

Pep Perrella got inclusion before it had a name



Pep Perrella is buoyed by Catholic schoolkids he feeds.

Was on the phone with my daughter Kate last weekend, and told her that Pep Perrella was ailing. “Do you remember Pep?” I asked. “How could I forget his chicken parmigiana?” she said, 3,000 miles and 12 years from the last time she had one of his hot lunches at St. Francis of Assisi School in Mayfield. Kate would bring home half her sandwich from SFA and eat it later that night, Pep’s food was – and is – that good.

In writing about Pep, there are a lot of Catholic schoolkids, let alone their parents, who have no idea what an important soccer player he was in his time. In the late 1990s, I helped coach my kids’ CYO teams in northeast Baltimore. Jogging at Herring Run Park, it drove me crazy to see 7-year-olds standing in line at practice, so we organized some coaches’ clinics for Northeast Baltimore. The first clinic was given by my brother Kevin, who won a couple hundred games as a high school coach and had the presence of mind to step back and be an assistant at Mount St. Mary’s when his own boy was playing high school soccer. The next year, Pep did the honors. Both guys taught volunteers how to keep kids moving, and how to make practice fun.

Pep was a landmark player and sent a bunch of guys onto college and professional careers when he coached Archbishop Curley, but in talking soccer, the most animated I saw him get came when he was talking about his first coaching job, circa 1975, with the J.V. at Towson Catholic High. His first team was a good one, and Pep got the notion of inclusion from the start. In the season finale, with another Owls’ win locked up, TC was awarded a penalty kick. Pep pointed to the last man on his team, who proceeded to score his only high school goal. The guy had never even attempted a shot on goal before that golden moment.

“That’s something I’ll never forget,” Paul McCardell told me. “Everyone went crazy.

My teammates lifted me up on their shoulders after the game.”

Pep was delighted to learn that Paul is a renowned library researcher for The Sun, where I reached him on the phone.

In letting me write about his battle with cancer, Pep said it might be a chance to make old acquaintances. He has no idea of the connections he is making out there, as Paul was a guy who made some of my old Sun stuff better.

If you're free Feb. 20, come to Archbishop Curley, where Pep guys like Mickey Cuchiella and Pete Eibner will host a celebration in his honor. Stop by to tell some Pep stories, and let him know that we want to hear him make more.