

"Old-school" Dawson still plugging along at Chaparral

Scott Bordow - Feb. 24, 2010 07:26 PM The Arizona Republic

Jerry Dawson grabs a rake and heads out into the late-morning sun. There's work to be done on the field - there's always work to be done - and he's not one to delegate.

Especially when the field bears his name.

The **Scottsdale Chaparral baseball** coach isn't necessarily fond of the hard labor. After all, he's 66 with an artificial right knee and a bum left ankle that hasn't responded well to surgery last June.

But he still vividly remembers the field he played on as a kid in Missouri. There were so many rocks in the infield that when he played shortstop, he'd make sure to stand with them between his feet so he didn't trip going forward or backward and fall on his face.

The school's track ran through left field and had a hump on each side. If a power hitter was up, Dawson would play behind the track so he wouldn't trip over the hump chasing a fly ball. If a singles hitter was up, he'd move in front of the track.

"The field was absolutely awful," he said. "I always thought that if I coached I'd make sure that didn't happen to my kids. When I started out, it was a labor of love because it was the only way to get it right in my opinion. Now, it's gotten to be too big of a job, but I've set the standard so I have to do it."

Dawson smiles and laughs at himself. He knows he's lying. You know he's lying. He's out there, working the field every day for the same reason he's heading into his 37th season as the Firebirds' coach.

He's a baseball man. Always has been, always will be, until his body tells him he can't anymore.

"I'm not one of those guys who sits around very well," he said. "I can read a book for a while, but then it gets old and I'm looking for something to do."

Dawson could retire tomorrow and his legacy would be complete: Eight state championships and more than 120 players who have gone on to play college or pro ball. But every spring he leaves his home - and his wife - north of Prescott, moves into their condo a block from campus and tries to turn kids into baseball players.

His methods never have changed. He's old school and proud of it.

"I had a coach tell me, 'The kids are scared of you,' " he said. "But I don't think kids have changed as much as parents have. When I was growing up, or even 20 years ago, there was accountability and kids were held responsible. Today, that's not the case. Instead, parents make excuses for them."

"If being old school is an insult, so be it. I really, honestly believe that kids crave structure."

So does a gray-haired 66-year-old with a bad wheel and a restless nature.

"When it is time to stop coaching, hopefully I'll find a transition thing wherever I'm at so somebody will let an old person come out and hang around baseball," Dawson said. "I've done it forever. I wouldn't know what else to do."