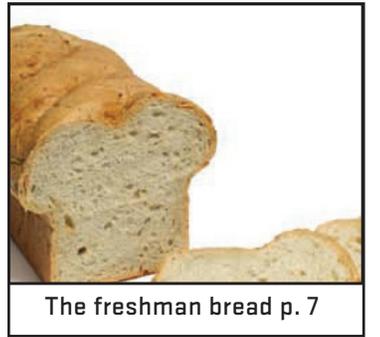


# features



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## Sally Baum: Inspirational leader, 'one of a kind'

• Benjamin Snyder  
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Sally Baum sat alone in the basement of a dormitory at Slippery Rock University, yelling at the television as tennis champion Billie Jean King took on Bobby Riggs in the famous 1973 Battle of the Sexes match to promote gender equality in tennis and in sports. Now the coach of the Goucher Women's Tennis team, she recalls being surprised that no one else shared the experience with her.

It was a rare occurrence for female athletes to appear on television in the '70s. But, growing up, Baum immersed herself in all types of sports, including playing on her high school's boy's tennis team in Poolesville, Maryland. This love of athletics made the occasion even more powerful when King won the match in straight sets. The tennis champion's win would eventually jumpstart the creation of initiatives promoting women in sports over the next three decades.

Today, Baum, who lives in Fallston, Maryland, exhibits attributes of her childhood hero. She's been a coach for the Women's Tennis Team for over 29 years and, reflecting on her time at Goucher, which she began after earning her Masters in Education from her undergraduate alma mater, Baum says she's been "lucky."

Like King, her team has battled through adversity to win. For more on the team's season, please see the news story on page 23.

Baum takes with her a calm attitude as a coach and on the court when she plays, which helps her overcome the obstacles that arise. "I don't understand the tennis player that gets upset at three [games] all. When I played basketball, I was always going to make the next shot. I could've had a 0 for 15 days, and I was going to make the 16th shot. I struggle with athletes who fall apart at the first sign of trouble."

As for her own tennis game, which she started developing with family at the age of around six or

seven years old, "if [the opponents are] going to beat me, I'll keep them out here for hours until they do. And I may not [win], but that's my mentality. I won't beat myself, you have to beat me."

Athletic Director Geoff Miller has worked with Baum over his 17 years at Goucher and recognizes her poised and competitive qualities. "She's a very experienced coach; she doesn't get too high and she doesn't get too low, and I think that kind of calmness and poise, the team senses that," he said. "I think they do respect her and admire her, and they want to please her and perform well for her."

Part of this effectiveness in her interactions with the team comes from her ability to connect with those she works with, according to Miller, who described Baum as both a mentor and a leader. He said, "she creates roles for people, she figures out that maybe her number two doubles [in the team line-up during matches] might not be her third and fourth players...That's what I like about how she coaches—I think she really looks at it from a holistic angle."

Highlighting her inspirational qualities, team captain Jacqui Lamer '11 explained how Baum made her feel like a part of the team when she was injured last year. Lamer has worked with Baum these past three years, and the two have formed a powerful relationship. "For me, it's so much more than just tennis with Sally," said Lamer. "When I got injured and I got sick, she made me feel like I was part of something. She offered me a job and made me feel like I was part of something and more. Thinking back, I could have easily taken time off of school, and Sally and tennis are the reasons I stayed here and got up in the morning and had something to do here and had a reason to be here," she said.

Miller particularly values Baum's personality and ability to help people thrive. "The thing I admire about Sally is she's the same no



Sally Baum has coached the Goucher Women's Tennis team for 29 years. (Photo: Billie Weiss)

matter what the season is and no matter what the students are. She acknowledges that every team is different and every team has different chemistry because of the individual people on it," he said. "She tries to meet them where they are, [and] she's very much the situational leader. She's trying to motivate them so they can be the best they can possibly be."

Along with her ability to help her women on the court, Baum plays just as valuable a role off it. "People trust her and people value her opinions. I'll go by her office and there will be a coach there talking to her. It's because some coach just wants to bounce some ideas off of her. She's an incredible listener," said Miller.

For son Steve Baum '11, who plays on the Men's Tennis Team and who was coached by his mother growing up, it's her work ethic

that is particularly effective. "The big thing I've noticed is that she gets everyone on the same page, everyone knows what the team goals are, everyone knows what they need to work on and it's this sense of not only a team, but a family," he said.

Coach Baum fosters team spirit by making sure the women keep active together, said her son. "They're always doing things, going on training trips, and building up that camaraderie through the team, [which] is a huge aspect for my mother."

Her penchant for coaching developed as a player on the numerous sports she competed in growing up. "My coaches always referred to me as the coach on the floor whether I was the point guard [in basketball], or the center half for field hockey, or the setter on the volleyball team, or the shortstop pitcher," she said.

Because of this quality as a student athlete, Baum expressed that the transition to coaching was not a difficult one. Instead, it "was the students who at the time told me they didn't practice on Fridays, they didn't do anything on the weekends, they couldn't possibly do two hours a day [of practice]," she says. "The program had been fairly lax up until that point. There were a couple people who quit that first year."

Additionally, Baum serves as the Senior Female Administrator for the Athletic Department, meaning she's "involved in an awful lot of decisions all the way from personnel to policies and procedures, and compliance," said Miller. "She's really involved with the day-to-day business of the athletic department as well as the tennis team."

By working with her in these capacities, Miller discussed his perceptions of Baum's thought process and style of working. "Ironically, she's introverted, and she's very contemplative...She's very careful before she responds. In a staff meeting setting she probably will be less inclined to speak up while she might be more inclined to come see me personally, privately afterwards and say I've been giving this some thought, and this is what I think," he said.

This quality contrasts to her job as coach, explained Miller. "In a team dynamic in terms of our staff team, she's not a real vocal, cheer-leading, out there kind of person, while as a coach she has to be more like that, and I think because she is introverted she forces herself to be more extroverted as a coach. I think she can go ahead and be herself a little more as an introvert in our department," he said.

For President Sanford Ungar, Baum's three decades with the college can be described as impressive. "It's humbling to think that I've been here less than a third of the amount of time that Sally has...she's a great resource for Goucher and one of a kind," he said.