

Retirement doesn't last long for baseball coach Ron Davini

by **Scott Bordow** - Apr. 6, 2011 The Arizona Republic

When **Scottsdale Chaparral baseball** coach **Jerry Dawson** retired in August, **Ron Davini** decided he would put his fungo bat up as well. He had spent 39 years as a coach: Six at Tempe McClintock, 28 at Tempe Corona del Sol and the last five as Dawson's assistant. It was time to retire and spend his leisure hours running the National High School Baseball Coaches Association (BCA) from his Tempe home.

His wife, Patty, had other ideas. "My wife turned to me one day and said, 'Ron, you're not going to sit here all day. Get your hind end out there,'" Davini said. "She happened to be working for Tempe (Preparatory Academy) at the time, so she volunteered me. "I told her I was busy. She said, 'You have to be busier. Get off your lazy butt.' "

So here's Davini, 63 years old, beginning his fourth decade as a baseball coach and at a school so small it doesn't even have its own practice field. "I try not to be only a baseball coach, but I think I probably am," said Davini, who is an unpaid assistant to head coach Dave Maza.

Coaching at Tempe Prep is a whole new world for Davini. Chaparral and Corona are two of the state's premier programs. Kids there have been active in club ball for years; they know the game and how to play it. At Tempe Prep, a small liberal arts school with a rigorous academic curriculum, Davini often finds himself trying to teach the basics. It's Baseball 101, and at times it both challenges and invigorates him.

One example: In a recent game, a Tempe Prep player was safe at second base - until he walked off the base and was tagged out. When Davini asked him between innings why he left the bag, the player responded, "I heard everybody yelling and I thought I was out."

"It can be very, very frustrating," said Davini, a member of Arizona State's 1967 team that won the College World Series. "When I was at Corona or Chaparral, kids might have had bad habits, but you can break those bad habits.

"They have no bad habits here (at Tempe Prep), but some of them don't have any baseball knowledge, either. You have to teach them how to throw the ball, catch it, how to hold a bat, how to swing a bat. I've had to shake off a lot of cobwebs the last few weeks."

Just getting to practice requires some brain matter. Tempe Prep is a nomad; it might practice at Tempe Sports Complex one day, the Papago Softball Complex the next and a practice field at Tempe Diablo Stadium the day after that. "I never know where we're going to be," Davini said with a chuckle.

For Maza, having Davini at practice is like getting a master's degree in baseball. Maza played junior varsity at Corona but didn't get to know Davini well "because he kept cutting me." Now he routinely turns over practices to Davini, stands back and listens. "What a godsend, him falling in our laps," Maza said. "We've pretty much turned over the reins to him. When he's coaching, we're learning, too."

Davini doesn't know how long he'll stay at Tempe Prep. He still has the BCA to run, he'll turn 64 in early May and at some point he'd actually like to give retirement a try - if his wife will let him. Then again, as long as there's some baseball team to coach . . .

"Jerry Dawson told me he wanted me to come out one day to work with his catchers," Davini said. "Then he said, 'Would you come out one more time?' He set the bait and hook and he had me. "I can't keep away from it."