



*Lexington High School Head Football Coach Bill Tighe*

## **America's Oldest High School Football Coach Inspires Generations of Players**

# **Storied Coach Defines Endurance**

By John Conceison

The walk in helmet and pads to that after-school classroom has remained relatively the same.

The maze within the Lexington High boys' locker room has been complicated by renovations over the years, but once in the hallway to the field house, the route is simple – take a right out the door in front of the dome and make your way through the gate of the junior varsity baseball diamond.

Awaiting there are assistant coaches whose faces have changed, but the sound of that lovable bark, punctuated by whistles and countless drills, have echoed there in the setting sun since that Bicentennial year of 1975.

Then again, just like in those thrilling days of yesteryear, those barks from that football teacher Bill Tighe don't seem quite so lovable to the pupil after missing a blocking assignment. But as generations have proved, these are lessons learned, on the gridiron and in the key of life.

All who have played for Tighe howl their affectionate impressions – “Are you kiddin' me? “Oh, you chowdah-head!” –

all with a chuckle and knowing they have learned far more than just football while sporting blue and gold.

Promising sophomores Nick and Connor Murray learned early what to expect. Their father, Mike Murray, was an All-Middlesex League center under Tighe before moving on to play for Joe Restic at Harvard. And Mike, of course, learned from his dad, the late, esteemed educator Kevin Murray, who was on Tighe's first LHS coaching staff.

“They told us he was one of the best things to happen to Lexington football,” said Nick, a running back. “They told me to expect a lot of screaming and to be able to handle that.”

Added Connor, a quarterback, “He still screams a lot, but it's actually a great thing because it's making you a better player.”

So what's missing with Tighe these days? The glasses.

Many, many times over the past 20 years, the oldest coach in America has nearly called it a career, and failing eyesight last year almost made retirement a necessity.

There were cataracts and glaucoma in his left eye, and macular degeneration in the right. “I couldn't see the middle of the field, couldn't see the interior line play,” said Tighe, who faced two operations in the summer. If they worked, he'd be back.

“I can see better now than I've seen in 50 years,” Tighe said. “It was so invigorating when I got my eyesight back.”

Recovering his eyesight has invigorated his drive much like his remarkable rebound from colorectal cancer in the late '80s did. Since then, the coach hasn't seemed to age, though his birth certificate reads June 21, 1924.

“Honestly, I don't picture him as an 85-year-old coach,” said senior quarterback Myles Adley, whose father, Brian, played QB at LHS in 1980 and now serves on the coaching staff. “He has so much energy all the time.”

“I don't ever think of my age,” Tighe said. “I keep on the move, I walk fast, I do things fast. That's why I don't play golf

— it's too slow for me.”

“For me, the thing that stands out is his character,” said Naomi Martin, Lexington's first-year athletic director who came over from Ashland, where Tighe grew up. “The kids see how he's with them every single day, and he has a pulse on what the kids are doing. He's observing every single aspect — what more can you want?”

So how did this role model become a role model, and who were *his* role models?

“Harold ‘Grump’ Walker, my coach at Ashland High, Buff Donelli at Boston University, they both had great imaginations,” Tighe said, “and Vince Lombardi — there's a lot to be said about when he said winning isn't everything — it's the only thing.”

The tenets of Tighe's coaching philosophy?

“Discipline — the players always have to know who the boss is. Respect. Imagination. Intelligence. Loyalty.



*Coach Tighe with his family. Pictured (l to r) in the front are: Billy, Maureen, Mike, Sharon and Kevin. In the back are Steve (the baby), Coach Bill Tighe and Mary Tighe.*

# Lexington High Football Coach Bill Tighe Leaves a Lasting Impression



*Top Photo: After leading his Wakefield Warriors to an undefeated 8-0 season in 1962, Tighe was invited to the White House to receive congratulations from President John Kennedy.*



*Left Photo: Bill Tighe is pictured with his family during his 1992 induction into the Boston University Athletic Hall of Fame. Pictured are Mary and Bill Tighe in front. In the back are their children Steve, Maureen Sharon and Kevin.*



*Coach Tighe watches his players intently during practice. Tighe knows each and every player and works with them to develop their on-the-field skills.*

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Now the two, along with Florida State's Bobby Bowden, are showing octogenarians can still win at this game. Tighe notes he enjoys watching Paterno and Bowden continue to succeed and battle for the all-time lead in Division I coaching victories.

"I have great energy, and my mind is still as sharp as ever," he said. "It's good for me, I still love working with the kids, trying to get the best out of their ability."

And that enjoyment has gone far beyond the gridiron

for Tighe, who at LHS served as physical education teacher and guidance counselor before retiring from the faculty in 1986. He has always been helping his players, and even other students, gain acceptance to colleges.

Beyond just writing recommendations, Tighe frequently takes advantage of personal contacts from coast to coast he has gained over the years — often calling a college's football coach, who in turn makes his inquiries to the admissions office.

"I've always felt there's a school for every kid," he

said. "That's always one of my favorite projects."

When people have mentioned that 'R' word in years past, Tighe often has pointed to a promising sophomore class as motivation to see them through graduation. Today is no different, especially after this year's sophomores went undefeated as a freshman squad and the 2009 JVs are unbeaten in Middlesex League play.

"I've got a great sophomore class — they were one of the best freshmen teams we've ever had," he said, basically intending to guide the Murrays and their classmates through

another couple of seasons of lovable barking.

"There'll be times he'll say, 'Your father wouldn't have done anything like that,'" Nick Murray said.

"But," Connor added, "there'll be times he'll compliment when he'll say you're showing a little of your father in you."

*John Conceison, who graduated from Lexington High School in 1979, is a sports copy editor at the Telegram & Gazette in Worcester.*

## Bill and Mary Tighe Foundation carries on legacy of supporting players

By John Conceison

The march to the 1980 Middlesex League title was just the beginning of a promising future for Cecil Cox and Justin Beckett.

Their storybook senior season served as a springboard to success in Division I college football, meriting invites to NFL training camps, and recently the two former METCO students have even gone into business together.

So about a year and a half ago, Cox and Beckett put their heads together to pay tribute to Coach Tighe, and the woman behind him—his wife Mary. Together, they provided direction for Cox and Beckett. To honor the contribution the Tighes made in their lives and countless others, they helped to establish the Mary and William Tighe Scholarship Fund.

"It wasn't just coach, it was Mary, too," said Cox, who in 1985 earned All-Ivy League laurels as a free safety at Harvard before trying out for the Detroit Lions. "It was about their welcome sort of nature — what a remarkable woman she was."

The Tighes were married 57 years before Mary passed away in April 2006. She was the buttress of strength on the home front, while they raised six children, two who were afflicted with cystic fibrosis. And of course, she was fielding/screening the phone calls from everyone seeking to talk to coach.

"To lose two children so young in life, as a 46-year-old father of two, it's hard for me to understand

what kind of impact that can have," Cox added. "Coach had the innate ability to keep things moving. What defines you is how you recover. He'd use phrases like 'intestinal fortitude' to motivate us."

The fund provides financial support to graduating METCO senior athletes attending Lexington High, who demonstrate high academic and leadership promise through their commitment to scholarship, their service to community, their proven team work, and who best promote values that Mary and Bill Tighe imparted to student-athletes.

On Oct. 14, the fund presented its first scholarships, totaling \$4,000, to Lance Green and Darren Holloway.

"I really have a great fondness for the METCO kids and what they have to go through," Tighe said. "They have to get up at 5:30 in the morning, bus out here from Boston, go to school, then put up with me for 2-1/2 hours, and not get home until about 8 o'clock at night. That really takes character."

Beckett, a star lineman at Duke before working out with the Dallas Cowboys, serves as chairman of the fund, while Cox serves as executive director. The two broached the idea with Tighe over a couple of breakfasts during the summer of 2008.

"I was very honored, and Mary sure would have been very honored," Tighe said.

For more information on the Mary and William Tighe Scholarship Fund, visit [www.tighescholarshipfund.com](http://www.tighescholarshipfund.com).



*Longtime LHS varsity football head coach was front and center in August when Lance Green and Darren Holloway accepted the first William and Mary Tighe scholarships. Pictured (l to r): Coach Bill Tighe, Cecil Cox, Lance Green, Darren Holloway and Justin Beckett.*



*Coach Tighe reacts to action on the field during a recent practice at Lexington High School.*

“And the will to win, that’s been my philosophy. I hate to lose, and they were the same way.

“You have to win, whether it be on the field or in the books. Winning is a word we can interpret many different ways in how it applies to life.”

“Lexington had always had talented players but not many winning seasons,” Mike Murray said. “Coach Tighe had this certain attitude and led by example. He wouldn’t accept lack of effort or lack of toughness. He took that same level of talent and turned things around so that winning seasons became the norm.”

And Tighe’s teams over 51 seasons have done their share of winning, to the tune of more than 260 victories, and league championships at Wakefield, Malden and Lexington. He drove Minutemen squads to the postseason in 1984 and 2003, but maintains the greatest champion of them all was the 1980 unit, the first LHS team to capture a Middlesex League title.

“That team was unique. I had tough kids and big — they were agile, hostile and mobile,” he said, rhyming those last three

adjectives. “Cecil Cox may have been the best free safety Harvard ever had.”

Those Minutemen finished 9-1, concluding with a 21-14 victory over Burlington, in their first Thanksgiving home game in four years. That team also snapped Woburn’s 32-game unbeaten streak, emerging in a season when several of the league’s seniors wound up in NFL camps after college.

Brian Adley, who began the season as the starting quarterback, blew out his knee in practice early in the season and returned only to take a few snaps on Turkey Day. Cox stepped in to run the offense.

“That’s when I learned there’s more to life than football,” Adley said. “He had me be like a part-time coach on the sideline, helping out with Cecil, keeping me as part of the process.”

That team also featured a burly, talented two-way line including Justin Beckett, Craig Caster and Tom Fernandes (“more beef than Colonial meats,” Tighe said before the Thanksgiving game that year), which opened gaping holes for powerful back Barry Neal.



*A young and agile Bill Tighe strikes a pose as a member of the Boston University Football Squad in 1948.*

“We had a unique concept of team,” Adley added, “which was instilled in us and became part of our lives.”

The other team Tighe mentions in the same breath is his 1962 Wakefield unit, in his sixth season as a head coach. Those Warriors went 8-0, earning an invite to the White House by JFK and venturing to Washington the following March.

Today’s Minutemen are enriched by stories about these events, from a man who served the Army Air Corps in the South Pacific during World War II, played football and baseball at Boston University under the GI Bill, then after graduating from BU in 1949 started his coaching

career, beginning with an eight-year stint as an assistant at Wakefield.

“He’ll tell about what it was like in World War II, and the kids will say in amazement, ‘You were there?’ ” Adley said.

In a spring scrimmage entering his senior year as BU’s quarterback, he matched up against Brown’s QB, Joe Paterno. When the Penn State legendary coach paid a recruiting visit to LHS in 1979 in pursuit of high school All-America linebacker Gene Mewborn, that 22-12 BU victory indeed came up in the conversation.