



NEWS RELEASE

FIRE TO SUCCEED STILL BURNS IN AMPHITHEATER'S FRIEDLI

PHOENIX, AZ (Sept. 8, 2009) – Vern Friedli takes nothing for granted.

Not his life. Not his wife. Not his job coaching football players, which he has done for nearly 50 years.

"I have been very fortunate and blessed to be allowed to do what I do," he says.

From the time he began as a fresh-faced coach in the early 1960s to the present day, with his features and voice weathered like the mountain ranges of his beloved southern Arizona, Friedli has had only one purpose – help young men become productive on the football field and in all other areas of life.

On Aug. 28, Tucson Amphitheater's Panthers gave Friedli an early 73rd birthday (week of Sept. 6) gift with a 21-0 victory at home over Marana, allowing him to climb past Jesse Parker and into the top spot in career coaching victories with 310.

Amphi made it 311 on Friday night (Sept. 4) with a 42-34 victory over Chandler Seton Catholic.

Friedli, with a 311-146 career record, has had a few health issues from time to time, but he isn't about to leave the Amphi sideline that he has patrolled since 1975. He also coached at Morenci High and in the Tucson Sunnyside system.

"I might forget where I parked once in awhile," he said, laughing, "but I still feel that I'm doing a good job. And if you are doing a good job, why stop?"

Amphi had a few lean years earlier in this decade, but the program now appears to be rejuvenated. The team finished with a 6-5 record in 2008.

Friedli simply called the struggles "a speed bump. The kids are coming back. We've got some good athletes going. We are headed in the right direction."

Further evidence is that there are 46 varsity players, "which is the best we've had in five or six years," he said. The team was able to attend a preseason camp in California and that helped tremendously in terms of bonding.

"They really came together," Friedli said. "They are a tight group. They care about each other. They are a fun group to coach. They don't care who gets the credit – they just want to play."

The athletes haven't changed much over the years, but society itself has changed, Friedli said.

Some players come from single-parent homes, some even no-parent homes. They need some discipline at times.

"It's amazing that they make it sometimes," he said. "It is going against the odds."

When Friedli was in high school, he had a good experience.

“Enriching,” he said. “A lot of the teachers came early and stayed late. They encouraged you to do the same. They said the best experience you can have for you is to be active and stay involved.”

He has never forgotten that and tries to pass that along to his players, who have gone on to a variety of productive careers in law enforcement, medicine and education, among others.

Friedli got his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Arizona. And in the fall of 2008, the school’s College of Education established the Vernon F. Friedli Scholarship Endowment for students from Amphi, Sunnyside and Morenci.

“That was very humbling,” he said.

Throughout his career, he said he couldn’t have accomplished what he has without the support of his wife, Sharon.

“She has been instrumental in everything we do,” he said.

The work will continue, for as long as Friedli is able.

“We (coaches and teachers) need to be effective, make a difference,” he said. “The kids need what we have to offer.”

Have a Story Idea:

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