

“Nobody cares less about your ego than a stopwatch. It’s who can swing the racquet and who can swim the fastest.”

he can always **come home**

4 gold medals, 9 silver medals, 8 bronze medals, 26 trips to state
Hall of famer retires after 30 years at MHS

Rusting lion statues, chess boards and framed awards line the shelves. Yearbooks from the past 30 years lay stacked in one corner, while photos of family and students cover every wall. It all looks like it’s been there forever. Coach Sam Serio will leave behind these layers of memories crowding his natatorium office.

Serio retired after 30 years of building McKinney High’s swimming program from the ground up and taking numerous athletes to state over the decades.

“I will miss some of it. Some it I won’t,” Coach Serio said. “I’m getting old. I’m 67 fixing to turn 68. And after 45 years of playing with other people’s kids, I’ve got three grandkids of my own. So, I’m going to stick around and play with them.”

Ag major joins vietnam war

When he first began college, Coach Serio was an agriculture major.

“When Uncle Sam called me to the Vietnam War, I changed majors to physical education and fell in love with it,” he said. “I actually learned to swim at 16 and took lifeguarding at the end of that summer and got hired at the end of that very summer. I mean I didn’t even know how to swim. I was lifeguard for the last two weeks of that summer, and I have been there ever since.”

Lifeguard begins coaching swim team

Along with lifeguarding, he has coached swimming for 30 years.

“The first time I got to coach high school swimming, I’d already coached the summer leagues for five to ten years, so I knew swim and dive,” he said. “Coach (Ron) Poe asked, ‘You want out of football to go to swimming?’ and I said, ‘Let me do it for a couple years.’ My math’s not good. It’s been 30 -- 30 years here.”

Coach Serio may have coached for 30 years, but he never chose to stop learning, either.

“I go to a coaching school every year, and I just beg that I get one thing that’ll help me every year,” Serio said. “They say you can’t teach an old dog new tricks, but if the old dog wants to learn new tricks, he will. I just tried to pick up something new and different to keep the kids off balance.”

Football, cross country, softball, track and field, tennis, volleyball and basketball. Out of all the sports he’s coached, he enjoys two the most.

“Swimming and tennis are my favorite sports to coach,” he said. “The stopwatch in swimming doesn’t change who you are. Nobody cares less about your ego than a stopwatch. It’s who can swing the racquet and who can swim the fastest.”

Ryan Newhouse, former student and now colleague, had Coach Serio when he coached cross country.

“Coach Serio has been here for forever,” Mr. Newhouse said. “I didn’t have him as a swim coach, but I know he’s considered the godfather of swimming coaches because he’s been doing it for so long. I was kind of forced to run cross country by my soccer coach. I don’t know if I necessarily enjoyed it at the time, but one thing Coach Serio taught me was the importance of training and finishing the race.”

His swimmers not only remember all the serious advice he’s given but also the lighthearted side of his personality.

Swimmers learn life lessons from coach

“Coach Serio and I had some pretty epic towel popping contests. He was a serious competitor in towel popping, that’s for sure,” former swimmer and class of 1996 graduate Austin McNally said. “He always encouraged us to work hard and be good teammates. He’s just a good guy and that filtered down to his swimmers. I remember, his favorite quote was ‘Grandma’s slow, but she’s old.’”

As Mr. Newhouse and Mr. McNally remember the lessons Coach Serio taught them, Kristin Pierron, senior, varsity girls’ swimmer, and one of Coach Serio’s last athletes, believes she will never forget his advice.

“Coach Serio really taught me to not give up and put a lot of effort in everything I do,” Kristin said. “He built up my character, and taught me: always give a 100%. He was my first swim coach ever. I had him when I was 7, and he’s my coach now. He’s the best coach I’ve ever had, and I’ve learned so much from him.”

Coach Serio also has memories he will never forget.

“I will never forget winning regionals the first time,” he said. “I took it away from Lewisville Marcus Flower Mound. They had not lost in 15 years, and we made their boys cry. And their coach had bought huge trophies, thinking they would win, and after the medley relay, she said, ‘You’re going to get it, Sam, because we spanked her.’ She knew that the only way to get close was winning the medley relay, but she came in third, because we smoked them.”

His experience of beating other schools is not limited to Lewisville at regionals. Head McKinney Boyd swimming coach Matthew Fosheim admits he has lost to Coach Serio more than once.

“We have had some good battles between Boyd and McKinney High in the last couple years,” Fosheim said. “He’s got thirty years of his experience next to my ten, and he beat me. Back when I was in high school, he was the coach at McKinney High. As I graduated college, got a degree, and started coaching high school, he was still here. He’s been here a long time. He’s an institution.”

His institution, however, is much more than coaching.

“People don’t realize all the work he does, between the swim lessons, managing the pool chemicals, and being

involved with so many extracurriculars outside of that,” Fosheim said. “Serio’s been around a long time and it’s kind of weird to think about, but he’s been wearing 3-4 different hats in his career. He’s here at 6 A.M. in the morning. He gets a little bit of break during the day, and he’s here till 8 o’clock in the night.”

Despite all this work, kids have kept him in the game.

“People were saying he’s going to leave for the last five-six years,” Fosheim said. “But he had a couple more state championships and qualifiers he wanted to coach. It’s easy for coaches to hang up and decide to not coach anymore, but Coach Serio kept wanting to get better and stay involved with kids.”

Coach Serio’s determination to teach didn’t stop at coaching. Lifeguarding has stayed an important part of his lessons.

“I had two drownings while I was first lifeguarding,” Coach Serio said. “I revived a third one that was almost gone, but, that’s why I stayed to teach lifeguarding for so long. If I can save one, I’ve done good. I taught lifeguarding to the JV baseball team one year, just for the 7 who wanted to do it, and that summer, one of them saved a baby who almost drowned in the hidden creek pool. And, a police officer told me if he hadn’t had been there, the baby would’ve been dead. So that’s why I keep doing it.”

Coach believes future is bright

His dedication to educating students has kept him teaching for so long. Even though he will retire, Coach Serio believes the swimming program has a strong future.

“Hopefully, my son will take over,” he said. “If he doesn’t, I’ve given myself two goals. I wanted to win state, and they told me I couldn’t do it unless I was here for twenty years. I stayed thirty and didn’t make it. But, the main goal was to leave a team that’s better than what I’ve had. Our girls team is going to be the best one that we’ve had. The boys team will be solid. But swimming will be good at McKinney High.”

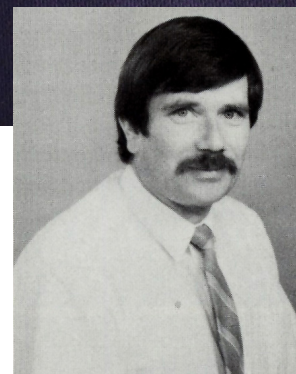
District Athletic Director Shawn Pratt felt bittersweet to see him go.

“He’s a man of character and faith who has a love for education and students, and a love for swimming,” Pratt said. “You go across the state of Texas, and swim coaches everywhere in Texas know Sam Serio, and they respect him. He’s put many, many years, and worked very very hard, and he has earned that opportunity to open up a new chapter in his life.”

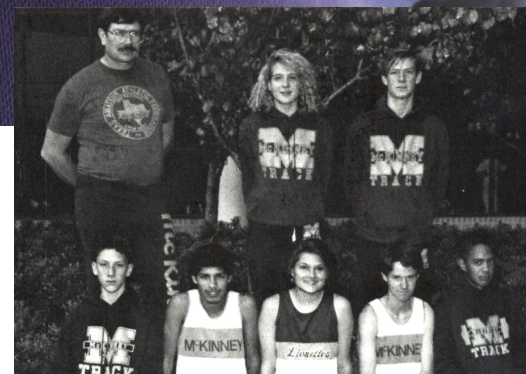
by Neelam Bohra and Udani Satarasinghe



Serio and the '88 swim team



School portrait from '90



Serio and the '90 cross country team