



Education

[The Hammonton Gazette]

Funding for this section was made possible in part by the New Jersey Civic Consortium.

HHS's longest tenured coach awaits season

by **Andrei Simon & Samantha Irwin**
GAZETTE CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Joseph Martino always dreamed of coaching for a college basketball program, but he couldn't turn down the phone call from his hometown high school to run the basketball team. He now awaits the start of his 21st consecutive season as head coach, making him the longest-tenured coach at Hammonton High School.

Soon after graduating from Hammonton in 1988, Martino decided to help at the middle school level and be an assistant coach for the Hammonton Bulldogs.

"I ended up falling in love with all of it, it pushed me to major in physical education at the old Glassboro State College [now Rowan University]," Martino said.

After graduating from Glassboro State and living in Hammonton all his life, in his early 20s, Martino ventured out to pursue a career in coaching college basketball.

It was not an easy nor quick journey for Martino. At first he earned the opportunity to be assistant basketball coach for Hammonton High School after working with the middle school team. This led to him becoming the assistant coach at Bucks County Community College. Eventually through networking and growing a reputation within the sport, Martino landed himself at Millersville University as a graduate coaching assistant, while also working on and

completing his master's degree.

"There's no class or course for head coaching. Once you're in that seat it's much different than even assistant coaching. It really comes with experience," Martino said on the importance of utilizing his experiences leading up to this position.

After two years of coaching Division II, basketball, Martino went to Arizona to earn a degree in counseling and psychology to pursue a new career. It was soon after this, in 2001, that James Donoghue, former principal of Hammonton High School, phoned Martino to inform him of an expansion within the district as well as to offer him the head coaching position of the boys basketball program. After quick consideration, Martino returned back home.

Martino said he takes great pride that his program not only focuses on maximizing the talent and effort of his athletes on the court, but also emphasizes the importance of maturing in situations outside of basketball.

"I like this age group a lot, you get to see the kids grow from ninth grade to 12th. And



Coach Joseph Martino

there's lots of changes within that time period. You really get to see the boys, not just in skill, but mature as young men. That to me is really one of the biggest things I enjoy while coaching at this level. You really do see that transformation from ages 14 to 18 and I find a major reward from that, which is not just wins and losses," Martino said.

"Coach Martino always reminds us to work hard with everything you do because it will pay off in the end," Vinny Bar-

lotti, a senior basketball player at Hammonton High School, said.

One of the reasons basketball is Martino's preferred sport is because of how it's rooted in adversity.

"That's another reason I love the game so much because it's always about overcoming adversity. I always try to help the kids overcome that on the court as well as with any other counts of adversity that come their way in life," Martino said.

"We always have a fun season with him; we're always happy to play for him. He always tells us, 'If it's not working out now, just keep your head up and keep trying and

it'll get better at some point,'" Sebastian Pangia, a junior player, said.

Every head coach has their favorite glory moments as well as nightmare experiences and each coach also measures success differently. Some want the highest winning percentage, some want the most championships, but Martino strives to always compete and to grow a whole team of individual leaders.

"You want to always stay competitive. Make sure every kid is maximizing their potential. I want to see my players grow into leaders and not just followers on and off the court," Martino said.

"Mr. Martino taught us to work together as a team, so the team itself will grow stronger," another senior, John Andaloro, referring to the importance of teamwork in Martino's program, said.

Martino's work, effort and passion that he's instilled into this program has not been overlooked or downplayed as he is one of the most-respected coaches Hammonton has. As he's greatly looking forward to the start of his 21st season as head coach, he has little to no future expectations or milestones within his head.

"I'm not one for just outcomes, it's all about the process for me. I think it's more about being present and enjoying the moments. Also trying to improve upon the things that we can work on to get better at because we all have our weaknesses that we can improve on," Martino said.

Impact of injuries on Hammonton High School athletes

by **Dillon Siddiqi & Nick Salvati**
GAZETTE CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Injuries are an unfortunate reality in the world of sports that affect both professional athletes on the highest level and high school athletes just trying to finish out their playing careers.

For many athletes, high school is the last time they will ever suit up to play at a competitive level. Students spend months training and practicing for a season that can be taken from them at any moment.

Rocco Leo, a senior at Hammonton High School, lost his final football season to injury just four games into the year. Leo tore his MCL (medial collateral ligament) and PCL (posterior cruciate ligament) on a play where a teammate fell on his right knee. For Leo, fear for the worst immediately set in.

"Not again, this can't be

happening," Leo said.

Leo also cracked his pelvis a few years prior when he was playing football in middle school, making him no stranger to devastating injuries. The difference this time is that it's Leo's senior year that is being taken away from him.

"It was the last time I ever stepped on a football field and I didn't know. I never knew. I never knew that was my last play," Leo said.

Along with the physical pain, there is also an emotional battle that comes with these injuries. Leo and the football team practiced throughout the summer to prepare for this campaign and having it taken away was a tough reality for Leo to come to terms with.

"This summer, it was hot and we were working hard. It was a whole different group of kids who came in, it was a whole different team and we were all just ready to play and we all wanted to win. When it was taken from me, I was just like,

it was tough. It was one of the hardest things," Leo said.

At Hammonton High School, one of the first people to help an athlete battle an injury is their athletic trainer, Donna DeLucca. She's the first person on the scene of an injury and does everything she can to comfort the athletes both physically and emotionally.

"I just do my part by staying as calm as possible because it's very scary for someone this age. Sometimes this could be the first big thing that happens to them health wise and sometimes it could be a pretty significant thing," DeLucca said.

DeLucca also understands how important it can be to stay calm for the sake of the parents, as she was once in that situation herself.

"A lot of times it's also keeping the coaches calm and keeping the parents calm. My daughter was an athlete here and she broke her arm in a soccer game. And that was the hardest for me to stay calm. Like,

all of my knowledge went out of my head for a few seconds until I got her out of here and sent her for an X-ray," DeLucca said.

These types of incidents happen to high school athletes all the time and Leo is not the only player on the football team to have their season cut short.

Hunter Valentin, a junior at Hammonton High School, abruptly lost his season when he broke his collarbone during a game.

"It was a pass play and I had to back up to guard the guy because he had gotten a step behind me and I jumped to intercept the pass but fell on my back, knocking the ball down and my arm got caught under my back and it (collarbone) just broke," Valentin said.

Injuries can make the simplest of day to day tasks difficult and that is something that Valentin said he physically struggles with every day.

"It affects my entire day, every

day. Getting up, like, if I get up wrong, it hurts. I need help tying my shoes if my shoes get untied. Putting on my socks takes 10 minutes," Valentin said.

Similarly to Leo, the injury has taken an emotional toll on Valentin.

"When I realized it was going to keep me out for a while, it really hurt. Like mentally, it hurt ... I was on a roll in football, pretty much. And that injury just stopped it," Valentin said.

For some athletes, like Leo, injuries force an early end to their careers. For others, like Valentin, it's a bump in the road and provides a source of motivation to come back even better.

"It definitely motivates me because it's my junior year and I only have one more year after this. So, it definitely motivates me in that way, and that keeps me going, alone, but I definitely have confidence in myself that I'll be back," Valentin said.

210 Bellevue Ave.
Hammonton
609-547-5263

3 N New York Rd.
#14 . Smithville
609-382-7052

SWEATER WEATHER IS HERE!

Come in and take
10% off your
entire purchase

Gift Cards Available

www.yourperhaps.com

JOE'S FLOOR COVERING

MAKE A MAGICAL CHANGE TO YOUR HOME!
LET US GIVE YOUR FLOORS A ROYAL MAKEOVER!

Serving the
Hammonton
Area for over
40 years

**CALL 7 DAYS A WEEK
FREE ESTIMATES**

(609) 413-2787

**CARPET, VINYL,
LAMINATE,
RUG BINDING &
REPAIRS**