

Couple Bring Varying Styles to Their 25-Year Coaching Partnership

By GRANT GLICKSON

Frank and Barbara Horan may very well be the only husband-and-wife ice hockey coaching tandem in the country.

And it would seem there isn't a person who has laced up a pair of skates in Rockland and Bergen Counties who hasn't crossed paths with the Horans, who have taught hockey together for the last 25 years.

"We've been doing it for so long around here that the names Frank and Barbara have become one word," said Barbara Horan. "If you look for Frank, you're going to see me, and if you look for me, you're going to see Frank."

What you see on the ice at Mackay Park in Englewood, N.J., when this couple of 19 years teaches youngsters is that opposite styles do in fact attract.

Barbara, 60, a voluble woman, and Frank, also 60, a soft-spoken man, met 25 years ago when she was looking for a job as a rink guard and he was busy building the Rockland Ice Arena in Stony Point, N.Y.

"We were both married to other people at the time," she recalled. "He hired me and I think that he kind of threatened the kids at the beginning that a girl was going to come out and work with them. And then I got along with them so well and they learned so much that I stuck around."

Barbara, a former speed skater, placed in the North American Outdoors, won three Silver Skates awards (1948, 1953, 1955) at Madison Square Garden and was the New York State outdoor champion in 1955.

She spent the winter months training for the Olympics, but family demands — she had three children in her first marriage — turned her expertise elsewhere.

"Kids were playing hockey, but they didn't know how to skate that well," Barbara explained. "There were a lot of little skating tips that would make them better. So we devised this program that we go through together."

Frank, who also has three children from his first marriage, pitched minor league baseball for the Milwaukee Braves' organization. He was a left-handed Class AAA pitcher who made it all the way to major league spring training in 1953 and '54. But Horan's baseball career did not go any further, as a chain-saw accident almost cost him his pitching arm while he was working for the Rockland County Highway Department. Horan's arm was sliced from his wrist upward and he was never again able to pitch with the same velocity.

Horan wound up coaching a couple of Connie Mack League ball clubs in the early 1960's before turning his attention to hockey. After teaching himself to skate in his mid-20's, Horan began working hockey camps at various rinks: Low Tor in Haverstraw, N.Y., the Rockland Ice Arena, the Sport-O-Rama in Montsey, N.Y., and Mackay Park.

"When you're not pitching, you're not in the game," said Frank, explaining why he



Frank and Barbara Horan coaching Brian Telesmatic (4) during Bergen Catholic's 8-2 victory over Notre Dame on Friday.

Monica Almeida/The New York Times

didn't continue coaching baseball. "Everybody other than the pitcher is standing around. In hockey, there is no standing around."

Almost 10 years after establishing a hockey program at Mackay, the Horans have combined to build one of the largest youth hockey programs in the area. The house league at Mackay has a membership of

more than 500 players. Waiting lists are so backed up that the Horans were forced to form travel clubs for different age groups, which adds another 200 youngsters to their program. A skating clinic on Mondays draws 80 to 100 players, ranging in age from grade school to people in their 50's.

"I couldn't imagine how we'd ever get anything going here," Barbara said. "Neither one of us had ever managed a rink before." While the two have taught hockey together for 18 years, the Horans have only coached two high school teams: St. Joseph of Montvale, N.J., from 1980-86, winning state tournaments in their final two years there, and Bergen Catholic for the past two seasons.

Tomorrow, the Crusaders (18-3-1) will face off against Debarton (17-2-2) in the second round of the Parochial Private School divisional playoffs.

"They are both high class coaches," said Bergen Catholic's J. J. Picinic, the state's second leading scorer with 58 goals and 45 assists in 21 games. "They have distinctly different styles of coaching."

In practices, Frank runs the drills, reveals the team's game plan and provides his players with motivational speeches.

"Frank does all the things that a head coach is supposed to do," said Brian Telesmatic, the team's best defenseman. "He handles the drills, positioning and game concepts."

Barbara's task is to school them on power skating. She is often heard shouting, "Toe-knee-chest-nut," which means she wants her players to line up their toes with their bent knees, chest and head, which she refers to as "nut." Barbara taught almost every Crusader how to skate when they were grade schoolers.

"I used to pick up my feet too high," said Dan Cassella, who is the team's second leading scorer with 39 goals and 56 assists. "She taught me to keep my feet closer to the ground. I definitely see a difference in my speed."

Barbara added: "Frank's word is law around here. He has a no fighting rule and the kids don't fight. We haven't had a fighting penalty in all our years of coaching high school hockey."

"Our motto has always been: If you're mad enough, put it on the scoreboard. That's how you beat them. You're not going to settle anything with your fists."

During games, Frank does not raise his voice. "He never loses his cool behind the bench," Barbara said. "A lot of coaches could watch him and learn something for him."

He will patiently wait for a player to get to the bench and talk to him between whistles. If one of them does something wrong on the ice, Frank will occasionally opt to communicate his displeasure by cutting down the player's ice time.

"Frank is the epitome of coaching and the kids all know it," Barbara said. "He's probably the best bench coach that I've ever seen. He always manages to match the other teams' third line against our first line. You have to see this guy in action to believe it."

Barbara, on the other hand, is not beyond shouting instructions and often delivers wake-up blows to the helmets of her players when they skate to the bench after making mental errors.

"Frank is the quiet one," Picinic said. "He'll talk to you during whistles and he'll pull you over to the side in practice. But Barbara is always yelling. We could hear her all over the ice shouting. 'Shoot the puck!'"