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Section Title Top Thrill For Bemus Point Coach

Mel Lewellen, who is nearing completion of his 13th year as director of physical education and coach at Bemus Point Central School, is the Jamestown Times-News top sports personality for March, a unanimous choice for the committeemen.

The 1964-65 Lewellen-coached Red Dragons ran and shot their way to not one notable season's achievement, but two, a thoroughly convincing method of demonstrating their merit.

A, they won the Section VI Class B championship; and B, they hung up a 21-0 record winning all the games that may be won under the present rules of the New York State Public High School Athletic Association.

Lewellen's selection was based on his guidance of the Bemus Point five to sectional honors, a single feat although it well could have been on his 13-year overall record.

His 1958-59 team also won the sectional crown and the successes of the Point's schoolboy athletes and teams since Mel took over in the fall of 1951 add up to a sparkling impressive listing.

Mel, a quiet fellow who has proven he's a man who can get the job done, is not one to talk of himself and his pride in his youthful charges and their accomplishments was evidenced throughout an interview with the writer of this piece.

Whenever the scribe bore down on the supervision and coaching angles, the Lewellen attitude came through in such quotes as the following:

“Credit for any honors which have come my way must go to the fine group of athletes which I have had the privilege of coaching.”

Or, “the main reason I have stayed in Bemus for this long a period is found in the type of boys and girls who make up the student body there.”

The Point’s athletic director, who is dedicated to the belief that “sports are the greatest” as at least one of the keys to the preparation of the teenager for his adult years, when asked, pinpointed three career high points.

The first of these greatest thrills would have to be the Section VI basketball championship in 1959 over Barker in a sudden death double overtime after being down 13 points at half time in Buffalo’s Memorial Auditorium.

Some of the players on that team were Dave Evans, Gene Heil, George Newman, Frank Furgiuele and Mike Rogers,

Next in order of sequence Mel named the capture of the 1964 baseball Section VI baseball title by the Dragons. “We defeated Akron, 3-1, but we had to go two extra innings to do it.”

The roster of the championship nine included the names of pitcher Brian Brown, Terry Woodfield, Bob Gustafson, Paul Carlson, Dan Harnish, Dave Richner and Mike Gore.

But, to Lewellen, the greatest of all his coaching thrills was furnished by the cagers who only recently nailed down the Section VI championship to put the capsheaf on a spotless 21-0 record, 18 of these in regular season games.

Added luster to the 1964-65 feat stems from the Red Dragons’ establishment of a Chautauqua County schoolboy basketball record.

“We were 12 down at the end of the first quarter,” recounts the BP coach. “That the boys came from that far back to win, 67-61, the issue in the last minute of the game demonstrates their real championship caliber.

“This group probably exerted the finest team effort of any I have had,” Mel continued. “I do not want to take anything from any of the other teams which turned in grand performances. I have had many fine groups and individual players but never a team that has operated as a unit like this one.”

The Bemus height, supplied by Bob Swanson and Paul Carleton, both at 6-2, was not an overwhelming factor in the success saga, according to Lewellen, who attributes it to fine all-around shooting and defense, generated by “a feverish desire to improve and to win.”

Others on the team included Ray Head, Bob Gustafson, Terry Woodfield, Randy Chamberlin and John Evans.

Lewellen notes the Pointers have won the county B class basketball title in nine of 13 years and that, since 1955, the school’s athletic squads have won 21 sectional trophies, divided among basketball, baseball, golf and tennis.

A check of the BP records reveals that, since last spring, the baseball team compiled an 11-0 log, the Jim Lucey coached golf team went 14-0, Gordy Kidder’s footballers chalked a 7-0-1 performance, to go with the cagers’ 21-0 level. All of which points to the fact that, since last March, the school’s teams have not lost a match.

Since coming to Bemus in 1951 as athletic director, basketball and baseball coach, Mel’s cage teams have a record of 183 wins and 83 losses for a 69 per cent average; his baseball nines have recorded 109 wins and 37 losses for a 74 per cent mark.

And yet, Lewellen retired as baseball coach following last year’s campaign.

At this juncture, the coach veered from the personal to the ratings of some of his charges in the past: “Among the fine athletes at Bemus during my time would be Jerry Galloway, Denny Rodgers, Fred Wilcox, Wally Carlson and Charley Wuertzer.”

Lewellen was born in Nadiad, India, to the William Lewellens, missionaries, in February, 1924. The family came to this country, subsequently residing in Philadelphia, Albany, Brooklyn and Houghton. Mel, after attending Brooklyn's Samuel J. Tildon High, was graduated from Houghton High in 1941. He earned letters as a first baseman in baseball and a standing guard in basketball.

He saw World War II service with the U.S. Navy in the Pacific from 1942 until his discharge in July, 1946. He received his AB degree from Houghton College in 1948 and completed his physical education studies and received his Master's Degree at the University of Kentucky in June of 1951.

Lewellen married Miss Winifred Rhebergen of Clymer in 1947. The Lewellens are the parents of a daughter, Wendy, 11, and two sons, Scott, 13, and David, 6.