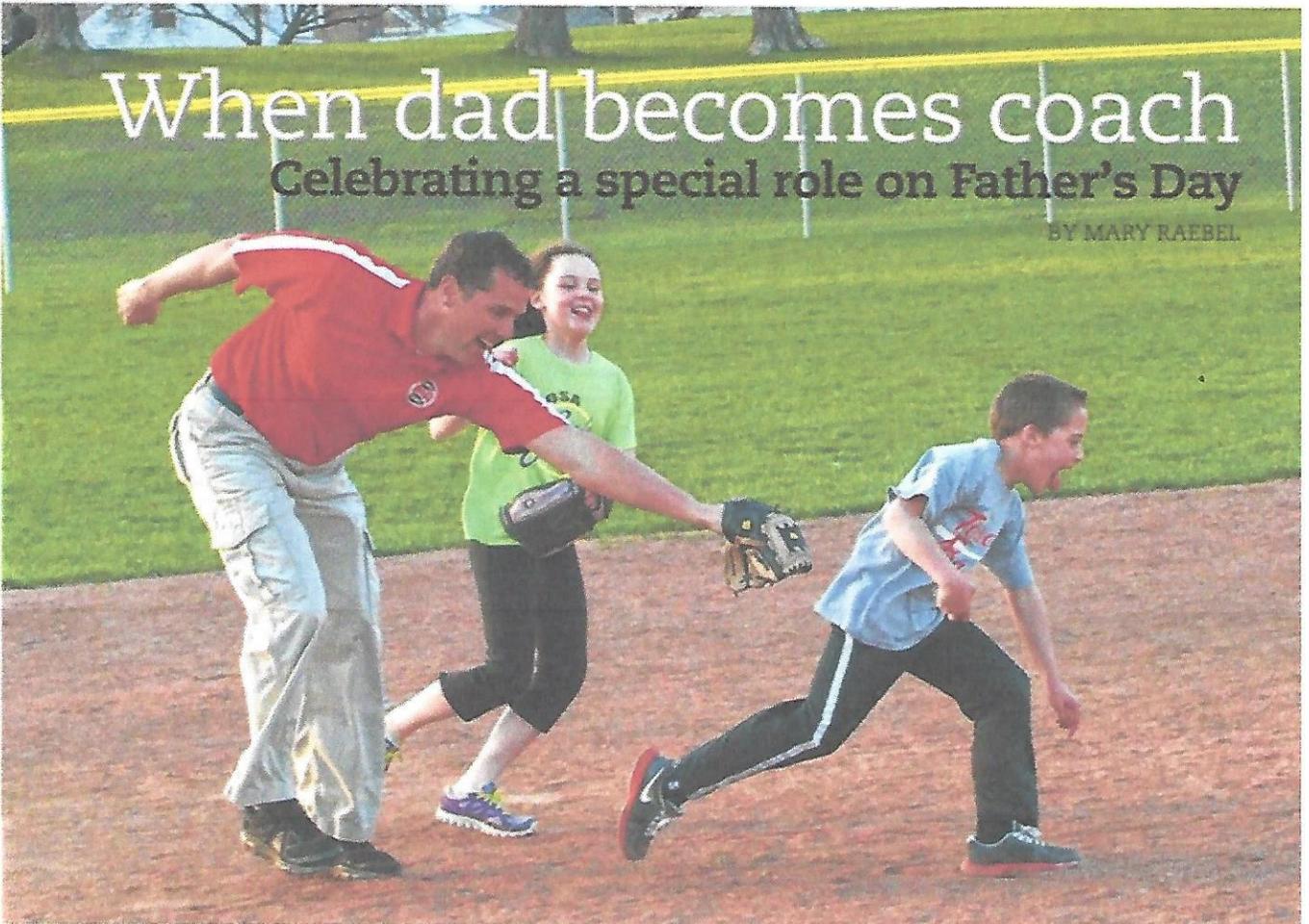


When dad becomes coach

Celebrating a special role on Father's Day

BY MARY RAEBEL



Bill Scallon with Olivia and

"I knew when I was a kid it was really cool my dad was my coach. He was the kind of coach other kids liked. He was a fun coach. He taught a lot, but he was laid back."

Bill Scallon knew that was the kind of coach he wanted to be, too. Before his oldest child, Danny, was 2, the Wauwatosa dad began playing ball with him in the yard—just like his dad did with him. Two years before his son was eligible to join Tosa Baseball, Bill was already talking to the league. Then in the spring after Danny turned 7, his son was on a team, and Bill was in.

"All in," as he says. Since that first rookie team, Bill has coached his son, now 15, six seasons in baseball and four seasons in youth football. He's coached his daughter Katie, 12, for three seasons in Tosa Girls' Fastpitch. Bill is also on the Tosa Baseball League Board.

Olivia, 8, and Evan, 7, are playing on teams, too, and look forward to Dad coaching them someday. "I knew when I signed up for Tosa Baseball I could be coaching 15 to 18 years." And that's more than OK with Bill.

"I'm passionate about my family, my kids, and this is one way to spend more time with them." And 13 other kids.

Bill says that first season he had to have a conversation with his son, explaining that as coach, he had a responsibility to work with all the kids. On the field, Danny was treated like any other player, but back home in the yard, it was dad and son again.

After several years of coaching boys, Bill prepared for the new challenge of bat-wielding girls. He thought coaching girls would be different but soon learned it really wasn't.

"Whether they're peak performers or up and comers, or whether they're boys or girls, if you work with all kids the same way—have a good respectful relationship, communicate well and try to help every player get the most out of what they can do—that is what's most important."

He did have to learn how to pitch like the girls. "I watched that windmill motion with fast-

pitch softball, and I didn't even know where to begin with that." So Bill went to clinics with his daughter and learned.

Coaching has allowed him to grow with his kids. He says, "As they've gotten older, I've stayed connected with them. It's just one more thing we have in common." It's also a great way to get to know their friends and get involved in the community.

When coaching, Bill says it helps to have an understanding employer—one that allows flexibility for games and practices. It also helps to have an understanding spouse. With four kids in multiple sports, his wife, Ann, spends a lot of time making sure everyone is where they ought to be. "Thank God for Google Calendar!" he says.

Someday, Bill knows he won't be "Coach" anymore, and he dreads that day: "Like you wouldn't believe." Even now, he

can't coach every team his active kids are on.

When Danny moved on to a select baseball team, Bill sat in the stands cheering ... and watching. A few times, he migrated over to the dugout to quietly bend the coach's ear, telling him different things he'd observed. Bill went back to the stands, but after a while, the coach flagged him over. And there Bill found himself, on the bench again.

All in the family

"No one has stepped up to coach. Will you?"

Mike Domitrz has gotten that phone call several times. Like anyone else, he has good reasons to say he's busy, and he travels a lot. No one would blame him if he said no. Instead he says, "Yes, if ..."

"The team needed a coach and the last thing I wanted to see was the boys not be able to have

fun playing together and learning. Regardless of how busy my family and professional schedule was, if my dad could be the head coach, I was honored to be his assistant again."

Mike's dad, 72-year-old Joe, has coached every time one of his three grandsons played for the 7th grade basketball B team. It's meant driving an hour from Whitewater to Hales Corners twice a week for practices, then again on weekends for games.

That's a lot of time and a lot of miles, but on the court it's clear: Joe's at home. In the final game of the season, the bleachers are packed in the small gym. The decibel level rises as the clock ticks and St. Mary's rallies to tighten the score. Joe's on his feet; he points; he shouts. He admits he's a little intense when he's on the court.

"Yeah, he yells a lot," says Mike, "but it's all directional. He's telling them what to do: go low, slow down."

Joe says a lot of that directional shouting is aimed at grandson Matt because he plays point guard. Besides Grandpa and Dad, big brother Anthony, 18, is also courtside, clipboard in hand.

Three coaches, all family members—that could create a lot of pressure for one 7th grader. "No, not really," says Matt. But a big brother, too? "No, not at all. When my brother was helping at practices, he treated me the same as all of the other players."

The Coaches Domitrz make it their mission to treat every player the same. "We meet with the parents at the beginning of the season and actually have them sign an agreement," says Joe. "That agreement allows every child to play an equal amount of the time regardless of the score."

The parents, the players and the coaches all sign a pledge of promises on conduct and expectations. Parents promise to help their child set realistic goals and "remember my child plays sports for their enjoyment and not mine."

The final game goes into overtime. It's tight to the finish. Every shot matters, yet every three minutes, different players are rotated into the game.

"It's a risk as far as winning or losing," says Mike, "because you might not have the five kids out there some coaches would have

put there. But we want them all to have the opportunity to experience those moments."

Matt says having his dad and grandpa coach was fun. "I liked having the extra time with both of them. It was really cool knowing my teammates enjoyed being coached by them."

Coaching isn't for everyone, but Mike calls it a blessing. "Those are bonding opportunities you can't replace," he says. "As the boys get older, they naturally do more and more with their friends and peers. That time you get together coaching in grade school and middle school is wonderful!"

"And," Joe adds, "it keeps you young."

Coaching for life

Not every dad can say his kids snap to attention and bow to him when he enters a room. Brian Ounkham says that's not happening in his house either. But at Okinawan Martial Arts in Sussex, Brian is Sensei. Everyone bows to Sensei—even his kids.

Brian teaches Okinawan Shorin-Ryu karate, and his children Ella, 9, and Alex, 8, are among his students. They already have more than three years experience under their junior brown belts.

Brian has been practicing martial arts for more than half his life. Karate is more than an activity to him. It's a lifestyle and now it's his business. However, as important as karate is to him, Brian says he wasn't going to force it on his kids.

It turns out his kids were anxious to learn. He explains to the parents and other students on the floor that his kids get treated equally. "My kids are not going to get a break. They follow the same rules as everyone else."

Brian says he might be a little harder on them at times; he wants them to set an example for younger students. At home, though, he's dad. He says his wife, Fadara, makes sure of it. He also lets her take the lead when it comes to disciplining the kids. "She's a little more polished than I am," he says, smiling. "She's a better human than I am, for sure."

The dojo is very traditional—it's what separates karate from sport. Brian prefers to teach not so much on how to play by the rules of competition, but more on how to survive in the no-rules world of self-de-

fense.

However, it's not just about punching and kicking. "I want to be able to reach out and help lives, and martial arts is really the catalyst," says Brian.

Karate is also about learning self-confidence, resilience, self-control and leadership. Brian wants to be able to teach those life lessons to his kids, and the dojo offers another opportunity to do that. "He teaches us about conduct, respect and honesty," says Alex.

Brian's third child is Andrew, 6. Andrew has autism, which brings its own challenges, Brian says. His goal is to spend more time with his kids. "That's what's most important." However, besides running a dojo, Brian also has a full-time job in commercial real estate. He isn't home to eat dinner with the family.

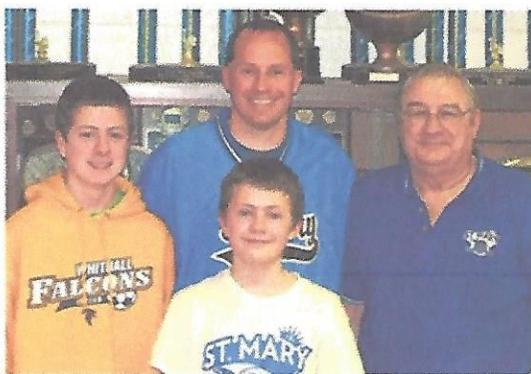
So they adapt. Brian builds his business and cultivates trusted teachers—and to give him more time. Ella and Alex take karate two to three times a week, and often the kids are at the dojo just to hang out. An informal kids group has formed while parents



Sensei Brian Ounkham with students of Okinawan Martial Arts.



Joe Domitrz huddles with his 7th grade B team.



The Domitrz coaches Anthony, Mike and Joe with Matt.



Brian Ounkham with Alex, Andrew and Ella.

workout in the adult class.

There is no one season for karate. It is year-round and year to year. People get to know one another. There are celebrations at the dojo. Dojo-mates invite their grandmas, grandpas and other family members to parties. The dojo has become an extended family, of sorts.

"My kids are growing up in the dojo," says Brian. "And even though I'm not giving them 100 percent love and tenderness all the time like I want to, I'm with them."

—photos by Chris and Mary Raebel

Tips for parent coaches:

- Separate the parent from the coach.
- Treat every child fairly (including your own).
- Establish rules of conduct for players, parents and coaches.
- Remember, it's not about you (or the parents). It's about the kids. Are they having fun?
- Practice good communication with players and parents regarding schedules, rules, expectations and feedback on players' performance and progress.
- Appreciate supportive employers and partners.
- Know your sport. You don't have to be an expert, but seek out clinics for help.
- Give it a shot. If you're not sure coaching is for you, volunteer to assist or help out at practices.