

Remembering Samuel Lesseig

1939-2013



The Index and the Truman State Community is saddened to hear of the long-time Bulldog Samuel Lesseig's death. He served many roles at Truman including professor, coach and interim athletic director. As stories of his genuine goodness circulate the campus, we are reminded of how lucky we were to have him as a part of this community.

His legacy lives on through his wife Dee and his children Vance, Corey and Kristin. All of his children are Bulldog alumni. We send our deepest sympathies to the Lesseig family during this time of mourning.

We are privileged to have our Assistant Sports Editor cover a feature about Mr. Lesseig. To shed light on the magnitude of his passing, the interview took place and the piece was written two days before Lesseig was hospitalized. These are some of Mr. Lesseig's last words. His wisdom shines through and he doesn't disappoint.

David Lemon,
Sports Editor

Father, teacher, coach, friend

BY JONATHAN REMBOLD
Assistant Sports Editor

Longtime Bulldog and head women's golf coach Samuel Lesseig, has adorned the purple and white since 1963.

After completing his master's degree during that year from Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kan., Lesseig got a piece of advice from his professor.

"He told me [Truman State] is a nice small school and that I'd fit in well. I came here and I liked it," Lesseig said. Fifty years later he still is here.

Now, Lesseig is known more as a coach than a teacher. However, he said he had never planned to coach. Lesseig said he played golf during college and that was it.

After 20 years in the classroom, this changed when a group of girls approached Lesseig and asked why there wasn't a women's golf team at Truman.

"There were three or four young ladies who knew that I had a daughter who played high school golf and they asked why there wasn't a college team," he said. "They started a golf club and asked me to be the sponsor. After a year and a lot of hard work, they petitioned to become a varsity sport and I got named coach."

Once named the varsity coach during 1985, Lesseig was able to coach his daughter Kristin as one of the original golfers. Even then Lesseig still had some doubts.

"I never thought I would be doing this for long," Lesseig said. "The first 10 years the coach didn't get paid, but once the men's team got a new coach and they paid him, he called me and said, 'call them Sam, they have to pay you.'"

After only four years of coaching, Lesseig was asked to serve as the interim Athletic Director while Truman searched for a new one. With some hesitation, he said he agreed to hold the office while the school searched.

"I said I'll take it for a year," Lesseig said. "It took about two-and-a-half months for me to decide that I didn't want to do it. As an AD, you are the person who gets called in on everything. As a coach you are just with one small group and you know all the problems with them. It is very hard to answer every coach's needs when you have a limited budget. Being an AD is not what I wanted to be. I appreciated the chance, but it was something that I didn't want to do."

Lesseig shifted his focus back to only golf and teaching. Lesseig is one of the few coaches at Truman who still oversees a classroom as well as a team. He tells the team he is a coach and they should not look at him as a teacher.

"You get to see the students as an athlete and hear a lot of stories about other faculty members," Lesseig said. "You see them as athletes but you have to step back and remember that they are just kids."

Alumna Beth Folsom, now a coach and teacher, said she fondly remembers Lesseig and the beginning of the Truman team.

"For me he was the perfect coach," Folsom said. "I teach and coach now and I learned a lot from him. What I appreciated most was how much he cared about us. He knew what classes I was taking and knew how I was doing and all my professors. He cared about golf, too, but he cared about us most of all."

Junior golfer Courtney Cisler said she sees Lesseig's enthusiasm and caring for his players firsthand.

"I almost describe him as a grandpa to us," Cisler said. "He has an open door policy and whenever we need a break from school or from the course we can go to him and he can help us with whatever we need."

More so than any golf tip or shot adjustment, Lesseig was able to shape players in unconventional ways. When Folsom was asked what she would remember learning from Lesseig, she said she immediately thought of pizza.

"We would always find a unique local pizza place on our road trips and Coach would always say that all pizza is good pizza, just some are better than others," Folsom said. "So I think about that on the course too — that all shots are good, but some are better than others and that everything can be positive."

Cisler said she remembers a softer side of Coach Lesseig.

"The very first round I played in college, I kept hitting the ball in the water and in the rocks," Cisler said. "He didn't say anything after the round. He just gave me a hug, and that is something that I will always remember."

When asked what he would want his parting words of wisdom to be, Lesseig still only thinks about the athletes.

"I would tell them that if you can honestly walk off the course and say you did your best, that's all I can ask... when you look back and say I had a great college experience, the friends and classes and people, and golf was a part of it, then that's great," Lesseig said.



Submitted Photo
Samuel Lesseig and the first ever women's golf team at Truman during 1985.