



BILL FRITTSCH

Firefighters with their new "coach". From left, John Suter, Chief Beyler, Beth Emshoff, Lt. Walter Ferguson, Rich Willauer, Chris Hinkus, Dave Barlow.

The coach gets a new job

Beth Emshoff works on the shape of Madison Firefighters.

Beth Emshoff was born in Marinette, Wisconsin in 1944.

Her father was a meatcutter, a butcher; her mother taught phy ed and "wound up being an elementary school principal. "She has two brothers, Jono, a public defender in Santa Cruz and Mark, who is head of respiratory therapy at Madison General.

"We're all kind of service oriented," she says.

A graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Beth Emshoff is one of the most

successful high school coaches in state history. Coaching both girls' swimming and track at James Madison Memorial, her records are:

- Swimming teams: 124 wins and 5 losses. Won 8 state tournaments, twice runnerup. Never lost a dual meet.

- Track teams: Big Eight Conference champions or co-champions in 10 of 11 years. Won 4 state championships, twice runnerup.

In 1979, Chief Ed Durkin brought her in to help him shape

up a new class of firefighters. Before they're done, it could very well be that they will have shaped up the entire Madison Fire Department.

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"When I was growing up," Beth Emshoff says, "women in sports were supposed to be cheerleaders."

Those were days when women got shorter shift because the perception was that a woman's place was not on the playing field. The men were the coaches, and they coached young men and boys.

The women were not the coaches, so

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young women and girls rarely got the opportunity to learn the fundamentals of even "throwing off the right foot" and generations of chauvinists smiled at the incompetence of their sisters and rarely stopped to teach.

"Good coaches are good teachers," Emshoff observes out of her experience, "and good teachers are good coaches. They know how to talk to kids. They also know how to listen."

Coaching was a man's world when she came to the University of Wisconsin and most men in it were "not too enlightened" about women competing in sports, let alone coaching them. At the University, she recalls, it was "pretty obvious" in the Phy Ed Department that the male students were being prepared to *coach* and the female students were being prepared to *teach* physical education.

Emshoff says that at some critical times in her life, there have been very supportive people around and some of them have been men "who know where I'm coming from and where I want to go with it."

There was just such a supportive person in her senior year at the University.

"Pat Berry," she recalls with a smile. "Captain of the UW swimming team. He kept telling me 'women's sports are coming, you have to get yourself prepared.' He kept saying it so often he convinced me."

Pat Berry had worked with youngsters at the Central Branch of the YMCA in Downtown Madison — "the only swim club in town for kids" — and in 1965-66, Beth worked with the Y kids too.

After that she took a job at a junior high school in Highland Park, Illinois where the ever solicitous Pat Berry "lined me up with a swim club." She stayed there for two years paying "more dues," learning what the differences were between coaching and teaching, between talking and listening.

She came back to Madison in 1968, interviewed "at four different places," accepted a job at Madison Memorial and joined the staff that Fall. In the Spring of 1969, she took the giant step that proved what a visionary Pat Berry had been: She started a Girls' Track Team.

"Track," she laughs. "Kids were competing in gym suits and cutoffs. I can remember some parochial kids competing in skirts."

She laughs again, and while she is too young to be an Oldtimer, there are the crinkly crowsfeet around the eyes that all coaches get from squinting into the sun, from squinting into the stopwatches.

"Those were the days," Beth Emshoff recalls without a trace of malice, "when the Softball Throw was a listed event in girls' track. Also the basketball throw. And the standing broad jump. The first state champion we had was Paula Graf and the event she won was the standing broad jump."

She shakes her head at the memory of that humble, not exactly flat-out, beginning, noting that the women's junior varsity times at Memorial today are better than the times that won the State meet back then.

But it was a start, she was only twenty-two, and a Coach. On top of that, she was named chairman of the Physical Education Department at Memorial.

"I was so jacked up," she recalls. "I thought: This is great for all of Madison because Memorial was showing the other schools they could do girls' sports. We were pioneering."

She admits that her new position and her new ideas were not greeted with unalloyed joy by all peers in her own department. But she was getting very philosophical about The Old Boys and their network, because while there were those persons — men, mostly, but not exclusively — who wanted her to fall flat on her whistle, there were those other persons — women mostly, but not exclusively — who wanted her to succeed. She remembers, fondly, a fellow teacher and coach at Memorial who "knew more about women's sports than most men. His wife had played girls' basketball in the enlightened state of Iowa and was felt to have more than passing interest in the current sports scene for girls and women.

"Glen Borland," Emshoff smiles. "He found money for swim suits in the vending machine fund and so, in the Fall of 1969, we started a girls' swimming team. We had four or five meets and we won everything."

Emshoff found that a little success goes a long way and with Memorial getting on the sports map, their women athletes along with families, friends and fans were beginning to ask some interesting questions, specifically: How come we can't have state meets? How come the girls can't have sports teams like the boys?

The usual answer given was that it was really a question of space and facilities, the girls would have to work "around" the boys' seasons and schedules and that's what it was.

Emshoff thought that it was weaseling out. She went to the Board of Education.

"There was no Title 9 then," she says. "I was talking civil rights."

"If you think," she recalls a male board member telling her, "that we're gonna endorse programs that are gonna keep women from having babies, you're crazy!"

"I was dumbfounded," Emshoff admits. "Here was the Board of

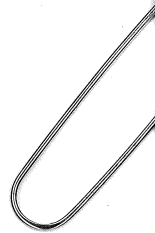
Education — not the whole board, thank God — saying that sports were unfeminine. Saying that we were going to turn these young athletes into Amazons."

Emshoff pursued her case along civil rights lines. She pointed out that the girls did not have equal facilities. She pointed out that the girls' parents *did* pay taxes like all the other property owners. She pointed out that it wasn't just Madison — all over the country

people were discovering: It's *The Law*.

In 1970, there were two WIAA — (Wisconsin Inter-Scholastic Athletic Association) — sponsored tournaments for high school women: track and swimming.

Memorial won the swimming championship in Speedo suits embroidered with JMM on the panels. Emshoff did the embroidery. She also silk-screened JMM on T-shirts, sweat shirts and a city's consciousness.



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"It was a program funded with pennies," she says, "but it was still better than anybody else had. By 1973, we started getting nice uniforms. Badger Sporting Goods really supported us. They'd ask: How much money do you have to spend? Then they would just give us a break. They just gave us more value than we had money."

As the years went by — "and I started

to be a better coach," — her Memorial kids thought of themselves as family. There were potluck suppers, sleepovers, camp-outs. Parents got involved and it even rubbed off on the boys' teams.

"Many of the boys had sisters who swam and it just rubbed off."

Emshoff says not many coaches will admit it — "the good ones will" — but they, the coaches learn from the kids.

"I learned more," Emshoff insists. "from just watching Sue Tallard than from anything else. She would tell me how she felt when she was running or when she wasn't running. And I listened. And I learned."

Tallard wasn't Emshoff's only champion at Memorial. But Tallard is special.

"She won the 400 meters every year in high school," Emshoff says. "She ran on our medley relay team that set a National record. She ran for the UW-Madison. Was team captain. She's married now, living in Florida and in her first year of coaching was High School Cross Country Coach of The Year. In the whole state."

After the "Tallard Era," Emshoff says she began "drifting and looking for something to do." She was still coaching track and swimming at Memorial but she left the teaching. She left, as she says, the public schools.

She sold sporting goods for a time at Barefoot Sports.

She ran an alternative food service at Memorial — "health foods, no sugar" — in competition with the school's hot lunch program. It proved so successful hot lunch took it over and runs it to this day.

She went down to the YWCA, in early 1979 and started on The Body Works, a concept that aimed at designing individual programs for anybody who wandered in to work on the body. By June, she thought the Y ought to get more involved in training women to qualify for physical jobs like firefighting.

"We had just sat down to talk about it," Emshoff recalls, "when Ed Durkin called about that very thing. It was almost spooky. Durkin said: 'I'll be over in nine minutes.' And he was. With Assistant Chief Harry Klinger who was going to be the Department's affirmative action officer.

What Durkin wanted was for Emshoff to write up a "pre-training program" which was to be submitted to the Police and Fire Commission. If feasible, the Commission would vote to transfer money from a salary account to fund the program.

Then Emshoff would run it.

And that's what happened.

"Ed Durkin," Emshoff emphasises, "is committed to having women on the Madison Fire Department. He's got

guts. He's not just a lip service liberal and that's why he creates a controversy wherever he goes."

Durkin also creates a whirlwind wherever he goes, as Emshoff discovered on the pre-training program.

"I was out at Truax," she says. "I was in the fire stations. I spent a lot of time in and around the Fire Department. Between coaching at Memorial and running The Body Works and running the Y-pre-training program, I was going full blast from 6 in the morning until 10 at night. By fall, I was ready to either commit suicide, have a brain transplant or chuck it all for Ely, Minnesota." Her favorite place, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area is at Ely. Along with her favorite person, wilderness author Sigurd Olson.

"Durkin," she says, shaking her head, "you know, we were driving along one day, when he screeches to a stop, slams it into park, puts the blinkers on and is out of the car like a shot, running toward a black woman on the street. 'Hey,' he says to her, 'do you want to be a firefighter in Madison?'"

"I told him that if he kept accosting people on the street like that, somebody was probably going to deck him."

Emshoff says Tom Bolger of WMTV swears he witnessed a similar scene, only the scene Bolger witnessed took place at LaGuardia Airport in New York City.

"Ed Durkin's serious," Emshoff shrugs, "that's why Madison has women firefighters."

In February of this year, Emshoff joined the Madison Fire Department as health and fitness co-ordinator.

"Everybody's crabbing," Durkin told her, "that the Department lowered standards to get women on the force. That's not true. Standards are standards, and everybody has to meet them. Rookies and veterans. Women and men. Set up a program. And run it."

Emshoff says she probably read about 250 studies relating to standards for firefighters. From other fire departments around the nation. From people in the field of physiology. She spent the summer getting it all together. Testing the rookies and the veterans. The men. And the women. Her report on the fitness of the force presented to the Madison Common Council in

October was, she says, "so far, the most controversial thing we've done."

The Wisconsin State Journal, in a headline, wrote of "Fat firefighters..."

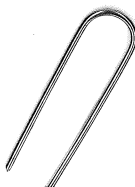
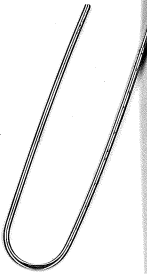
Emshoff decries the headlines, but defends the report as honest and objective.

"We have some very healthy people in the Madison Fire Department," she says, "and we also have some very unhealthy people. I don't like to read articles about 'fat firefighters' either but

maybe it takes getting embarrassed before we do anything."

By the same token, she feels that the people who cut breathing equipment from the city budget should not only be embarrassed, they should be ashamed.

"The face masks that the Department uses now," she explains, "are not a perfect fit. They don't make a seal on a firefighter's face. They leak. you can't send a person into a fire with equipment like that. It's old. It's



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ineffective. The lack of good breathing apparatus could kill someone."

It could be her mentor, Chief Durkin himself taking, as she points out there are buildings on the UW campus where hazardous materials are housed, and if there's an accident, a leak, the Madison Fire Department will be called in and then if a breathing apparatus malfunctions, *some firefighter is going to die.*

"That budget cut is foolish, ridiculous," she says with a trace of anger. "It's tampering with people's lives."

Emshoff believes that the city has a moral obligation to its workers that it puts into hazardous situations. And not just police and firefighters. But garbage collectors. Tree trimmers. And others. And in the hazards, she would include drug abuse and alcoholism.

"We're talking employees' health service," she acknowledges. "The private sector has done a hell of a job in this area. Johnson Wax. Kimberly-Clark. Sentry Insurance. Sentry probably has the best program in the state. The cities are bringing up the rear."

The private sector, she notes found that an employees' health service is cost effective, because a healthy worker stays on the job.

"In school," she says, "at Memorial, I was relatively protected. Out in the real world, it's tough and women are not really protected in it. The hardest thing about Affirmative Action is that you have to get beyond the sex of a person and ask: *Can he or she do the job?* That's the criterion. That's the bottom line."

Out in the real world, Emshoff has discovered that sexism runs as deep as racism, "perhaps deeper," and it's hard to fight. She realizes that some firefighters resent her simply because she's a woman, and she says she's become "a lot more tolerant" of their views.

"I'm a feminist," she declares, "but I was never radical or nutsy. I'm an advocate for women. But I'm also an advocate for men. I haven't changed. I used to get on this soapbox for sport. Now I get on the same soapbox for Firefighters, *all* Firefighters. And I'm still coming from the same place I always came from. I still know how to talk. I still know how to listen." ■