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By Frank Hyde

## **Mel Lewellen, A Gentleman As A Coach, To Be Gentleman Farmer in Retirement**

Mel Lewellen, a gentleman as a basketball coach and a person for years, becomes a gentleman farmer when school lets out.

"High school athletics have been good to me," he said the other day while discussing his coming complete retirement at Maple Grove High school. "I feel that I have received much more than I have given in sports," he added. "My only hope as I leave it is that I have been a credit to the boys I have had the pleasure of coaching, to the sports with which I have been associated, to my school and to Chautauqua County athletics in general."

Mel admits high school athletics have been a major part of his life for the last 28 years, "and will always be a big part of my memories." To that he adds: "If I had a choice of reliving my 28 years, I would do the same thing all over again."

Coaches and schoolmen honored Lewellen during the recent Section 6 playoffs. He was called to center circle and introduced as "Mr. Basketball of Western New York."

It was a very touching and fitting introduction.

Fellow coaches often refer to Lewellen as "the Dean" and when one considers his Maple Grove basketball teams have made the playoffs 24 times in 28 seasons, the last 16 in a row, it appears to be a pretty appropriate title.

Lewellen was once termed by a coach, in conversation with this writer, as a "master of changing and surprising strategies on the basketball court."

That, too, seems appropriate when referring to a coach whose teams finished three unbeaten seasons, once rolled up 40 victories in a row, a county record, winner of nine league championships and four sectional titles.

What does a man who has devoted much of his life to a busy schedule in coaching and education in general do when he enters the quiet life of retirement? "It won't be so quiet," Mel avers. "I am not sure what the future holds, but I intend

to step back from it all, take a deep breath and do what I want to do when I want to do it." He added: "I want to do my own thing, be my own man. My life will no longer be run by alarm clocks, class bells and deadlines."

Lewellen has five acres of land, mainly populated by maple trees, at Maple Springs. "I was out in my sugar shanty boiling sap when you called," he said over the telephone. "I'll be doing a lot of puttering around the place. We have ducks, geese, rabbits, horses, fruit trees, maple trees and a vegetable garden. I'll spend some time south during the winter but in the summer I will also be involved in youth recreation programs here in Chautauqua County.

Mel has not only been a maker of High School champions, many who have gone on to very creditable performance in college competition, but a maker of coaches as well. That includes his three children, Scott, Wendy and Dave. The boys played for him when they were in school. Scott is the present Randolph varsity girl coach; Wendy Gunderson coaches the girls' junior varsity at Clymer Central School and Dave is the fifth and sixth grade boy's coach at Wooster, Ohio, where he is a sophomore in the College of Wooster.

And former Lewellen-coached players who have become coaches include Bill Jowett, former Falconer varsity coach, Gunny Anderson, former head coach at Southwestern Central School, now athletic director; Wally Carlson present Maple Grove Jayvee boys coach; Bob Goold, present junior high boys coach at BOCES, Ashville; Chuck Pegan, former Fredonia Central jayvee coach, now one the Panama Central School faculty, and Bob Gustafson, present Maple Grove girls junior coach.

It is an imposing list for one person to influence, careerwise. But certainly a man who has won 387 games and lost 151 during a 28-year career can be the master builder of his profession.

His basketball success overshadows all else, but Mel has had a versatile career in athletics. He also coached the baseball teams at Maple Grove for a time, the volleyball and track teams and is serving as athletic director at this writing.

Much has been written about Mel Lewellen during the past few years. He has been featured in Western New York newspapers including *The Post-Journal*. So, briefly, he was born in India, son of a missionary; earned his Masters at the University of Kentucky after attending Houghton College. He admits he entered UK because Adolph Rupp, one of the greatest college coaches was producing conference and national champions by the bushel basket. Rupp lured such basketball greats as Cliff Hagan, Alex Groza, Frank Ramsey, Ralph Beard and others to UK, all first string All-Americans during their regime.

Mel Lewellen, you see, had his mind pretty well made up on a coaching career even that early and he wanted to study Adolph Rupp and his methods.

The Lewellen family moved a lot so Mel attended more than one high school as P-J staffer Jim Riggs pointed out in an earlier article. They included Albany, Samuel Tilden in Brooklyn, Bethlehem Central in Delmar and Houghton where he received his diploma and later attended Houghton College.

A coach with a 72 per cent winning record, of course, has some cherished memories of great players and fine teams, but Mel being the kind of fellow he is, shies away from comparisons.

"I am afraid comparisons could possibly make some great performances of their time feel slighted, and that is the last thing in the world I want," he told us.

That is the Mel Lewellen creed, which explains why he will be sorely missed in Western New York athletics.