

Tough Love

As coach and mentor, Whoop Snively inspired his players to play well and live well

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“SEE?” WHETHER IT WAS TO PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT OR CRITIQUE, SNIVELY ALMOST ALWAYS PUT HIS HANDS ON HIS PLAYERS’ SHOULDERS TO EMPHASIZE A POINT. “HE WOULD SAY, ‘NOW THIS IS WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO, SEE?’” RECALLS JERE LUNDHOLM ’53. “AND YOU WOULD DO IT.” (PHOTO: UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES)

Even half a century ago, A. Barr "Whoop" Snively was considered an old-school coach. His physical size alone lent him an air of toughness. Former players remember his hands in epic terms: as big as baseball gloves, as strong as vise grips. Then there was his guttural voice, and his way of spitting words out the side of his mouth, like a film-noir detective, ending most sentences with "see?"

As a football line coach and the head coach of varsity lacrosse and, eventually, ice hockey, Snively spent 11 years at UNH leading his teams to victory over opponents with better records and greater numbers. (For part of a season, for example, his ice hockey team had only eight players.) But when he died of a heart attack at a Durham gas station on April 15, 1964, his teams lost more than the man who developed complex game-day strategies and notorious conditioning drills. And even now, 50 years later, his former players remember him above all as a father figure whose mentorship enriched their lives well beyond the field and rink.

"Yes, he was a coach, but more important, a builder of men," says William Nelson '58, a lacrosse captain under Snively. "He was like a second father to me and many others."

Hired by UNH in 1953 as head coach for varsity lacrosse and as a football line coach, Snively brought with him years of experience as a coach and as an athlete. Having come into his own as an athlete and an individual during his own college days, he knew firsthand the struggles his players were facing on and off the field. Raised in a family of doctors, he had enrolled at Princeton with the intention of following suit. As a starting football player for the Tigers, however, Snively played a key role in the success of the 1922 "Team of Destiny," a scrappy squad that finished its season undefeated against higher-ranked opponents. He was voted the team's captain at the end of that season, after earning a reputation as the best forward passer in the East as well as a nickname that stuck for the rest of his life: "Whoop," or sometimes "Whoops." Deciding that his heart was in athletics, he also abandoned his plans for med school. He went on to earn a master's in education at Columbia, and was later hired by Brown University as a lacrosse coach and football line coach before going on to coach football, lacrosse, and hockey at Williams College for 16 years.

The same spirit and work ethic that characterized Snively's underdog success at Princeton also helped him lead UNH to success—especially on the lacrosse field. Few of his players had ever picked up a stick before coming to UNH, and they regularly faced off against other New England teams who drew their rosters from the elite prep school circuit. But in his first season as coach, the lacrosse team won six games and lost two. In his third season, in 1955, the team was undefeated and won both the Boston Division championship and the Roy Taylor National Championship. His career record at UNH for the sport was 85 wins and 47 losses, with one national championship and five New England divisional championships.



THE RIGHT RX: SNIVELY BROKE

FAMILY TRADITION BY NOT GOING INTO MEDICINE. BUT HE CARRIED HIS FATHER'S LEATHER DOCTOR BAG (ABOVE)—FILLED WITH GAME PLANS AND INFORMATION ABOUT HIS PLAYERS—TO EVERY PRACTICE AND GAME. (PHOTO: LISA NUGENT/UNH PHOTOGRAPHIC SERVICES)

The UNH athletic director who hired Snively, Carl Lundholm '21, once said of him, "He's the kind of coach who never had the best material, but could beat those who did."

According to his former players, the secret to Snively's success lay in a combination of strict rule-making and genuine caring that inspired them to give their all.

"Whenever you came off the field during a game, he would put his arm around you with his big hand on your opposite shoulder, and say, 'Now this is what I want you to do, see?' and you would do it," recalls Jere Lundholm '53, who played lacrosse for Snively and happens to be Carl Lundholm's son.

"He was a disciplinarian, but he had a warm heart and a soft touch."

That didn't mean playing for Snively was easy. His practices were often grueling—it wasn't uncommon for the lacrosse team to spend hours clearing the field of snow before practice "officially" began, and preseason conditioning drills included running through College Woods in drifts up to two feet deep. He spelled out his expectations for his players in no uncertain terms: Even if you couldn't play, you were still expected to attend practice. If you couldn't attend practice, it was because you were at Hood House, the university's infirmary, under a physician's care. If you missed practice and were anywhere else, you were off the team. One of his favorite sayings—or "Whoopsisms"—was "It doesn't help until it hurts."

Snively applied the same dedication to his coaching that he demanded of his players. He was an overachiever in every way, constantly studying up on plays and techniques, and keeping close tabs on the competition. In his first football season at UNH, he was asked to scout St. Lawrence before a big game. He did, and wrote up a 21-page report that included "everything except what the players ate the night before the game," according to John "Doc" Enos, who profiled Snively in a 1962 piece for *The New Hampshire Alumnus*. The Wildcats went on to beat St. Lawrence by a whopping 34 points, though the teams had been ranked as evenly matched, and afterward the

players presented Snively with the game ball, crediting his diligence with securing their victory.

That dedication came in particularly handy in 1962, when Snively was asked to take over as head coach for the men's hockey team: not only had he never played the sport (despite having served as freshman coach at UNH and Williams), he'd never so much as learned how to skate. Instead, he had studied hockey by watching the Boston Bruins practice and taking copious notes. He instructed his players on skating methods in meticulous detail while he himself shuffled around the rink in oversized galoshes.

"He certainly knew more about it than any of his players did by the time he was coaching us," says Dick Lamontagne '63. "We were all wondering how he came to know the sport so well."

He also put his own mark on the sport, incorporating football and lacrosse tactics into plays that caught other teams by surprise. Lamontagne remembers one as an adaptation of a football punt play in which a player in trouble would flip the puck high into the air; one of the offensive wings would then rush to pick it up. "It didn't work every time, but it's a play you don't usually see," Lamontagne explains. "In fact, I don't think I've ever seen it done before or since."



ALL AMERICAN: A
STANDOUT ATHLETE BEFORE HE BECAME A STANDOUT COACH, SNIVELY WAS
HAILED AS "THE BEST FORWARD-PASSER IN THE EAST" AT PRINCETON,
WHERE HE WAS A CENTRAL FIGURE ON THE 1922 "TEAM OF DESTINY."
(PHOTO: UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES)

Although Snively diverged from his family's tradition of pursuing medicine, he brought his father's brown leather doctor's bag—filled with piles of notes and paperwork—to every practice and game. It's not hard to see a symbolic connection between his coaching and the practice of medicine. Each season he handed each player his "Rules for Lacrosse," a 15-page document that was part sports strategy, part philosophical treatise. The players called it "Whoop's Bible," and they were expected to memorize it and follow it to the letter. In a section devoted to time management, Snively advised student athletes to prioritize their studies and keep their grades up, emphasizing that this was the best way to guarantee a bright future. He checked up on his players to be

sure they stayed on track, and arranged tutors for those who fell behind. Those who still couldn't keep up with their schoolwork—including some of his best players—were kicked off the team.

Snively was especially committed to helping students who were having trouble adjusting to college life, and several credit him with having turned their lives around. He had a guesthouse on his Durham Point Road property where he'd let some students stay, rent free. He and his wife, Eva, served as surrogate parents to these "problem kids," as Tim Churchard '65, '84G only half-jokingly calls them. Churchard would know. Today he's a lecturer in education and sports psychology coach for the UNH hockey team, but he was once a "Snively problem kid."

A Saugus, Mass., native who played football and hockey during Whoop's tenure, Churchard was so miserable his freshman year that he deliberately flunked out, with a 1.2 GPA. Thinking college wasn't for him, he got a job in construction and withstood a brisk winter of manual labor outdoors. But while everyone he knew tried to push him back into school, Snively was the only one who didn't try to force him to return.

"All he said was, 'If you do come back, you can stay here. I know your parents don't have any money,'" Churchard recalls. He did go back, and stayed in Snively's guesthouse with another student whose life had gone off track. Snively helped them both find their way back.

"If it weren't for him," says Churchard, "I wouldn't be here. I would never have graduated."

In his office at UNH, Churchard still keeps a copy of "Whoop's Bible" inside a weathered blue, three-ring binder of memorabilia held together by an elastic band. The faded pages give off a musty smell, but the lessons they contain are still as fresh as they were fifty years ago. Keep a cool head and play fair. If you run with the right guys, you will never get in trouble. Win by the book; it means more. Churchard often channels his mentor, especially when he encounters homesick freshmen who remind him of himself when Snively helped him.

Churchard also draws on the words Snively left for him, specifically. Every year, the coach wrote a personal note to each of his former players to check in with him and see where his life was taking him. Though that list grew ever longer, Churchard says, Snively never let anyone slip out of his reach.

Indeed, it was the coach himself who suddenly slipped out of reach, dying unexpectedly as he stopped at the Durham gas station to fill his car on an April evening in 1964—only hours after the university had announced plans to build the indoor ice arena he had championed for several seasons. The UNH community as a whole, and Snively's players in particular, reeled at the loss. There were no answers to be had in Whoop's Bible, its preliminary rosters and 1964-65 season game plans a poignant reminder of what was missing. Churchard was so devastated he left the hockey team.

But the coach's legacy endured. In February 1965, the new ice arena was finished, and named in his memory. Players like Churchard and Lundholm, Nelson and Lamontagne honored him by living their lives by the same high standards he had always held them

to. In the Field House, visitors still can find a small plaque commissioned in honor of Snively's 100th collegiate lacrosse coaching victory. Presented to him by his 1956 team, the plaque is inscribed to Snively: "friend, philosopher, respected advisor, and our esteemed coach." A quiet memorial for an unassuming man with big hands and an even bigger heart.



ON ICE: SNIVELY STEPPED INTO THE ROLE OF VARSITY HOCKEY COACH IN 1962 AFTER NINE SEASONS WITH THE FRESHMAN SQUAD. MANY OF THE PLAYERS ON THE 1959-60 FRESHMAN TEAM, PICTURED HERE, WENT ON TO PLAY ON SNIVELY'S FIRST VARSITY TEAM. (PHOTO: UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES)

Whoop's Legacy: Strong Leadership, Hard Work, and Genuine Caring

Snively's lessons live on in the many players whose lives he touched. Many credit him with helping shape them into the adults they became. He cared about them not just as players, they say, but as people.

“Whoops always checked in on what was going on in each of his players’ lives,” says Dick Lamontagne ’63, who played hockey for Snively. “It really wasn’t all about hockey—it was about all of us as individuals.”

Lamontagne credits Snively with teaching him most of what he knows about leadership. Now retired, he spent part of his career as a labor relations director for Verizon, a position that required him to work closely with people who saw the world differently from him.



BY THE BOOK: HE NEVER LEARNED TO SKATE, BUT THAT DIDN'T KEEP SNIVELY FROM BEING A MASTERFUL HOCKEY COACH. HE LEARNED THE SPORT BY STUDYING THE BOSTON BRUINS, AND HIS FORMER PLAYERS SAY HE CAME TO UNDERSTAND ITS INS AND OUTS BETTER THAN THEY DID.

(PHOTO: UNVIVERSITY ARCHIVES)

“What I learned from Whoops was that if someone is really interested in you as a person, you tend to establish a good relationship,” he says. “One of the first things I did was try to learn as much as I could about the people I was working with, to make it more of a personal relationship than strictly a business relationship. It made my job a lot easier, and I enjoyed it more.

“I think I learned more about life—forget about hockey—from him than anybody else.”

Snively valued hard work and spirit above raw ability, on and off the field. Writing in the *New Hampshire Alumnus*, John “Doc” Enos described a time when a player was having trouble grasping a maneuver at practice. Snively ran the play himself to illustrate it, saying, “You move to here, see? This guy cuts around you and then you move to

here. Their defenseman has to move over to cover him and you spin like this, see? Our guy passes to you and you score.” The player took six tries to get it right, but each time Snively paused to patiently explain it again.

Enos wrote about another player, a natural athlete, who won national attention for his success in a game. The following day, he skipped practice, so Snively barred him from playing in the team’s next game, explaining that the rules about missing practice applied to everyone equally.

Tim Churchard ’65 ’84G had his own taste of Snively’s tough love. When Churchard returned to UNH after flunking out, his coach gave him not only a place to live but also a job, hiring him to hand out and collect the equipment for intramural sports—and promptly firing him after he didn’t show up to work one drizzly evening. When Churchard reported for duty the next day, a new student already had his position. Stunned, he went to ask Snively for a second chance, but the coach was firm. “He told me, ‘Your job was to take care of the equipment,’ Churchard recalls. “I replaced you, see?”

Sam Paul ’60, who played football for Snively, still treasures the many “Whoopsisms” he picked up from his coach and mentor. One in particular-, which he learned while helping Snively chop wood for his fireplace, stands out.

“He turned to me and said, ‘Sammy, remember, if you cut your own wood you get warm twice,’ ” Paul says. “I have used that quote many times over the years, especially with my sons.”

After graduating, Paul made a point to visit Snively whenever he was in Durham, since the coach and his wife always wanted updates on his life. During one visit, he revealed that his wife had just had their first child, named Sammy, after his father. “Two weeks later, I received a call from the Durham bank informing me that a savings account had been opened by Whoops in young Sammy’s name,” Paul recalls. “I cried!”

Snively had two children of his own, but considered scores of former players to be surrogate sons. He was hard on them, but he loved them, and he was never prouder than when they played well. Dave Eastman ’65, who was the football team manager, still recalls how happy it made Snively to see them win.

“While we were beating UMass for the Yankee Conference Championship at the end of the 1962 football season, he was strutting behind the bench, saying, ‘I’m walking proud, see? Because those are my boys out there!’ ”

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