



School Ties

→ BY DAN HURLEY

THE ONLY TIME my father, Bob Hurley Sr., came close to leaving St. Anthony High in Jersey City, N.J., was when coach Pete Gillen offered him a job as an assistant at Xavier in 1985. He and my mom, Christine, flew to Cincinnati, and they brought back real estate brochures for homes in northern Kentucky.

Most kids would be in favor of their dad earning a pay raise, a promotion and moving into a bigger house. But my brother, Bobby, and I were crushed. We were in junior high, and all we'd ever wanted was to play for our dad at St. Anthony. We didn't have babysitters growing up—we took the No. 81 or 9 bus to White Eagle Hall and hung out at Dad's practices.

When my dad returned from Cincinnati, the allure of coaching his sons won out over going to the college ranks. I think it meant a lot to my dad to see just how much playing at St. Anthony meant to his kids.

Dad never seriously considered leaving again. He ended up with a record of 1,185–125, with 28 state titles, four national championships and a place in the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame. (My brother earned a scholarship at Duke and I got one to Seton Hall.) But the news last week that St. Anthony will close after this academic year has been so crushing to our family because the school *transcended* basketball. It feels like the reason I am where I am in life has been erased.

It feels unfair and unceremonial the way it happened—a 10-minute meeting between my dad, school officials and members of the Archdiocese of Newark—closing a place that's meant so much to so many people.

My dad didn't coach to produce first-round draft picks like Terry Dehere (1993), Roshown McLeod ('98) or Kyle Anderson (2014). The value of St. Anthony was giving kids from the inner city a better crowd of friends, improved academics and a chance to attend college. The best success stories are the kids who became policemen, firemen and teachers.

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It would be impossible to replicate St. Anthony anywhere else. We didn't even have a gym, and my dad kept a second job as a probation officer for many of his 45 years there. White Eagle Hall didn't even have a water fountain, so we all piled into the unisex bathroom during practice and greedily slurped water from our dirty hands under the lone faucet. (To this day, I still have germ issues from that experience.)

I wonder if we'll ever see another urban Catholic program dominate high school basketball like St. Anthony did. Within the last decade Rice High in Harlem, Paterson (N.J.) Catholic and St. Patrick's in northern New Jersey have all closed. Schools like that aren't producing donor bases that pump millions of dollars into their endowments. AAU basketball has also diminished the importance of schools like St. Anthony, as there's national exposure available in the summer. The shame of it is that, for its size, St. Anthony changed lives as much as any other school in the country.

There's talk of one last run, some games for everyone who played for my dad sometime in May or June. It would be a giant reunion and a celebration of what he did for St. Anthony, Jersey City and the hundreds of people whose lives he changed forever. It'll be as emotional as anything we've ever done, like the births of our children or our wedding days. I'm not sure what the NCAA rules are about a 44-year-old man running against a high school kid, but I will not be denied. I will have one last moment where my dad coaches me.

Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if my dad had taken the job at Xavier. Would he have climbed the ladder and coached in the Final Four? Probably. But if you gave him that choice right now—do what you've done or win in an NCAA championship—he wouldn't change anything. □