

Hall of Fame

The Midas Touch

Coach Walt Lozoski had a unique gift for winning

By JOHN GORALSKI
SPORTS WRITER

Walt Lozoski had a certain knack for winning no matter what the odds. Southington was never known as a basketball town, but Lozoski won on the hard-court. In the days of Lewis High School, Southington was farmlands and forest. Lozoski found ways to beat the city schools.

Give him a team, some players, and he'd give you a winning season. How did he do it? With

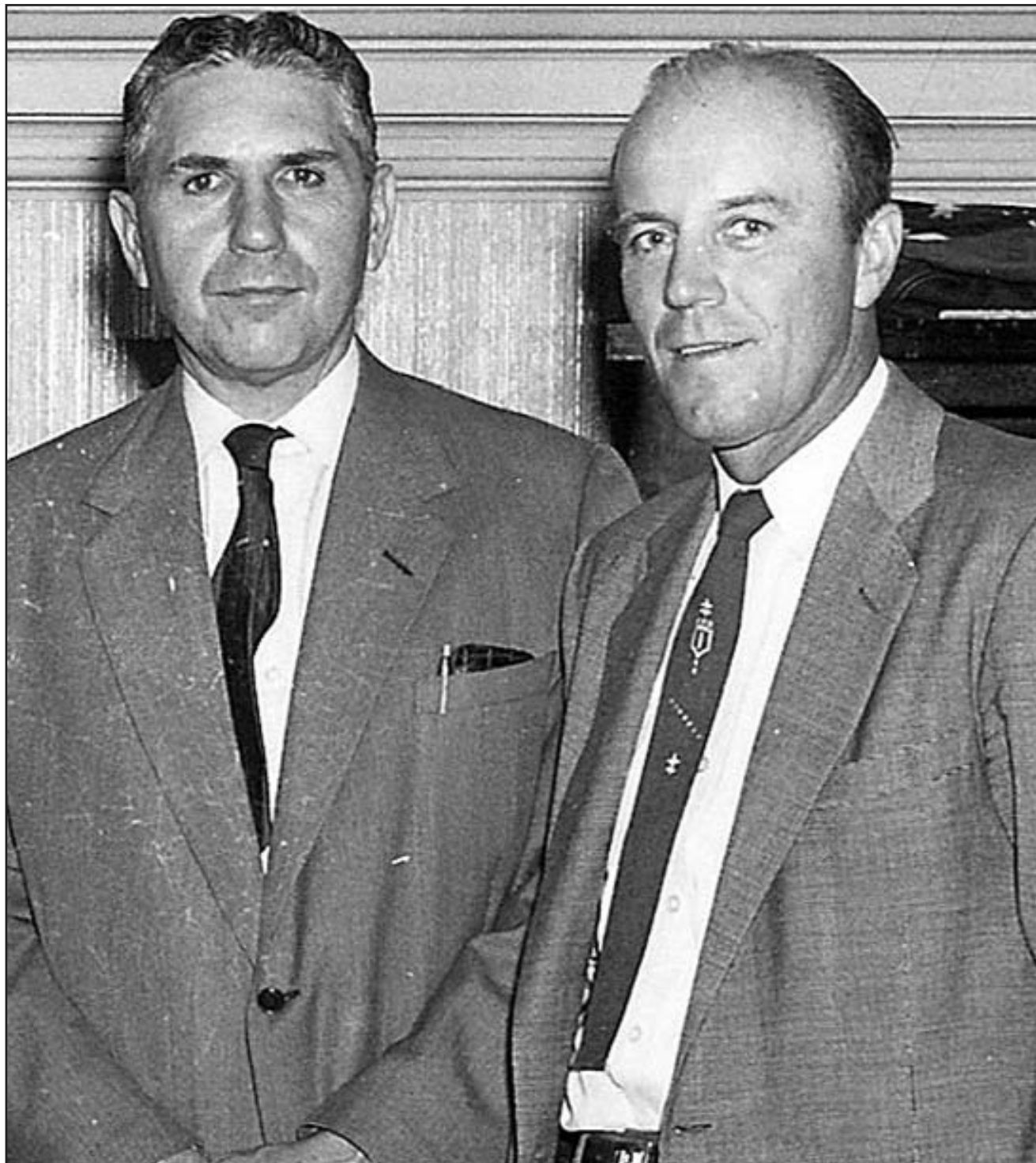
Coach

style.

"It was the way he coached," said Dan Sekanovic, Lozoski's half-brother and prized pupil. "Southington was never known for basketball, but Walt's first year he went undefeated in the league. He was always in contention. We never had the size. He was always dealing with the small, short Italian. It was just good coaching."

And a little bit of Yankee ingenuity. Long before John Fontana was a championship coach in the Southington dugout, he was a gangly teenager on Lozoski's first basketball team in 1950. He remembers walking into the gym for the first day of practice to see Lozoski standing in an empty gym with no baskets.

"The first two weeks that we had practice he rolled all the hoops up. He took the basketball out, and for two weeks we never took a shot," Fontana said in a 2007 interview. "We played defense. We did funda-



FILE PHOTO

Former Blue Knight coach Walter Lozoski, right, with former Southington Athletic Director Joseph J. Fontana.

mentals. We dribbled left handed, right handed. We went home exhausted and dropping. Everyone was wondering when those

hoops were coming down. I'll never forget that."

The preparation paid off right away. The fledgling team met up with Wethersfield, a top-heavy powerhouse with a pair of all-state players, and Southington's defense held them to 27 points and a loss. It was the start of a strong winning tradition.

"He was a good football coach, but what a basketball coach," hall of fame coach Joe Orsene said about his mentor. "I would say that he's as good as anybody who's ever coached in Connecticut. If you name them all, Walt had better be on that list. That's how good he was."

Just give him a ball, a rule book, and some players, and Lozoski could put together a winning team. His career spanned three decades and three sports. His overall coaching

record was 311-182 (.631). His teams won 12 league titles and a pair of state championships. His basketball teams went 249-162 over 21 years, and his four football teams went 24-8 with a Class B championship in 1957.

As if that wasn't enough, Lozoski created the town's varsity golf program and led the team to a 38-12 record over five years. In 1964, Lozoski was named as the CT High School golf coach of the year.

Hall of famer Mike Mauro played under Lozoski. Mauro set the standard for hitting in the 1950s with a single season hitting record that still stands, and he credits his coach for helping him reach his potential.

"He was terrific. I wouldn't have gotten as far as I did if it wasn't for

him," Mauro said. "A lot of what I achieved came from working with him. He was quite a ball player, himself, in his day. He took a liking to me, and did extra work with me—hitting wise and so forth."

Lozoski didn't have to be a coach. As a boy, he earned wide recognition for his prowess at football and basketball, but baseball was where he left his mark. He started 81 out of 84 games in college and played alongside players like Joe DiMaggio in the amateur leagues. He refused a professional contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers in order to pursue his education at Providence College. Baseball's loss was Southington's gain.

Lozoski held a variety of positions in the Southington school system. He was a coach, a

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John Fontana,
Former SHS
basketball player

social studies teacher, and a department chairman. Lozoski retired in the late 1970s and passed away in 2005, but he set the foundation for Southington's winning and learning traditions that have continued into the present day.

"He loved coaching," said Sekanovic. "I think that the best thing I could say about Walt was that he was a man's man and a coach's coach."

That's why Lozoski topped the list as one of four coaches selected into the first class of the Southington Sports Hall of Fame. On Wednesday, Nov. 10, he will be honored in an induction ceremony at the Aqua Turf in Plantsville.

"I think it's a great honor, and I really think that he'd be honored," Sekanovic said. "The first thing that he would want is for everybody to know that he was a man that loved people, loved sports, loved his students, and definitely loved Southington."

To comment on this story, email John GoralSKI@southingtonobserver.com.

Southington Sports Hall of Fame



Inside the Numbers

Overall record: 311-182

- Basketball, 21 years (Record: 249-162)
- Football, 4 years (Record: 24-8)
- Golf, 5 years (Record: 38-12)

- Established SHS golf program
- Two state championship titles
 - 12 league titles
- CT Golf High School Coach of the Year (1964)
- Inducted into the CT High School Coaches Hall of Fame

- SHS West gym dedicated to Walter Lozoski on January 19, 2007