



This 1986 shot of Dan Griesbaum giving signs to his batter appeared in South's 1987 yearbook.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GROSSE POINTE SOUTH YEARBOOK

DESIGN BY JOHN PIGOTT

The teacher, the coach, THE LEGEND



PHOTO BY RENEE LANDUYT

Dan Griesbaum Sr. is a familiar name to thousands of households throughout Grosse Pointe. Since he accepted a position to teach and coach here in 1979, he has touched the lives of countless students, athletes, colleagues, parents and families. After completing his 40th season as head coach of Grosse Pointe

South's varsity baseball program this June, the Grosse Pointe News sat down with the legendary teacher and coach. What we discovered was the story of a man who found his true purpose in teaching and mentoring young people, backed by powerful stories from those he has impacted along the way.

This is the story about faith, family, a teacher, coach and community legend:

Meg Leonard
Associate Editor

When Dan Griesbaum Sr. accepted a teaching position in Grosse Pointe Public Schools in 1979, little did anyone know he was about to begin a career that can only be described, by any definition, as legendary.

And much to the delight of Blue Devil baseball fans, he's not done yet.

Griesbaum, a Michigan High School Baseball Coaches Association Hall of Famer, just completed his 40th season as head baseball coach at Grosse Pointe South High School. He is among only a handful of high school coaches in Michigan to break the 40-year coaching mark, including his colleague at South, Steve Zaranek, and North's Gary Bennett.

Zaranek just coached his 44th seasons for the girls cross country and track and field teams. "88 seasons so far as a head coach...and yes, 50 years and 100 seasons is the goal," Zaranek said. He also taught at North, Pierce and South before retiring from teaching two years ago. Bennett, a math teacher and head coach for girls basketball at North, just celebrated his 40th anniversary this season.

Other active coaches in the state who have surpassed the 40-year mark are Trenton wrestling coach Tom Bluhm and

five softball coaches, according to the Michigan High School Athletic Association.

Griesbaum also was a health teacher at South for 35 years, where he got to do what he loves — working with kids — alongside his high school sweetheart and wife, Paulette, a business teacher at South, until they both retired in 2014.

'Dan is like a father, brother and great friend. I love him and I love coaching with him.'

JOHN HACKETT,
Grosse Pointe South Varsity Baseball Assistant Coach

"I knew the day I got hired in 1979 that it was the start of something pretty special," he said.

Having celebrated his 70th birthday last Dec. 24, Griesbaum actually has coached for more than half of his life — 46 years in total, thanks to a career that started with a two-year stint as an assistant coach at Central Michigan University and then four more years at Grosse Pointe North assisting another coaching legend, Frank Sumbera. Sumbera coached both baseball and football at North for 49 years and is someone whom Griesbaum considers both a mentor and dear friend.

"(Our friendship) is as solid today as the first day I met the man," Sumbera said, who attended South's regional

and quarterfinals games in June to offer support. "It gets stronger every day.

"We see each other at a game, establish eye contact, and we just know how much stuff we have gone through together."

In his first year with Sumbera in 1980, North varsity baseball won a state championship with a lineup filled with

Norsemen greats like John Clem, Bill Babcock, John Hackett, Tom Shook and Bobby Brown.

"In our starting lineup on that team, five of the starters got drafted. Clem by the (Seattle) Mariners, Hackett, the (St. Louis) Cardinals, Brown by the Detroit Tigers and Tom Shook by the Kansas City Royals," Sumbera noted. Babcock, who threw three no-hitters in the playoffs that year, was drafted by the Chicago White Sox.

Hackett would later become one of Griesbaum's assistant coaches at South and has been on his staff for 30 years.

"Dan is like a father, brother and great friend," Hackett said. "I love him and I love coaching with

See GRIESBAUM, page 10D



PHOTO BY CHERISHED CANDIDS BY ERIN

The 2023 Grosse Pointe South varsity baseball coaching staff includes from left to right, Dan Griesbaum Jr., John Hackett, Dan Griesbaum Sr., Matt Reno and Rich Smith.

10D | GRIESBAUM: CELEBRATING 40 SEASONS



PHOTO COURTESY BY RENEE LANDUYT

Dan Griesbaum Sr. heads to coach third after breaking a pregame huddle this season on April 13 against Anchor Bay.

GRIESBAUM:

Continued from page 9D

him.” Retirement is not imminent, Griesbaum said, though he understands it’s not in the distant future either. His six grandkids, including five boys and one girl, have full schedules of baseball and football games, school concerts, dance recitals and the like, and he wants to be there for them. “When I can’t do it the way I need to do it, with the energy and effort it requires, then that is when I will get out,” Griesbaum said. “I don’t just want to be a coach in name only. I want to do

He’s still accomplishing firsts for the program. His 2022 team was South’s first in its history to win the regular season outright in the MAC Red, one of the most competitive leagues in the state. When his team won the Division I regional championship and advanced to the state quarterfinals last month, he reached a new milestone — 898 career wins, a coaching echelon very few reach. And just last week, Griesbaum was named the Michigan High School Athletic Association’s 2023 D1 regional coach of the year for the 11th time in his career. Griesbaum chalks up his success to many fac-

helped him reframe his approach with his players, whom he regularly refers to as his “kids.” “My faith helped me take my focus off of me and onto the kids and how I can help make it the best experience possible — (teaching things like) being a good person, treating others like you would be treated, doing the right thing,” he continued. “The ironic thing is after I did make that commitment to God and to my faith and put that first, I started to see more success.”

How it started

Griesbaum loved playing baseball as a kid, but the game became his saving grace after his father left his mom and two brothers, older brother Al and twin brother Don, when they were young boys. “My father took off when I was 10, but baseball and the good Lord have given me everything I could ever hope for,” he said. “I thought I could go pro, but that didn’t happen, but now I know why. ... Sometimes prayers aren’t answered for a reason.” He is confident a pro career never happened for him because it directed him to a life of coaching and mentoring young people. He said although many would view his situation as a negative, or of a dream unrealized, it turned out to be a remarkable positive. “I’ve told the kids about

he began dating his future wife, Paulette Vitto, when she was a freshman. He was a star baseball player for the Cavaliers, and earned a scholarship to play at Central Michigan University from 1971 to 1975. Paulette joined him at Central and the pair married in 1973. Griesbaum earned team MVP honors his senior season in 1975, after which his head coach, Dave Keilitz, offered him a job as a graduate assistant. “Paulette had to finish school, so she finished up there and I got my master’s,” he said. “I got to teach classes like archery and bowling, while I helped coach baseball there. She also worked in the athletic office.” In 1979, in what one would call a stroke of great luck, kismet or God’s plan, the Grosse Pointe Public School System moved its part-time athletic directors and physical education teachers, Chuck Hollosy at South and Tom Gauerke at North, to full time. This move created the need to fill two part-time PE teaching positions at North and South, along with North’s open JV baseball job. North principal Bruce Feighner and South principal Bill Mogk offered Griesbaum the job. By 1984, South head baseball coach Jon Rice decided to coach the Blue Devils football team full time, so Griesbaum took over the baseball program at South. The wheels were set in motion for what would become a historical hire for the district.

‘Tradition Never Graduates’

In the first several years of his coaching tenure, Griesbaum coached South in the old Eastern Michigan League, or EML. In 1990, the league combined with the old Bi-County League and became the Macomb Area Conference, which has expanded seven times since its inception to now include 36 teams across Wayne, Macomb and St. Clair counties. Today, South baseball plays in the conference’s toughest division, MAC Red. Never shielding his program from a difficult non-league and league schedule is what helps the program stay competitive year after year, he said. It’s also the motivation behind the program’s motto, “Tradition Never Graduates.”

“I think it’s the mentality and culture I have tried to create, not just a fancy slogan you put on a T-shirt,” he said of his program’s belief that to be the best, you have to play the best. “It’s what we have tried to build our culture around. You have to see it and set the expectation before it happens. Our team culture and expectations fuel that.” But part of playing such a difficult schedule

Collegiate High School, where he and his teammates won the 2000 state championship his senior year. Griesbaum won his first state title at South the following year. “They’re like the Yankees,” he said of Griesbaum’s teams. “They’re always gonna play at a high level and play the right way.” Since he took over the Norsemen program in 2022, Shubnell has faced Griesbaum several times,



PHOTO COURTESY OF KARI GRIESBAUM

High school sweethearts Paulette and Dan Griesbaum celebrate becoming husband and wife on June 16, 1973.

each season comes at a bit of a price. While Griesbaum has notched 898 wins, he also ranks among the state’s leaders in total losses. But that’s a statistic that’s not likely to keep this coach up at night.

The right way

When asked about Griesbaum, player after player and coach after coach used three words to describe a core tenet of how Griesbaum manages his teams and teaches them to play baseball: “The right way.” North head varsity baseball coach Kevin Shubnell knows Griesbaum as both a high school player and now as an opposing coach. Raised in Grosse Pointe Woods, Shubnell played Grosse Pointe Woods-Shores Little League, competing against Dan Griesbaum Jr. “I was a Dodger and Danny (Jr.) was a Blue Jay,” Shubnell recalled. “So I always kind of knew about Grosse Pointe South baseball and that it was big and was kind of a thing. I knew it was a good program.” Shubnell moved on to attend De La Salle

making it a priority to keep the competition between the rivals respectful and about the players, just as Sumner did before him. In other words, the right way. “Games against him, those are for the kids,” he said. “You don’t have to say a word in those games. ... North/South baseball is the thing. Just let them play.” He said being a part of the rivalry today is “a joy to be on that field. There is no outside-the-lines animosity.” Assistant coach Hackett said the way Griesbaum plays the game keeps everyone committed to the program. “I’m not knocking anyone, but he could probably have another 100 wins if he played things differently,” he said. “Obviously you are upset when you lose, but you can definitely say it’s not the wins and losses for him. “It’s the whole entity, the family, the players and the people and caring about them. That’s the most important thing to him.”

See GRIESBAUM, page 11D



COURTESY PHOTO

1986 Grosse Pointe South baseball team, pulled from the pages of South’s 1987 yearbook.

all the things I’ve done in the past. “But it is toward the end (of my coaching career) and whenever I think about it, I get emotional.” Today, he remains armed with the desire and drive to continue coaching a game he has played since childhood. He has molded hundreds of young men’s lives throughout four decades, while also making Grosse Pointe South baseball a household name throughout the state. In 40 seasons, he has reached the state semifinals eight times, making him tops among Division I coaches with that many D1 final four appearances. His program also has the most final four appearances among any public school, behind only D1 private school athletic powerhouses Brother Rice (10) and Catholic Central (9). He remarked that accomplishment is noteworthy because, “it’s all with our own kids (from Grosse Pointe), too, because we can’t recruit.”

He has led his squad to three state championship games, losing in 2014, but winning his first title in 2001. His second and most recent state championship came June 16, 2018, which also happened to be his 45th wedding anniversary.

tors, but always credits two primary sources: his family and his faith. “I really felt like in the beginning, I put results over relationships,” Griesbaum said. “At the start of my career, I always felt I taught my kids life skills and such, but I maybe put results and winning over them.” Griesbaum said recommitting to his faith helped him reprioritize. It also

it to emphasize the importance of learning to overcome adversity, in baseball and life,” he said. “Your life can be directly affected and related to your ability to handle failure and adversity.” Before landing on his path of purpose, Griesbaum graduated from St. Clair Shores South Lake High School in 1971. As a sophomore,



PHOTO COURTESY OF GROSSE POINTE SOUTH BASEBALL

The 2023 team headed south to Florida for spring training, including special batboy Blake Griesbaum (front center), the grandson of Dan Griesbaum Sr.

Redemption story between coach, former player transcends baseball

By Meg Leonard
Associate Editor

Dan Cimini grew up in Grosse Pointe Park in the 1980s, when nearly every young boy enjoyed a shared rite of passage — playing Little League baseball.

He played on the dirt diamonds of what is now known as Getz Field. He remembers final scores, championship games and all-star teams, the very things young budding baseball stars remember when they become grown men and reminisce about their Little League years.

But as a young teen, life threw Cimini a curve ball. His parents divorced, causing him to move away for a few years. In 1986, he returned to Grosse Pointe, now being raised by a single mother. He transferred into Grosse Pointe South as a junior and continued to take solace in playing baseball.

“I came out junior year to try-outs, got cut,” Cimini said. “I was clearly one of his best players. I went into him, mad as all get out, and got told to go to a second tryout and he cut me again.”

What most might have a difficult time believing is that the “he” in Cimini’s redemption story is South’s legendary head coach, Dan Griesbaum Sr.

Griesbaum, who just marked his 40th season as the Blue Devils skipper in June, looks back today at cutting players early in his career with

great regret.

“I apologize early on if I wasn’t the type of coach for that,” he said. “I was a work in progress and took me too long to realize that.”

“... But the last thing I ever wanted to do was hurt a kid. Now the focus

‘The biggest takeaway I have from him is the life skills that I learned from him just watching with his family, faith and his integrity.’

DAN CIMINI
University Liggett Head Varsity Baseball Coach

is on relationships and giving kids the best possible experience as I can,” added Griesbaum, who now is known for

kids out from center field.”

From that game on, Cimini became a core member of the 1987 team, which went on to become Griesbaum’s first team to reach a final four.

But before this team made program history, Griesbaum approached Cimini in the middle of the season during a pregame warmup. He asked about his college plans. At the time, Cimini had none. In fact, he wasn’t even sure if college was for him at all.

“He told me he knew someone at Macomb (Community College) he could talk to if I was



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAN CIMINI

Dan Cimini, left joins North coach Mike Kras and South’s Dan Griesbaum Sr. for a pre-game photo.

Griesbaum hired Cimini to help coach his JV and freshman teams, along with Cimini’s 1987 teammate, Sean Bruce.

“(Griesbaum) got me my start in coaching,” he

five state championships with Liggett and was inducted into the MHSBCA Hall of Fame in Class of 2016. He has been named district, regional and state coach

of the year on multiple occasions. This year his team, which had five Division 1 college commitments, advanced to the program’s ninth final four in 12 years, earning him honors as the 2023 regional Coach of the Year from the National Baseball Coaches Association and Michigan’s Division 2 regional Coach of the Year.

In May of this year, Cimini also won his 500th career game with the Knights.

But for all of their individual successes, the special connection between Cimini and Griesbaum transcends baseball.

“He’s the first person I put on my resume as a reference,” Cimini said. “He’s a father figure to me, the only good one I have ever had.”

“His integrity, faith and family are things I model my life after.”

Griesbaum is fully aware of the caliber of a baseball program Cimini has built. Earlier this season, he spoke with great respect about his former player’s accomplishments.

“Dan has built a world-class program at Liggett,” Griesbaum said. “... (His program) is well-known here and in the Midwest, and his talent is off the charts with all of his D1 commits.”

“But it takes a good coach to do all that.”

For his part, Cimini speaks of a mutual respect of two people who have spoken on a weekly basis for 30 years.

“I think as much as he has influenced me, I think I may have influenced him and now maybe he has stolen some pages of some of the things I do coaching baseball,” he said. “The biggest takeaway I have from him is the life skills that I learned from him just watching with his family, faith and his integrity. He would never cheat, would never disrespect the game of baseball.”

“I just want people to know how much I love him and how thankful I am to him. I wouldn’t be where I am today without him.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF GROSSE POINTE SOUTH'S 1988 YEARBOOK

Sitting in the front row, third from left, Dan Cimini and his 1987 teammates became Dan Griesbaum’s first team to reach a final four in the state tournament.

carrying rosters as large as 25 players or more.

For Cimini, getting cut only fueled his desire to prove everyone wrong. He tried out again senior year. He made the team.

“I sat the first two games,” he said. “I got put into the third game and threw three or four

interested,” Cimini said.

Cimini took him up on his offer. He attended Macomb for two years, eventually transferring to University of Detroit-Mercy. There, he earned a bachelor’s degree while playing four years of college baseball.

Afterward, in 1993,

said. “I fell in love with it.”

In 2006, Cimini became the head varsity baseball coach at University of Liggett, a position he still holds today in tandem with his newest role as the school’s admissions outreach coordinator.

He has gone on to win

GRIESBAUM: Continued from page 10D

His teams

Speaking to Griesbaum about South baseball is akin to looking for answers in an old-fashioned Encyclopedia Britannica. He recalls details, scores and stats with unbelievable accuracy, whether it’s South’s record for stolen bases in a season (held by former MLB player Chris Getz, who had 40 in 2002), or situations where he called game-winning suicide squeezes.

Griesbaum rattled off two instances with ease, recalling South’s first state championship win in 2001.

“In the bottom of 6, we had Mark Peppler on third and Mike Hackett up to bat with a 1-2 count,” he said, recalling the moment he sent Peppler home for the winning run. He also recalled South’s district title over North in 2019, when Matt Fabry squeezed in Weston Brundage for the win.

As far as his most memorable seasons, Griesbaum considers his

state championship teams in 2001 and 2018 as tops. He also recalled his 1986 team, which gave Griesbaum his first district win, as well as all of his other final four teams from 1996, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2014, 2015 and 2018.

“A few times in our history, we went to three final fours in five years,” he said, adding that each team did something nota-

‘Even if their record wasn’t terrific, the kids were. This is why you do this.’

DAN GRIESBAUM
Grosse Pointe South Varsity Baseball Head Coach

ble or unique to contribute to the program.

But he has several others that also hold special memories for him, including his 1987 squad, who surprised everyone with its unexpected playoff run.

“I wanted to contend for a title within the first five years and, in 1987, we did. We reached the final four for the first time, but we lost to Midland Dow,” he said.

Another memorable team for the skipper was the 1992 team, which lost to Brother Rice 5-3 in the

quarterfinals.

“They were a very good team and Rice went on to win the state title that year,” he said.

“In ’01 we had a great nucleus of guys and in ’03 and ’05 we did, too.”

He said his 2014 squad was notable because it entered the playoffs with 18 losses and ended up in the state championship game. The skipper remembers something

about every one of his 40 teams, even if they didn’t finish with a great record or win a trophy.

“I never really thought about that or looked at a team as being ‘worst,’” he said. “Even if their record wasn’t terrific, the kids were. This is why you do this.”

As far as his most talented teams, Griesbaum said, “I think there have been several. Some of the final four teams might not have been the most talented necessarily, but they caught breaks and went on runs.

“2018 was pretty special,” he noted. “But not so much that there were college players on the team, but they played together and created something very special,” he said of their state championship.

He also laments the cancellation of the 2020 season to the pandemic and the “what ifs” that come to mind with a team he considers to be among the most talented he has had.

Over the years, he also has had the good fortune to coach countless future college players, many of whom played for D1 programs like University of Michigan, Central Michigan and Michigan State. He has had a handful of players who also saw some time in the minor leagues.

Among his most successful players are Getz, who had a 10-year major league career after being



PHOTO COURTESY OF GROSSE POINTE SOUTH BASEBALL

Dan Griesbaum Sr. calls a timeout to chat on the mound with catcher Sean McLeod and Chris Getz, who had a 10-year major-league career after being drafted 125th overall in the fourth round of the 2005 MLB draft by the Chicago White Sox.

drafted 125th overall in the fourth round of the 2005 MLB draft by the Chicago White Sox. Cam Gibson (son of Detroit Tigers great Kirk Gibson) played at MSU and was a Detroit Tigers prospect. Carmen Benedetti and

Adam Abraham played at U of M and eventually played some pro ball, according to Griesbaum.

“It was very special to coach them in high school,” he said.

See GRIESBAUM, page 12D

12D | GRIESBAUM: CELEBRATING 40 SEASONS



PHOTO BY DR. RICHARD DUNLAP

Dan Griesbaum Jr. celebrates what would be his final hit in a Grosse Pointe South uniform with his dad, who was coaching first.

GRIESBAUM:

Continued from page 11D

Like father, like son

Griesbaum coached another memorable player, who eventually followed in his footsteps, enjoyed a successful college career at Central Michigan and continues to help coach at South today: his son, Dan Griesbaum Jr.

Most often referred to by those who know both father and son simply as “Junior,” Dan Griesbaum Jr. was an outstanding catcher and power hitter for Grosse Pointe South from 1996-99. He sits in the top 10 of several program records, including batting average, runs scored, RBIs and hits. He ranks No. 2 in home runs with nine in back-to-back seasons in 1998 and 1999. He has the most triples in program history, hitting seven in 1999.

Along with teammate Charlie Braun, who played at MSU, Griesbaum Jr. received a scholarship to play D1 college baseball after high school.

And like his father, he moved on to play for Central Michigan. There he served as team captain, leading the Chippewas to a MAC championship in 2004.

But his Blue Devil career almost didn’t happen.

Since the Griesbaum family resided in the North attendance area, the coach’s son always figured he would be a Norsemen.

“The first snowman I ever built had a Norsemen on it,” Griesbaum Jr. quipped.

At the time, the district allowed teachers whose families lived in Grosse Pointe to choose what high school to attend. But as a loyal son, who was a South ball boy since

that if I made anything other than that decision, God only knows how many people that would have affected,” he said.

“That one decision is probably the most important thing I have done in my life.”

His father considers his years coaching his son among his favorites.

“Even though we didn’t make it to a final four together, those four years with my son are the most satisfying I have ever had,” he said.

Despite Griesbaum Jr.’s busy life with his wife, Jessica, and three boys, Danny (12), Blake (9) and Beckham (5), and as an executive with the Utica Unicorns of the United Shore Professional Baseball League, he has managed to be an assistant coach at South the last 10 years.

“I’m very blessed to have to have him on staff, with everything he has on his plate with his family and job commitments,” Griesbaum Sr. said. “His baseball knowledge is great and he is so good with the kids. He knows how to communicate with them.”

He got emotional when he looked back at win-



PHOTO BY MEG LEONARD

Father and son stand atop the visitor’s dugout in South’s annual game at Comerica Park this year.

experience.”

His son shares that sentiment.

“In reality I certainly feel the same about sharing that experience in 2018. I was really surprised by my reaction about the state championship,” he said, admitting how his tears flowed freely when he embraced his dad after the last out.

“... Most people never get to end their season on a win. You’re used to going out on a platter every time. I did it 15 times (when I worked

coached with him for a combined 66 years.

“I could not and the program could not have achieved what it has over the years without them,” Griesbaum said, who also added assistant coach Rich Smith in 2019. “There’s no way in the world I would be able to do this for this long without them.”

Hackett, who played college ball at Birmingham-Southern in Alabama, just completed his 30th season coaching with Griesbaum. Reno,

recall patting on the head as the team’s batboy, began helping during playoff runs while still in college. He fully joined the staff in 2005.

There are several championship rings among the three assistants and Griesbaum Jr. said that’s a talking point to their teams.

“Younger coaches worry about themselves a lot more. It’s just how it is,” he said. “We show our rings to the kids and preach, ‘We want this for you, not for us. We’ve had enough success, but now we want you to know what it’s like (to win these.)’”

Hackett said the South staff generally faces just a few other teams that have a longstanding coaching core, like Sterling Heights Stevenson for example, but otherwise they see a lot of turnover in other programs.

Noting Griesbaum is a little more mellow than when he was a new coach, his “character and principles have stood the test of time,” Hackett said. “He has not changed in that arena one bit and that’s what it’s all about.

“And that’s why we have all stayed around. ... You know where you stand with him and everyone agrees with putting character and caring first.”

Reno said the staff also shares the same baseball sense.

“We all get along, we all have our area of expertise,” he said. “I’ve got defense, Junior handles the hitting, Hack the pitching and Dan has the last say. Our personalities all gel and we get along.”

Added Reno: “We’re all addicted to baseball.”

Family

While baseball may appear to be the center of Griesbaum’s world, it

See GRIESBAUM, page 13D

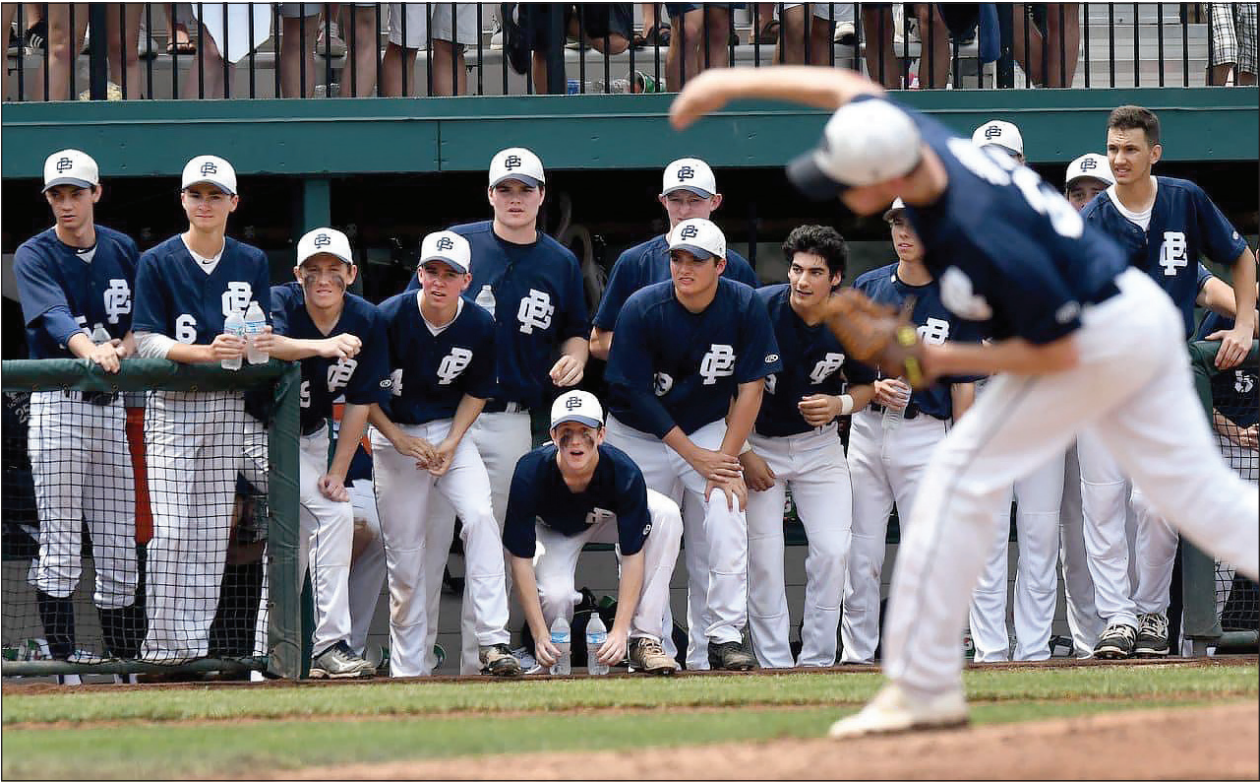


PHOTO BY KRISTIN MALLEGG

South’s dugout awaits Cameron Shook’s pitch to get the final out – a pop out to short – to win the 2018 state championship.

“I chose (South) because I was the type of kid that takes the happiness of his family into consideration,” he said. “I think I was pretty street smart and I could just tell that my mother was going to be unhappy (with the upheaval) and having my dad give up a job isn’t the greatest thing to do.”

Realizing “it was hard to see myself as anything other than a Blue Devil,” he made the decision to go to South in July 1995, a month and some change before his freshman year.

“I can’t help but think

ning the state championship with his son on staff in 2018.

“Winning the state championship in ’18,” he said as he paused to collect his thoughts. “When you can hug your son on the field after winning the state championship, that is something not many people will ever

for) the Tigers and at CMU it all ended with a loss. (Winning your last game) is a very special thing to experience.”

Assistant coaches

If you talk to Griesbaum for any amount of time about his program, there’s not a chance he won’t credit his longtime coaching staff, which includes his son, Hackett and Matt Reno, who have

who played baseball for Grand Valley State University, helped coach from 1986-90, taking a break to raise and coach his four kids through Grosse Pointe Park Little League, then rejoining the staff in 2009. Griesbaum Jr., whom many former players



PHOTO BY KRISTIN MALLEGG

Elated faces and a few tears mark the 2018 Blue Devils’ on-field celebration after its state championship win in East Lansing.

Memories that matter

By Jerry Joliet and John Joliet
Guest Writers

It has been around 35 years since either of us have had the honor of donning the Grosse Pointe South pinstripes, but it's probably taken a little time and distance (we now live on opposite coasts in Connecticut and California) to truly appreciate the man and the legend that is Coach Dan Griesbaum.

We always knew he was an exceptional baseball coach, but in retrospect he was much more. He was an incredible mentor — with an unwavering commitment to his teams, exemplary family life and a resolute dedication to molding young athletes into exceptional young men — and someone who has left an indelible mark on the lives he has touched.

Today, looking back on the remarkable career of Coach Griesbaum, or just “Coach” as he was affectionately known to his players, we see clearly a man whose passion for baseball has always gone hand-in-hand with being

looked to be in his late 20s — Coach dealt with typical issues you might associate with a high school baseball team, such as bad grades in school, lost confidence at the plate, distractions from girlfriend breakups or, his ultimate “kryptonite,” weekend keg parties where one or more of his players were spotted. But even at that young age, Coach was

helped redirect our family's potential trajectory in the aftermath.

We vividly remember the strong, father-like, omnipresence of Coach, with his wife, Paulette, who also was a teacher at South, along with an incredibly dedicated GPS guidance counselor, Karen O'Shea. Coach led a game plan, with great discretion, to guide us as we intervened with our

‘And so, his legacy will be one not merely of baseball achievements, but of lives touched, guided and enriched.’

uniquely mature and never shied away from helping his players deal with even more grave situations affecting them and their families, weightier things like divorce, alcoholism, depression and Alzheimer's.

Today, regrettably, many coaches would be reluctant, if not afraid, to lend such a helping hand.

Nearly 40 years ago, Coach gave us his greatest gift after the unexpected death of our dad during the school year in

mom. This watershed moment helped her find comfort, purpose and ultimately a sobriety that lasts to this day.

Like the best of his relief pitchers, Coach ultimately helped save a delicate situation that could have turned out dramatically worse for the team. So many of us have these Coach stories.

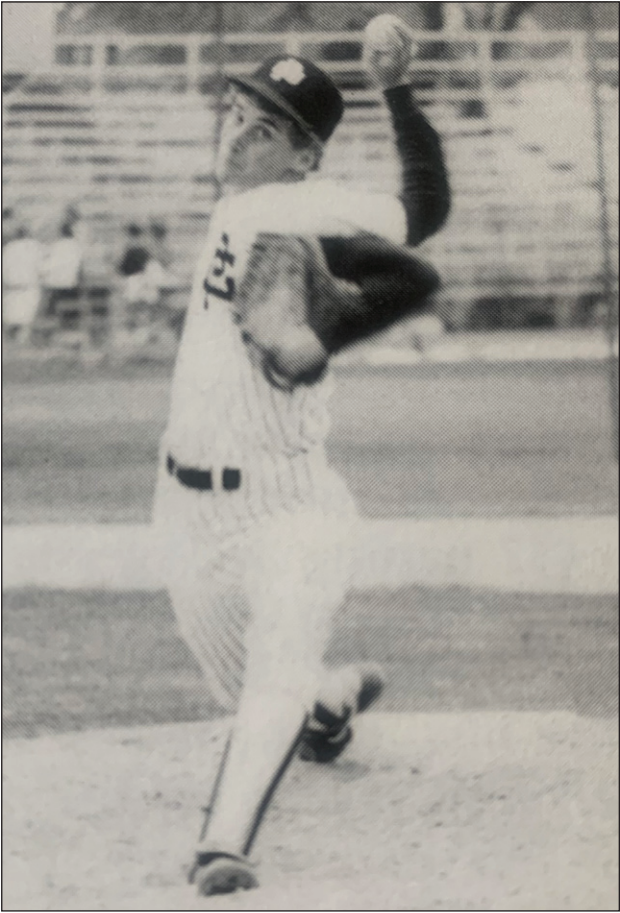
Some other special memories of Coach outside the lines of the ball field involved his beautiful family. He exemplified what it means to be a

and Kari, were like adopted team mascots: always welcome, always smiling, always cared for, and always believed to bring good luck. We've often thought that Coach's devotion to creating not just good ball players, but good young men, was in part to create a community of teens who could be a positive influence on kids like Danny and Kari, since moms and dads can't always be around.

Today, if his young players ever wonder what Coach was like back then, it's a complicated answer. Some might say “stoic,” meaning measured, wise, eminently skilled at his trade and always in control. He also was occasionally “animated,” red in the face with palpable anger and flirting with an eruption that never materialized — after a bad call affected the outcome of a game.

No doubt he was naturally “competitive,” because to Coach winning a game on the field or experiencing one of life's little victories was always a good proxy for one's dedication, hard work and perseverance. He was incredibly “disciplined,” always keeping his body in peak-performance shape; if he's ever tasted a drop of alcohol in his life, it has not been in our presence. He was certainly “demanding,” pushing all his young men to waste no talents and always be in pursuit of one's best self, promising there would always be another chance if you put in the work.

But perhaps the trait we remember most about Coach was that he possessed an unshakeable “faith” — to God, to his family, to his community, to his teams, to his ball players. The Marines have “God, Country, Corps.” Coach has “God, Family, Team.” His faith provided a serenity and confidence that everything would work out, everything would be OK. He prayed with his team before every game, long



COURTESY PHOTO

John Joliet helped anchor South's 1987 pitching staff, which combined for a 2.77 team ERA and the program's first trip to the state final four.

before praying in sports was in vogue, then out, primarily for his players' safety but also so each would perform to the best of his abilities. Many of his ball players can still recite that prayer today, 40 years later. Needless to say, everybody wanted to be like Coach and nobody wanted to let him down.

In the annals of high school athletics, Dan Griesbaum will always be known as a Hall-of-Fame coach, but he also has been a cornerstone of our community since he first took the field with his mighty Blue Devils many decades ago. He lives by a set of values that all parents hope their boys, their children, develop: strength of character, determination, integrity, humility, empathy, positivity.

Through his unwavering dedication and love of the game, he has forged not just exceptional teams and ball players, including several of both at the highest level of the game, but good men. He always has known that

true victory lies not just in the final score but in the transformative power of a mentor who believes in the potential of every young athlete. And so, his legacy will be one not merely of baseball achievements, but of lives touched, guided and enriched. He has made Grosse Pointe South baseball special; he has made Grosse Pointe special.

His name has been forever etched in the hearts of all those fortunate enough to have been a part of his incredible journey.

Jerry Joliet is a 1986 Grosse Pointe South graduate, who played for Dan Griesbaum from 1985-86, serving as team co-captain his senior year. He resides in Southport, Conn., with his wife, Sadhana, and three children.

John Joliet is a 1987 Grosse Pointe South graduate, who played for Dan Griesbaum from 1986-87. He resides in Los Angeles, Calif., with his wife, Mariel, and three children.



COURTESY PHOTO

Guest writer Jerry Joliet, third from right in the bottom row takes a team photo (from top row, left to right) with Dan Griesbaum Sr., Tom Fellows, Rick Leonard, Mike Hennessey, Steve Goodrich, Rick Waugaman (middle) Scott Tucker, George Ghazal, Jason Colgrove, Anthony Eugenio, Sean Bruce, Steve Kinsley, Peter Meur and (bottom) Mike MacMichael, Jerry Henry, Rich Cordova, Joliet, Ted Kolp and Rob Wood.

a devoted husband, father, teacher and the true embodiment of a role model. We consider it a blessing to still be in touch nearly four decades after we played for him.

During the early years of his head coaching career — when he still

1985. The resulting grief overwhelmed us and our mother, who was left to raise five young kids. This temporarily led her down an understandable road of despair and alcohol dependency. Coach's dedication to us as both our coach and teacher

devoted husband and, together with Paulette, they were a rock-solid partnership that was an inspiration to the young men on his teams, who were likely experiencing their first meaningful relationships.

Their children, Dan Jr.

GRIESBAUM:
Continued from page 12D

is yet a distant second to what he holds most dear: his family.

His high school sweetheart and wife of 50 years, Paulette, comes to every game, always sporting South's colors and giving hugs and hello's to the dozens of families she knows in attendance. As a busy working mom, who was also busy raising their two kids, Dan Jr. and daughter Kari, and now a grandmother, her husband understands the great sacrifices she has made with every baseball season. He said her unwavering support helps him to be at his best.

“No way would I have been able to do this without her by my side,” he said. “The love and support and ability to run things by her has been so valuable. To have her as the rock helps me tremendously, whether she is telling me when I'm wrong or just offering support.”

She also knows a thing or two about baseball

after all these years.

“She is very knowledgeable about the game,” he said. “And she will question me. I have no problem with people questioning me. I hope I'm going to be right, but you may be wrong. It's the nature of the game.”

Their daughter, Kari Griesbaum Mannino, said her mom and dad have set the bar as a couple for her and her husband, Phil Mannino, and as grandparents to their three kids, Cameron (8), Easton (5) and Brynn (3). Cameron and Easton play Little League with Woods-Shores, while Brynn carries the special title of being the Griesbaum clan's only granddaughter in a sea of grandsons.

“Papa and Gram” are active grandparents to all of their six grandchildren, regularly attending their numerous school and athletic activities, Mannino said. She added that among Papa's favorite activities is playing intense floor hockey games with her two boys — that is when he's not busy coloring, playing Play-Doh or princess with her daughter.

“When I walk in (to a floor hockey game) the score is almost always 10-9, with my boys up. My dad lets them win, but he's too competitive to lose by too much,” she said with a laugh.

With her boys now Little League age, having her dad there to watch the games and also having her boys help in the South dugout is not something she takes for granted.

“Watching my brother as a batboy and now seeing my kids there and seeing it all come full circle in the next generation is special,” she said. “We are kind of in that sweet spot. ... The boys are just as invested in the games now.”

Mannino herself also is carrying the torch in the next generation with another family tradition — teaching. On staff in Grosse Pointe the past 15 years, Mannino was the longtime magnet teacher at Defer Elementary School and currently is a reading interventionist at Parcels Middle School, her alma mater.

She said her parents influenced her drive as she went on to earn a

master's degree from Oakland University after graduating from MSU with a bachelor's degree in elementary education.

Her dad said he admires his daughter's decision to teach.

“I am very proud of the teacher she has become, as well as the great wife and mother she is,” Griesbaum said.

Mannino said she became aware of her dad's impact on students only as she got older.

“When I was at Michigan State, former students of his would come up to me and say, ‘I quit smoking because of your dad, because I know how bad it is for me,’” she said. “My dad dealt with some heavy-duty situations like suicide prevention, addiction issues and eating disorders and helped kids through them.”

“... My dad believes your health impacts your life and he teaches kids how to be healthy and do things the right way,” she said of her dad, who does not drink alcohol and rarely eats red meat.

Mannino said her mom

See GRIESBAUM, page 14D



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAN GRIESBAUM JR.

South head coach Dan Griesbaum Sr. gets a few minutes on the field May 27 with South class of 2013 baseball alum Carmen Benedetti. Benedetti went on to play for the University of Michigan from 2014-2017, and was selected in the 12th round in 2016 by the Houston Astros in Major League Baseball's First-Year Player Draft.

14D | GRIESBAUM: CELEBRATING 40 SEASONS



South's 2002 team race to celebrate at the plate after beating North for the district title, thanks to a Taylor Morawski single to drive in Chris Getz.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAN GRIESBAUM JR.

Teammates swarm the field in 2001 after beating Grand Ledge for the program's first state title.

GRIESBAUM:
Continued from page 13D

and dad both work out regularly at the Neighborhood Club and take evening walks along Lakeshore. It's just another example of how her dad exemplifies the message of good health and fitness to the athletes he coaches.

Mentors

The head coach remains a student of the game and still attends conferences around the country, representing various baseball organizations, including the Michigan High School Baseball Coaches Association and the American Baseball Coaches Association.

"I have never not been to a coaches' camp in 40 years," he said. "You

learn from people that know more than you do." He considers many people he has learned from over the years as mentors, including North's Sumner and his CMU's Keilitz, with whom he still stays in touch, along with former South football coach Russ Hepner.

"I have learned something from everyone I have been with," he said.

A few of his other mentors have since passed, including his predecessor, Jon Rice, as well as Detroit Tigers 1984 World Series winner Dave Bergman, who was instrumental in developing Grosse Pointe's Redbirds travel baseball program.

One of his biggest mentors was Paulette's older brother, Gary Vitto, who passed away in 2001 at age 59, only

six months after Griesbaum's first state championship. Vitto was Little Caesars founder Mike Ilitch's right-hand man for the Detroit Tigers, primarily on the business side.

"He won several championships of his own as manager of the Detroit Caesars pro softball teams back in the '70s, and was the GM of the very successful Detroit Drive arena football teams," he said.

"He had more knowledge in his little finger than most could ever hope to have."

The more things change...

While Griesbaum is not retiring, hitting the 40-year coaching milestone has given him the opportunity to reflect on what has changed over the years — and more

importantly what has not.

Some administrative areas that have changed include the need for fundraising. As athletic department budgets get smaller, the need for financial support has increased.

Years ago, Griesbaum had the foresight to formalize a board of volunteers, coined the Dugout Club, which is responsible for fundraising duties and other logistics that go into keeping the baseball program financially solid and well organized.

"I have had great Dugout Clubs that have helped me and supported our program," he said. "Tony Braun was one of our founding guys. We started running camps and really formalized things and it's just grown tremendously."

Of particular note this year was the installation of a new scoreboard, completely funded by more than \$50,000 raised through team fundraisers and private donations.

Another area of change he sees is how today's athletes are pressured to "specialize" in singular sports. Though he admits baseball is "a tough sport to get good at," specializing is something he does not encourage his players to do.

"I believe so much in that development (from other sports)," he said. "I believe in the carryover, whether it's from tennis, football, hockey or basketball. You can't minimize the benefit of playing other sports."

"On (baseball's) all-state list, 90 percent of athletes who make it have been two-sport athletes."

The more things stay the same

What has not changed much, according to Griesbaum, are the kids.

"People think kids have changed and they ask me if they are as still as focused, hard working and team players," he said, "but I really can't say kids have changed all that much. People say they are more entitled, but I have not experienced that."

Griesbaum said though he doesn't get as charged up about bad calls, or balls and strikes as he once used to, he remains as committed as ever to reacting and responding appropriately to adversity, because he knows his players are watching.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GROSSE POINTE SOUTH BASEBALL

Griesbaum and his wife, Paulette, embrace after South's 2023 district win over Grosse Pointe North this June.

"It's not what you say, it's how you say it," he said. "Bad language, shouting, etc., isn't really effective. I treat those players the way you would want your son treated by a coach."

Another constant is his taste in music, which can be heard playing in between innings during home games. He admits he's "not much of a fan" of the current music scene and instead sticks to classic rock and country for the team's playlist. Think Journey, Boston and John Denver, whose song "Country Roads" became the 2018 team's theme song throughout its state championship run. Fans also are treated after every home game victory to Alabama's rendition of "Song of the South," blaring through the press box speakers.

His son said he agrees with his dad's musical selection.

"Despite being a generation younger than my dad, if you go to any ballpark around the country, it sounds like it does at South," he said, noting he and his dad rode to school every day together listening to music from groups like the Barenaked Ladies and the Dave Mathews band.

"I like '60s and '70s rock, country and a lot of southern gospel," Griesbaum Sr. said, making particular mention of the Gaither Vocal Band.

"... XM is always on in my car. It's always on the Blend, the Bridge and Enlighten."

Another thing that has remained relatively unchanged since he started coaching is Griesbaum's iconic mustache. It has only been shaved three times in rela-

tion to baseball. The first was in 1994, then in 2001, and again in 2005, when that year's underdog team made the final four.

"I had to shave it once as a bet I had in 1994, when Danny's Babe Ruth team won the state championship," he admitted.

Always a fan of his word, yes, but not everyone was a fan of the move to shave it.

"Kari burst into tears," he said of his daughter's reaction.

Above all, what has stayed the same is Griesbaum's belief in his role as a teacher and coach.

"It's not about you; it's about those kids," he said. "Your job is not just to teach baseball, but the life skills through baseball that they need to learn. It's about the students and caring about people. If you put kids first, and parents know that, that can have a powerful impact."

Sumner, who also taught in Grosse Pointe for 49 years in addition to coaching, said he is hopeful the community understands the treasure they have in Griesbaum.

"He's an outstanding man, has a great family and is so family-oriented," he said. "That's how he runs his team and always has."

For Griesbaum, he brought it all back to his source — his faith — and a spirit of gratitude for family, friends and community.

"I want to tell everyone how thankful I am to have been able to coach in this district for over 40 years," he said. "I have been so blessed to drive down Lakeshore Drive for 12 minutes to work every day. It's been such a pleasure. The parents have given me such phenomenal kids to work with."

"Anything the program achieved is truly a community accomplishment. ... What the program has evolved into, I thank God for. He has shown me the right way to do things."



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAN GRIESBAUM JR.

The gang's all here! The Griesbaum family gathers during their annual family vacation in Bay Harbor. From left to right, back row are Phil Mannino, Dan Griesbaum Sr., Beckham Griesbaum and Dan Griesbaum Jr., middle row, Brynn Mannino, Kari Griesbaum Mannino, Paulette Griesbaum, and Jessica Griesbaum, and front row, Easton Mannino, Cameron Mannino, Blake Griesbaum and Dan Griesbaum III.

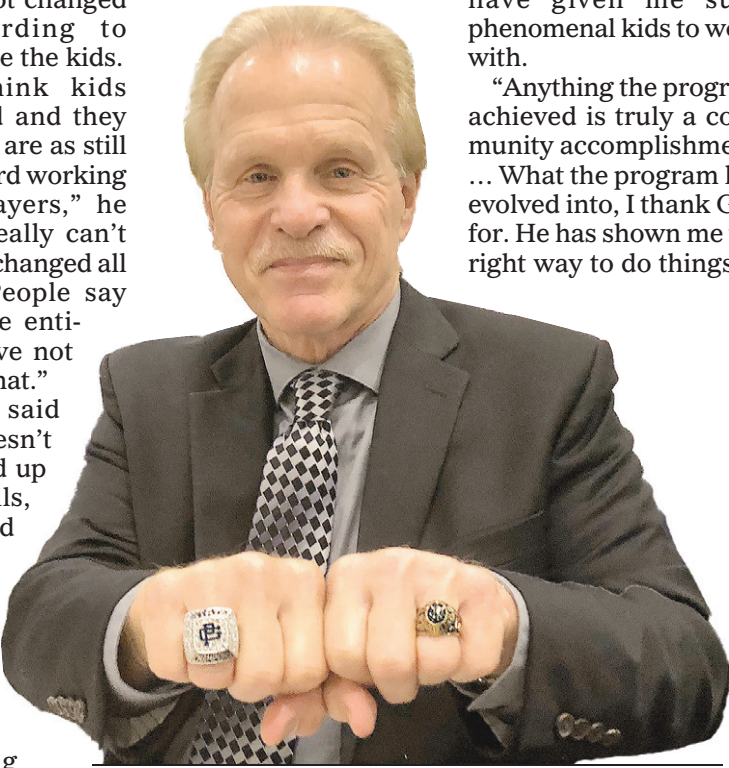


PHOTO COURTESY OF GROSSE POINTE SOUTH BASEBALL

Dan Griesbaum Sr. flashes his 1980 state championship ring he won at North and his 2018 state championship ring at South's annual team banquet.

GRIESBAUM: CELEBRATING 40 SEASONS | 15D



PHOTOS BY RENEE LANDUYT

Above, Dan Griesbaum addresses his 2023 team before senior day this spring. Right, assistant coach Matt Reno holds baseballs signed by the 2023 Blue Devils to be given to head coach Dan Griesbaum Sr. and program donors Peter Mogk and Gary Spicer during the team's field and scoreboard dedication May 20.



PHOTO BY RENEE LANDUYT

Not one to wear his emotions on his sleeve, Dan Griesbaum Sr. runs to hug 2023 co-MVP Cliff Grabowski after South beat North 3-2 for the district title.



Coach Dan Griesbaum

Dan Griesbaum

Coach is just one title...Teacher, Mentor, Role Model, Husband, Leader, Volunteer, Father, Grandfather, Philanthropist, Friend and so much more.

Your commitment and passion to develop student-athletes beyond the baseball field is unmatched.

No coach has ever done it better. Here's to many more years in the dugout!

The Grosse Pointe South Dugout Club

