

Dave Coyne



Building successful football programs at high schools with a small enrollment is nothing new for Dave Coyne.

Indeed, longtime Norwalk football fans can attest to that from Coyne's coaching days at tiny Central Catholic, the former small private high school on West Rocks Road. CCHS was the smallest school in the Western Connecticut Conference and had one of the smallest boy enrollments in the state before closing in 1990.

Yet despite playing a schedule with a number of Class LL and L schools on it, the Cavaliers were a perennial winner during Coyne's 11 seasons as head coach. His 1978 team won the

Briggs Division championship, finishing the season 8-1-1 with only a one-point loss to Weston preventing an undefeated season.

What's more, the Cavaliers boasted the No. 1 defense in the entire state in all divisions that season, allowing only 3.7 points per game. Then again, Central Catholic was always among the top defensive teams in Connecticut during the Coyne Era.

He also coached the Cavs to an 8-2 season in 1975, while going 7-3 in 1974 and again in 1982. One of those wins in '82 was a 14-0 victory over Norwalk High School, a Class LL school. In his 11 seasons as head coach, from 1974-84, Coyne was 58-46-5.

The only thing more remarkable than what Coyne did at Central Catholic is what he's done for the past 13-plus seasons at Rocky Hill High School. Like CCHS, Rocky Hill is one of the smallest schools in the state with 800 students, and, like the Cavaliers did under Coyne, play schools much bigger than theirs.

In addition, the town of Rocky Hill has always been a huge soccer community. So when Coyne, a Physical Education and Health instructor there since 1990, decided he wanted to start a football program in 2000, people at the school and in town told him he'd never be able to pull it off in a soccer-crazed town.

But Coyne, working the same kind of magic he did in Norwalk, not only started a football program, he eventually built it into a perennial winner. By 2005, Rocky Hill went 9-1 and made the Class S state playoffs (falling 22-19 to the eventual state champions). In 2007, the Terriers went 8-2 and just missed the playoffs, while in 2008 they went 10-1 to secure a Class S berth.

Rocky Hill also went to the state playoffs in 2011 and 2012 with back to back records of 8-2 and 9-1. Last year, they also won the Central Connecticut Conference East Division championship.

All told, Rocky Hill has posted winning seasons in seven of the last eight years (they went 4-6 in 2009) and made the state playoffs four times.

Of course, Dave Coyne learned all about successful football at small high schools long before he got into coaching. A 1968 graduate of Central Catholic, he was a senior running back on the '67 CCHS football team and finished second in scoring with six touchdowns. He also played baseball for the Cavaliers.

After continuing his career at the University of Bridgeport, Coyne returned to Central Catholic as an assistant football coach and took over as head coach in 1974. He also coached boys and girls track, JV baseball, and from 1976-80 was the school's athletic director.

At Rocky Hill, besides football, he's coached seven other sports—including soccer—as well as the school's unified sports team. A member of Trout Unlimited and the Farmington River Anglers Association, Coyne also started an outdoor education unit at the high school where students learn, among other things, how to fish.

Coyne and his wife Jacalyn—whose father, Ralph Venezia, was the head coach of the Spring Hill Tigers football dynasty in Norwalk during the 1940s—reside in Farmington and are parents of three children and have four grandchildren.