involved when your last name is Hillery. “I feel a lot of pressure as I strive to become the high caliber coach that my grandfather was, but I am honored to carry on his legacy along with my cousins and siblings,” Myers stated.

Adding to the expected pressure is the fact that Brittany’s youngest sister Abby, a sophomore at Mount Mercy, is a member of the varsity team. It definitely adds extra stress when one of the team members is your sibling.

“At first I was skeptical,” Myers remarked. “But honestly it has been easier than I thought. I think it is a result of the fact that my parents raised us so well. My sister is very respectful and has perfect attendance. As a matter of fact, I am probably harder on her than I am on anyone else. I don’t think there have been any problems with the team; in fact they find it humorous when I discipline Abby!”

Abby Hillery is a forward for the Magic. She has adapted well to having her sister as a coach. “I enjoy having my sister as my coach, but sometimes I do feel more pressure because she has high expectations that she believes I can meet. It is a lot of fun and is a great bonding experience for us. It is a different experience than I have normally had while playing soccer, but it is definitely improving my skills for the better,” Hillery commented.

She echoes the words of her sister, the coach when she said “No, it has not caused any problems between us or with the team. It has brought us closer since we do not live together anymore. Brittany doesn’t favor me. She is harder on me than anyone else!”

Although she did not have the benefit of her grandfather’s wisdom for as long as her sister Brittany, James Hillery still played an important role in Abby Hillery’s life. “My grandfather always told me to never give up. Despite my small size, he told me to play even bigger than my competition. He encouraged me to strive to be the best I could be and to try my hardest.”

Her grandfather also imparted his coaching wisdom to his young granddaughter. “He taught me many things, and I always valued his advice and used it in my game. He taught me to try my hardest and always keep my head held high no matter what the outcome may be. He taught me to go into the game filled with confidence and to walk off the field with a positive attitude, whether it was a win or a loss,” Hillery remarked.

When James Hillery died, many commented that his influence on others in both life and athletics was wide-reaching and extensive. It is quite evident that his wisdom and love of athletics has been passed on to his granddaughters Brittany Myers Hillery and Abby Hillery. The athletic legacy of James R. Hillery is alive and well in South Buffalo at Mount Mercy Academy.

“I think about him daily, but especially while I am coaching. If I am having a bad day or I am feeling overwhelmed, I take a deep breath and think to myself, how would my Grandpa handle this?” Myers concluded.

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