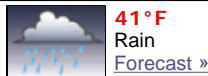




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Tuesday, March 22, 2005

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SPORTS

Trainer tends to physical, emotional needs of her `kids'

Saturday, March 19, 2005

Editor's note: This is the second installment of Good Sports, a new feature that will spotlight the positive people and players in South Jersey sports.

By LYFORD M. MOORE
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WASHINGTON TWP.

Don't count 40-year-old Tanya Dargusch among those who look down on today's youth. She interacts with kids on a daily basis and has nothing but praise for them.



LYFORD M. MOORE/Courier-Post
Washington Township athletic trainer Tanya Dargusch treats softball player Melanie Helterbran Tuesday.

"I think they're awesome," she said, her brown eyes starting to moisten. "There's something that shines in each and every one of them. I see them doing many many good things every day."

Now in her 17th year as athletic trainer at Washington Township High School, Dargusch tends to the physical and emotional needs of the school's student-athletes.

She can't imagine a job any more rewarding.

"Being here is the best thing that ever happened to me, absolutely the best," she said. "I love it. I absolutely love working with kids. It's never dull, and they're so appreciative."

She refers to the children as her "kids," just like a mother might, and is not above making an occasional house call to check on the progress of a pulled muscle, an ankle sprain or perhaps something even more serious.

Parents call her at home all the time, as do other teachers. Kids will dial her number every so often, too.

Many of the student-athletes she administers to refer to her affectionately as "Miss D."

They say the same nice things about her that she says about them and view her more as a trusted confidante than a teacher or district employee. Often, they'll come up to her just to chat.

Dargusch is only happy to oblige.

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Online Poll: What will be the result of Villanova's NCAA tournament game against North Carolina on Friday night? Includes radio buttons for various outcomes.

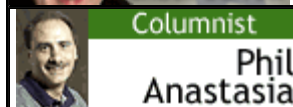
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"I look at these kids like I do my own," she said. "I call them `my kids' all the time. They talk to me about real stuff, serious stuff. People think high school life is easy for kids, but it's not. Kids have problems, too. I've talked to some who were faced with cancer. They want to talk about their problems - the big ones and the little ones."

Senior softball pitcher Melanie Helterbran, 18, says Dargusch is special.

"Miss D knows how to work with us better than any of our other teachers," she said, nodding at Dargusch in her office. "She understands where we're coming from if we're injured, how to help us and how to get us out on the field again as quickly as possible. She's in this to help us out, not just to pick up a paycheck."

When asked how much she made, Dargusch didn't know for sure. Only after looking up the figure in a folder near her desk did she come up with a reply.

Athletic Director Kevin Murphy, 40, says there are two main reasons why Dargusch is held in such high esteem: her knowledge of her profession and her concern for the student-athletes of Washington Township High School.

"She always puts their well-being first and foremost," he said. "She'll never risk anybody to win a game. Winning and losing are secondary to taking care of the physical and mental needs of our student-athletes."

When asked how difficult it might be to replace her some day, Murphy didn't hesitate.

"You couldn't replace her, you just couldn't," he said, looking Dargusch straight in the eye.

Dargusch, who has two young children of her own, says she never dreads coming to work and dealing with yet more children. But why would she? After all, she got into the business of healing athletes because she always liked athletics and because she always liked to help out.

While her job is overwhelmingly rewarding, Dargusch says it's not without its downside. It can be particularly painful, for instance, when a young man or woman she's known for three or four years is killed in a traffic accident.

Thus far, she says, that sort of pain has found its way to her doorstep at least six times. Unlike most people on the obituary page, however, those people had a place in her heart. They laughed and cried, sang and danced - just like her, just like the rest of us.

"It's like a piece of you died, too," she said, recalling those instances as though they were yesterday. "You were there working with them every day and now they're gone. Dealing with their deaths and not being able to do something to help them is . . . that's the worst."

*Good Sports runs every Saturday and focuses on the people and players who make a positive impact in South Jersey sports. Contact Lyford M. Moore with story suggestions at (856) 486-2424 or [lmoores@courierpostonline.com](mailto:lmoores@courierpostonline.com)*

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