

January 27th 2015

Coach Bob Callahan's Quiet but Effective Leadership - Near and Far From New Jersey's Squash Scene!

Ferez S. Nallaseth



Kristen and Bob Callahan at Bob's Retirement – Jadwin Gym, Princeton University, 6.1.2013



Coach Callahan's Clinic for the Rutgers University SRC in Werblin Gym at Rutgers (August, 2005)



Lifelong friend and Princeton Coach Gail Ramsay explaining Bob's many contributions to Princeton, Regional, US and Global Squash in filling the role of Master of Ceremonies (MC) at his retirement in Jadwin Gym (6.1.2013)



Typical audience response to Gail, Bob, Todd Harity and others at Bob's retirement in Jadwin Gym (6.1.2013)



Typical audience response to Gail, Bob and others at Bob's retirement in Jadwin Gym (6.1.2013)



Fellow Coaches and Engineers of Upsets and World Championships at Jadwin - Neil Pomphrey and Bob Callahan



Ferez & Bob (2012) – complimentary snap courtesy of Bob and Neil!



Coach Paul Assaiante explaining the magnitude of fellow Coach, Fierce Competitor, Trusted Colleague Bob Callahan's role in Collegiate, Regional, US and Global Squash at

the final Trinity/Princeton match (5T-4P) Coached by Bob in 2013. The 2 teams and their Assistant Coaches are behind and beside Paul and Bob.



Bob quipping about always having trouble figuring out which Mic worked – brought the house down (T/P match 2013).



Two of the Callahan boys bucking up their only Coach (T/P, 2013)



The start of the match (T/P, 2013) – all smiles from Coaches Pomphrey, Assaiante, Callahan and the Security Staff.



Coach Bob Callahan – Level C, Jadwin Gym, Princeton University (T/P, 2013)

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The Squash World sustained another loss today! Through the decades Bob Callahan was a remarkable Person whether as Winner or Player or Captain or Coach or Leader! But today we were deprived of what would have been his Natural Judgment and Wisdom as Elder/Statesman

– when his amazingly long three year resistance to Cancer came to an end. All of us marvel at the remarkable journey of Kristen Callahan the Callahan stoics and their sense of humor! And through such things as Central Park Runs, if they did not quite turn the tables on it, they effectively contributed to the War Chest against Cancer. Everything in this Nebulous, Amorphous, and even Contradictory Collection of things that we call being Human wrenches things best left to those who are good with words! Some of these things are obvious in the accompanying images assembled from a number of events featuring Bob at Jadwin – matches with Trinity, Celebrating Bob and PJS Scholarships endowed by Bob!

Bob Callahan's other world lay in his Princeton Tiger's Squash Team and his near life long association with his fellow Coach Neil Pomphrey - with whom he engineered their many wins in Collegiate Squash. And of course with Coach Gail Ramsay with whom he built Princeton University's Squash Program including the Princeton Junior Squash version. Bob's work with the Collegiate Squash Association and in securing the Junior World Championships for Princeton University is well known. Only someone with Bob's communication, administrative, diplomatic and leadership skills and stature could have secured the Junior WC for Princeton University!! But these are all best left to the record books and those in the know! Despite all this a point of note that Coach Gail Ramsay makes - Bob had the touch and could make everyone feel good about themselves!

The Bob Callahan that I am going to try and project emerges from my personal experiences with him! Coach Callahan was someone whom one could only appreciate gradually! But I did learn fairly quickly that at the very least Bob was a special person and an effective leader! These perceptions came from the matches that he Coached or that we played, his advice as a fellow Coach (when I was the Coach at Rutgers and Lawrenceville), the passionate discussions on the angles and the mechanics of the game that we shared, his willingness to listen to someone some wise and learned ones considered a nobody (certainly in Squash), his strong support and recommendations even when 'the winds were not right and it was inadvisable to say anything', and his continued enthusiasm for my interests even when I knew that he was having bad days with his Cancer. But they came most of all, from my days as a volunteer photographer in Jadwin while documenting the 2012 National Champions and commemorations for Bob!! For example in not wanting to lose the array of expressions to Bob's hilarious, self-deprecating humor punctuating the poignant and dignified farewell comments I was pointing and shooting as quickly as the Casio would let me! Only much later did the wealth of adulation, respect, fondness, laughter, sadness - you name the adjective/verb pour out of the digital screen!

Bob won the vast majority of the matches we played – he was a tough competitor! We did not know this at the time but eventually realized that our paths had actually crossed as early as 1977 in the National Squash Championships held at the Naval Academy in Annapolis. We swapped stories as only 2 veterans can! The mentionables? Bob had Captained his Tigers to one of their many National Team Championships, Michael Desaulniers had won one of his three Individual National Championships and as a retired player representing the University of Georgia, in Athens I had the honor of facing Gil Mateer (#1 for UPenn, who became the Finalist, after the draw was revised mid tournament!) in the second round. I lost but made it to the final of the Inaugural 70+ Matches where I lost 1-2 to Stony Brook University's Stu Grodman. I was back

in New Jersey 2001 – present. It is in this latest period that I really got to know Coach Callahan, his humor, his quiet leadership, his mettle, his family, his straight arrow methods, his ability to absorb diversity and culture! Beyond which Bob listened to everyone but carefully chose the words he remembered.....I'll let those who know him pick the right words to describe Coach Callahan and you'll find many good ones will come easily!!!

After a Coach's Conference in New England in 2007 or 2008 we all returned to the Princeton area and I got a call from AD John Simar in effect giving me the privilege of Coaching the Lawrenceville School Squash Team. It was the best Squash team that I ever coached (we finished 6th of 56 teams in the US HS Nationals) – and as one of my nationally ranked Co-Captains and #1 Player Thomas Mattsson (& later UPenn #1), pointed out, we were one of the most 'over-performing' Lawrenceville Teams in History! It was almost certainly Coach Bob Callahan who had quietly recommended me and made all this possible!!

Even closer to our collective Hearts was the partially successful attempt from 2004 - 2006 to bring the 50000 plus students of Rutgers University into the fold of Collegiate Squash! With Coaches Bob Callahan, Gail Ramsay, Mark and Dave Talbott, Sean Sloan, Paul Assaiante and many others all lending a hand. But it was Bob and Gail who came and gave us complimentary clinics at the Rutgers Courts, arranged for free Racquets, Courts, arranged matches with the Princeton Squash Club and helped out in many other ways! Current Coach Charles Heckscher and others in the Rutgers Squash Community will have things to add below in the section on 'Reflections of the Rutgers Squash Community'. Bob Callahan's remarkable Coaching methods – first preparing the players with his intense, soft but engaging voice, (with all the Rutgers players seated in a semi-circle) – before he even took a step on court to highlight movement and stroke production which worked wonders! I have never seen that unruly lot so mesmerized and attentive!! It is in the faces and the picture below.

But Bob knew how and when to raise his voice!!! On one of the occasions that Trinity won 5-4, a large and unruly Trinity Fan made a snarky and personal comment about the Tigers Players while hiding behind a newspaper. Bob's voice instantly boomed out 'WHO SAID THAT?!!!' That Fan basically cowered behind the newspaper and whimpered something inaudible. Gone was the 'speak softly but carry a big stick!' This Bob was new to me but needed on this occasion! To his credit Coach Paul Assaiante (together with Bob), made it clear at the introductions before all matches, that such Fan behavior was not only unwelcome but actionable! See the muscle in yellow in the pictures!

The following year 2012 it was Princeton over Trinity 5-4 and they had won their first National Championships in years! The carriage was nothing if not exemplary, showing Bob and Neil's hands!

We could not possibly call it a day without at least one of Bob Callahan's hilarious Squash stories/pranks – I'll try but it'll be nowhere near the way Bob put it in person! This one was on his Squash savvy Pakistani Friend who was also a Gas Pump owner and like most, revered Jahangir Khan, reminding Bob about JK whenever he possibly could!!! When Jahangir Coached the Pakistani Team at the Junior World Championships held at Princeton's Jadwin Gym that Bob had engineered the dye was cast!! For their departure Bob arranged to drive JK and his

team in his SUV to JFK airport - of course stopping by the gas pump for the obligatory 'Fill-Up'! When the Gas Pump Owner came up Bob threw open the SUV sliding door and with his characteristic but low key élan (twinkle + 'look whom I've got for you' announcement) pointed to JK!! The Gas Pump Owner's jaw dropped!! The way Bob put it – it came off as a coincidence!

Knowing him I choose to believe it was Bob's sense of humor and his friendship for his Gas Pump friend that prompted him to engineer the whole encounter! Again showing his unique touch!

I can say much more about my good friend Bob Callahan but it is best to leave this to his, family, many friends, colleagues, players and students who will do a much better job. Suffice it to say I'll miss the tinkle of his easy laugh, his passion, his intensity – and most of all his warmth and straight arrow sense of fair play!

REFLECTIONS FROM THE RUTGERS SQUASH COMMUNITY.

- (1) Bob did so much for squash in NJ and across the world. He was a great teacher and coach and will be sorely missed.

David Finegold

Chief Academic Officer, **American Honors**, Formerly Senior Vice President of Rutgers University

- (2) Bob always treated the second nine with the same care and respect as he treated the top players (as my son attests). His teams were always known for having great depth of spirit as well as talent.

Charles Heckscher, Professor, Department of SMLR, Rutgers University

Coach Rutgers Squash Club

- (3) I never knew Bob Callahan but I often watched the fruits of his coaching at Princeton with awe and knew of his luminous reputation. He was a great figure in the world of college squash.

Jeff McMahan, formerly Professor of Philosophy at Rutgers, now White's Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford

- (4) Bob was an awesome coach, a great friend and an even better playing partner. I was supposed to play with him three years ago but unfortunately he had to cancel the game. That day he went to NY to meet the doctors. Personally, I believe that was one lousy way of getting out of a game. You are sorely missed Bob. At loss of words.

Sunny, **Sunny Muzaffar**

(5) , I heard about it.

What a loss.

He was a fine man. Hope you are well

Saad Rathore, RUSRC Coach/Player, Algorithmics Inc

(6) "After just a few drills, Bob gave me personal spot-on pointers which I immediately incorporated in my game. A kind man I reflect upon fondly."

Best wishes,

Rich

Richard Tedesco,

RUSRC Player