

Coach Tuke

“Who’s speaking at chapel tomorrow?” That was the pivotal question in my relationship with Coach Tom Matukewicz of Southern Illinois University. We were walking off the football field after a Friday practice and I simply told Coach Tuke who our guest speaker would be. He continued, “I’m thinking I ought to pray.” I chuckled and thought to myself, “That’s a good idea, coach, you ought to pray.” I was suddenly shaken by the thought, “He means tomorrow at chapel.” I asked him if that’s what he meant and it was. I immediately assured him that I’d set him up to do that and began thinking about how to not let him fail. I knew this was probably the biggest spiritual risk he had taken in his lifetime.

The next day as chapel was wrapping up and I was having players and coaches to pray for various facets of our team, I asked for someone to pray for our defense and turned to Coach Tuke. He agreed, prayed and thereby catalyzed his continuing development as a Christian coach, husband and father.

Over the next few years I watched a marvelous transformation as I saw Tuke become a tremendous model of all that God means for a man to be. His growing faith permeated everything in his life. His coaching became even more dynamic. He was hungry to know God’s will. He was eager to serve and to grow. He demonstrated integrity and wisdom as he led his players.

It has been my privilege to watch his love for his wife, Lenna, mature and to have participated in a vows renewal service for the couple. A few weeks later, on Super Bowl Sunday, they welcomed Georgia to their home; a beautiful little girl with a lovely smile and a warm heart.

Sadly for me and for Southern Illinois, Coach Tuke, Lenna, Georgia and most of Coach Jerry Kill’s staff left SIU after our NCAA Division I FCS semifinal appearance in 2007 and moved to DeKalb and Northern Illinois University. I am pleased to report that Tuke’s growth and development continues. People like Tuke, those who play their hearts out, who love their teammates and families, are those who inspire our souls and lead us to becoming all we were created to be.

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