

Coach puts kids on the right track

By Tim Smith
staff writer

He's been honored as the best varsity boys track high school coach in the state. But Southfield High's Tom Eschmann modestly turns such accolades aside.

"The school got the recognition, I'm just its representative," said the 42-year-old Eschmann, whose SHS

portraits

track squads have compiled a 71-3 dual meet record from 1981-89, including back-to-back class A titles the last two seasons.

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JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Southfield High School's Tom Eschmann (sitting) recently was named the state's top boys track coach of 1990. But he says much of the credit belongs to the athletes, such as junior Marvin Reynolds (left) and senior Rick Duncan, both hurdlers.

Coach motivates students

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Maybe so. But Eschmann's enviable record caught the attention of the Michigan High School Coaches Association, which named the Royal Oak resident its 1990 boys coach of the year.

"I'm honored that other coaches and committees recognized the effort that I personally put out," Eschmann said. "But my feelings toward it are... not only was this award directed toward me, it was directed toward the kids."

Eschmann's humble stance, meanwhile, appears to be a contradiction of how he chases achievement and motivates, both as a track coach and math teacher in Southfield High's "Focus Success" program.

THE LATTER is comprised of students "who have had a difficult time in a regular classroom setting," including attendance problems, said Eschmann, in his 20th year as a teacher in Southfield schools.

Besides math, Eschmann this year is teaching a computer applications course. In recent years he taught physics.

"I'd like to start the year and finish the year, and look back at something I'm proud of," Eschmann said. "That doesn't necessarily mean winning all the meets. Personal pride keeps me rolling."

Although he doesn't call himself a perfectionist, "others would," Eschmann noted with a laugh.

But Eschmann's quest for perfection allows room for improvement. The coach said he lives by the "Golden Rule" and tries not to come down too harshly on his athletes and students.

"It isn't necessarily how much you win that measures your success. It's how much you learn through participating," Eschmann said. "They mature, learn to do things differently. I don't have a lot of people who quit."

A REASON for that, Eschmann said, is that he lets people know what is expected of them and even asks them what assignments they want on the team, such as running the high hurdles or heaving the shot put.

Eschmann is the first to realize his success as a coach at Southfield High, since moving over from Lederle Junior High in the mid-'70s, is due to more than just his own abilities.



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Motivating Southfield High School students to excel on the track or in the classroom is a top goal of Tom Eschmann, discussing computer application techniques with senior Telitha Young. Moments later, Eschmann headed for another track practice.

"It takes more than great athletes, it takes a heckuva lot of luck and organization," Eschmann said.

The same way a coach looks back on a season to determine results, Eschmann said he is now beginning to assess how well his Focus Success class has fared.

"It's challenging, but right now, at this time of year, you start seeing positive results," he said. Those include that some students are missing fewer classes than before and are more enthused about learning material.

When the three-time Eccentric-area track coach of the year (1983, '88, '89) isn't at SHS, he can usually be found with his wife Pam and their three children Erich, 9; Kurt, 6 and Ehren, 4.

"MY FAMILY is my main interest," Eschmann said.

They enjoy traveling up to The Pinery camping facility on Lake Huron in Canada, sometimes just for the day.

And family neighborhood jogging outings are part of the routine.