

This profile of Carolina Day School athletic director Ernie Lasher appeared in the school's alumni magazine.

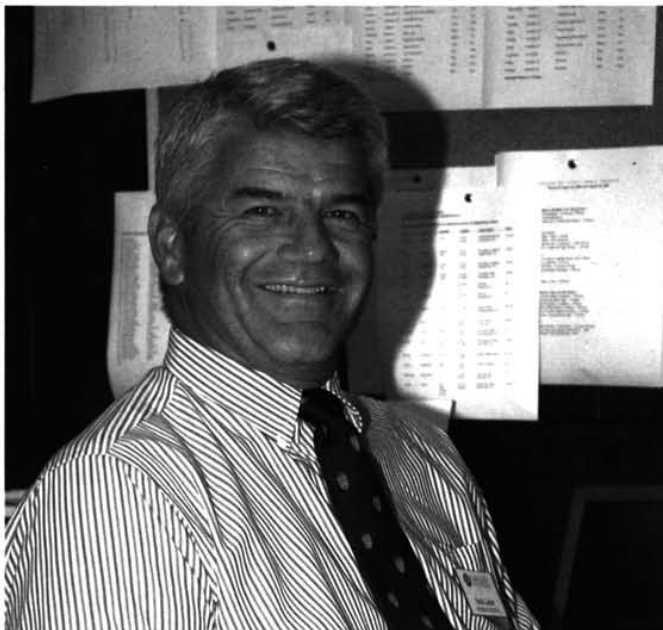
# CAROLINA Connection



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## Ernie Lasher



*“He was upbeat and very interested in kids and in the education process.”*

That's how Erich Cluxton, Head of Asheville Country Day School from 1979-83, describes his first impression of Ernie Lasher. Twenty-six years later, the growth of Carolina Day athletics confirms that impression: the School's program stands as a testament to Ernie's drive, his love for the students, and his commitment to making athletics serve academic life. Ernie's background prepared him well for ACDS. He had gone to WCU on a baseball scholarship and a football scholarship, and then later returned there to become the football team's academic coordinator—the member of the coaching staff who made sure athletes remained on track for a degree. That interest in the academic side of the players' lives gave Ernie experience at balancing the playing field and the classroom. “That's what interested me about Asheville Country Day,” says Ernie. “Here's this school that's putting its

## *Promoting Athletics and the School for 26 Years*

top priority in the education of young people but still values the athletic experience.”

“Ernie's passion for developing the whole child also made him an attractive candidate,” says Cluxton. “Ernie had the unique quality of being an overall school man—academics as well as athletics.” Soon, though, Ernie proved himself a gifted educator as well. Cluxton wanted someone who was interested in physical education, for example, and Ernie fit the bill. “He was fabulous with the younger kids,” Cluxton recalls. “He taught some of the PE classes, and he taught health classes.”

Ernie's main challenge, however, was building an athletic program that would help the school grow. Before he came, ACDS athletics didn't have much of a reputation. “We were referred to by local media as ‘the doormat,’ ” Ernie recalls, “which really got my competitive juices flowing.” And so despite its academic strength, ACDS had trouble convincing parents their children would develop outside of the classroom. “It was a missing piece,” says Ernie. “A lot of kids' families now choose our school as a package choice, whereas 20 years ago I don't think that was the case.”

Today, Carolina Day fields 29 teams in 16 different sports, coached by 22 different coaches. And from his window in the rafters of the Nash Athletic Center, Ernie can count quite a few of the dozens of championship banners CDS has accumulated. Nevertheless, the athletic program still serves as a complement to students' academic life. “Our teams play sports for all the right reasons,” Ernie declares, and he goes on to stress that the program focuses on “producing a good person first, a good student second, and if they happen to be a good player third, then we're happy campers.”

Playing for the right reasons has an impact outside of the school as well. Ernie believes his job includes fostering relationships with other schools, and a talk with a couple of local athletic directors shows he has succeeded. Rex Wells, who serves at Asheville High School, says that playing CDS

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**Ernie Lasher** *(continued from front cover)*

is “a tremendous experience,” and compliments the school’s sportsmanship and energy. He sums up Ernie by saying, “He’s class.” Rick High of North Buncombe concurs, saying that Ernie “returns your calls”—high praise among athletic directors—and that “it’s always a pleasure to schedule Carolina Day.”

Over the years, as Ernie built a program that helped grow Carolina Day’s reputation and enrollment, the School has expanded its commitment to the athletic program. When Ernie started, the School had only two playing fields: now CDS boasts a baseball complex and two gymnasiums (the lower gym and the Nash Athletic Center). Most recently, the School has built a 2,000 square foot weight training facility named in honor of Ernie himself. “Boy has it changed,” he says, laughing.

Ernie admits, too, that the growth of CDS athletics has paralleled his own growth, both personally (Kate and Meggie, his twin daughters by his wife Becky, now attend the middle school) and professionally. When he started, he taught half the PE classes, coached every sport, and even lined the fields. Now, though he still coaches the golf team, he sees himself as more of a director, responsible for making sure the program maintains its vision and direction and continues to grow.

And as he enters his 26th year as athletic director, Ernie is still working to move the program forward. These days he’s exploring moving Carolina

### *Edward Ledford '83*

*“While Ernie Lasher gave us the skills to play the games, he also gave us skills with which to live our lives. In short, Ernie Lasher made us better human beings.”*

Day’s outdoor sports off campus to give the 100 students practicing at any one time plenty of room. Typically for Ernie, the gain for the program would also be a boon for the classroom: in his conception, freeing up the practice fields would allow the school to expand and build an academic village on its current campus. Of course, making all this

happen could take some time. “I would like to see that as my final piece of work,” he says, “my swan song.”

In the end, Ernie is proud of the growth of CDS athletics. He’s also proud of the staff he’s assembled. He’s proud of the fact that now more than three quarters of CDS students participate voluntarily in sports. But he’s proudest of the students who have come through the program. He recalls a recent Fall Family Night when he ran into a graduate who now has children at CDS: the former student talked about the experience of coming back to watch his kids play soccer on the same campus he had played on decades earlier. “The rewards are in the kids who have been a part of the program,” Ernie says, then adds, laughing, “they’re not kids anymore.”

—Doug Gibson

