



Greetings, Sports Fans....as another SMCC basketball season starts up, we thought it would be a good time to look back at the early years of Cougar Athletics. Getting a new collegiate sports program off the ground is no easy task, as this story from 1982 illustrates....but hopefully our 1-and-25 days are behind us.

SMCC frustrated in athletic debut

By Hank Hughes
The Phoenix Gazette

South Mountain Community College's first venture into athletics has left a trail of frustration, disappointment, worry and hope.

The frustration belonged to Joe Caldwell, the men's basketball coach who resigned after the team went 1-25.

"I thought we should have been able to win at least 10 ballgames," Caldwell said. "We didn't. Something's wrong and I thought it must be me."

Richard Thompson, the men's and women's track coach, was disappointed. Thompson started the year brimming with confidence and loaded with athletes. Then the bottom dropped out as many of the athletes jumped ship. Thompson became embroiled in contractual hassles and continually was bothered by the lack of facilities. He will not renew his contract.

Athletic director Greg Medrano was not only worried about the fledgling athletic program but also about his health. He resigned and will teach business courses full time next year.

But Medrano retains hope, as does incoming athletic director Doug Fer-

guson. Both think South Mountain's teams will be more competitive next year.

"We did pretty well just to survive (this year)," Medrano said. "Now we can talk about winning."

Caldwell apparently had trouble relating to his players.

"The players failed to understand that someone who's played for 20 years can have the knowledge to teach the game," he said. "A lot of players took the attitude that a player can't coach. It was my fault, not being able to convince them that I could."

Caldwell also had his eyes opened to the drug problem.

"I learned there is another element going on in America that was not there when I was growing up," he said. "Many are caught up in the drug scene. They talk a lot about drugs and their main man, who deals them drugs."

"I didn't have to contend with that when I was growing up. Working to be an athlete was the main thing."

Caldwell said he resigned after he learned that the school's administration was planning on releasing his assistants — Ollie Payne and Ali Muhammad.

Dean of Students Wil Counts said they were making room for Ferguson to be an assistant. Edward Cottrell was named head coach.

For Thompson, the track problems piled on one after another. He lost many of his athletes after the school cut back the work-study program, leaving the students without sufficient funds. Then the track was never completed, so the Cougars were forced to work out at South Mountain High.

Plus, he said, the school never supported his program.

"Most of my athletes came from programs where they were treated like blue-chippers," Thompson said. "Then they got here and were ignored."

The biggest problem for Thompson was trying to sign a contract as both the men's and women's coach. He said he was hired to coach both; but it was later learned that violates a district policy which states no one can coach both teams.

All the problems, he said, kept him from coaching. But it did not prevent South Mountain from picking up its first national championship. Sprinter Joclyn Bentley won the 400-meter dash at the national meet last week in San Angelo, Texas. Thompson was on

hand for that.

It was Medrano who did the Herculean task of setting the athletic programs in motion. He oversaw it all — scheduling, purchasing equipment, uniforms and medical supplies, arranging transportation, coordinating the building of the facilities and a hundred other bothersome tasks.

"It was a challenge, and I think I met the challenge," he said. "And I don't want to leave after having done all this work, but why chance it?"

Medrano doesn't want to "chance" his good health. His worrisome tasks were taking a toll. After a frustrating afternoon when he had a gym full of athletes waiting two hours for doctors, Medrano had his blood pressure checked. The bottom number was 110.

"At Christmas I had a full physical," Medrano said. "My blood pressure was better but the doctor said the stress of 12- to 15-hour days could be harmful."

He has regrets about resigning. He figures the hard part is over. Still, "there's many more important things."

Ferguson, who coached at Glendale Community College last year, will be South Mountain's third athletic director in two years.