

Cassells earns coach-of-the-year honors

BY JASON TUREK
Sports Reporter

Brookfield tennis coach Gary Cassells was named Connecticut High School Coach's Association Tennis Coach of the Year at an awards banquet at the Aqua Turf on Thursday, May 19.

A physical education teacher at Huckleberry Hill Elementary in Brookfield since 1998, Cassells is in his 47th season as the Brookfield boys tennis coach.

Cassells' teachings have extended further than on the tennis court. He has held head coaching positions in football, swimming, and even cheerleading.

He has coached state championships in three sports and loves to see the players he has coached develop and grow.

"I love to maintain relationships with the kids I have coached," he said. "We just had an alumni match this week and men who are in their thirties are going up to me and giving me a hug. That means so much to me."

Cassells has been successful at each sport he has coached because he keeps the same approach.

"The reason I have had success in sports I have coached is because I have the same approach no matter what the sport is," he said. "I work on conditioning, discipline, and I want to make the sport fun for the kids."

Cassells began his sports career as a football player at Conard High School in West Hartford where he graduated in 1964.

He earned a full scholarship to play football at Indiana University and during his senior year started at left guard in the

1968 Rose Bowl against the University of Southern California and running back O.J. Simpson.

Cassells earned All-American honors and helped the Hoosiers or the "Cardiac Kids".

He also played in the Senior Bowl for the North squad in Mobile, Alabama.

After receiving a degree in physical education, Cassells signed to play with New York Giants. He managed to play only one season after a shoulder injury forced him to retire.

Cassells wanted to remain involved in sports and took a teaching position at Concord High School in Elkhart, Ind. where he coached the swim and assistant coach of the football team.

He later became head football coach of the football and swim teams at Greencastle High School in Indiana and led the football team to the state championship in 1973.

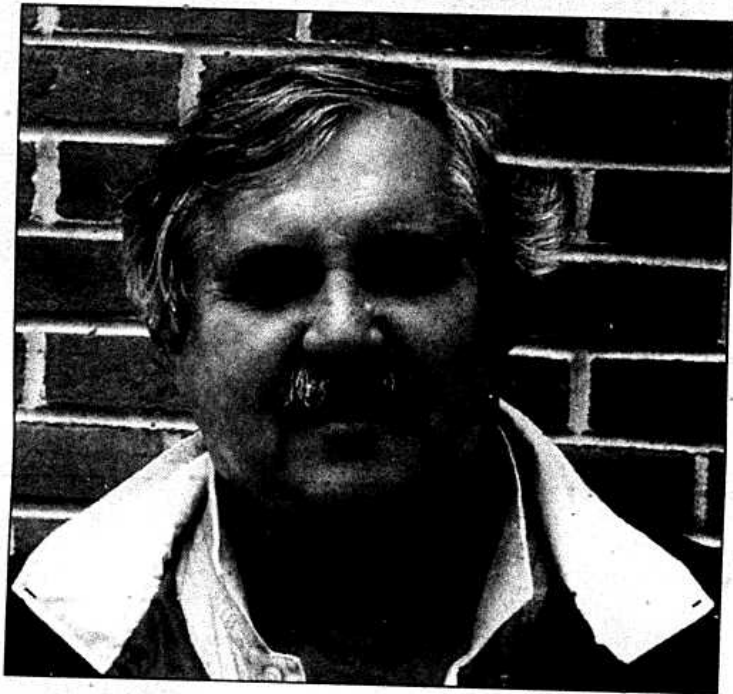
During that time Cassells managed to earn a master's degree in aquatics and safety from Indiana University.

In 1980, Cassells returned to Connecticut and taught physical education at Brookfield High School.

In 1988, he was simply filling a coaching position for the boys tennis team and had been coach ever since. He has learned the game and has had successful seasons in every season at Brookfield.

"When I first took the coaching position, I had to become a quick learner of the sport," he said. "I learned a lot from the first year and became a student of the sport."

Cassells also said that he learns a lot from the players



Photograph By Jason Turek

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themselves by listening to what they have to say.

"As a coach, you have to accept information you receive from your players," said Cassells. "You can tell them something they can use on the court and they can tell you something that you might not have known. They learn more on the tennis court and I learn something to coach in future matches."

Cassells' biggest influence in his life is his former football coach in high school Bob McKee, who he still keeps in contact to this day.

"He put me on track to become a coach and a teacher," he said. "He's the most important man in my life."

"Every year I tell the kids how

important he was in my experience and express to the seniors to pass on what they have learned from me."

Cassells' wife, Melanie, who works as a foreign language teacher at Brewster High School, is another person who is an important figure in his coaching career. He said that if it weren't for her, he would not be coaching.

"She's the reason I can coach," he said. "She takes care of everything at home in the afternoons while I'm coaching and I'm just so thankful for her. She allows me to pass on what I've learned to others."

The couple have three children, Catherine, 28; Andrew, 21; and Evan, 14.