

Brother Peter coach of year

Brother Peter Russell has undertaken the delicate task of transforming the traditionally-sensitive individual tennis player into a team tennis player with a good sense of humor.

"I think we've developed a tennis team spirit at St. Joseph because the players know I respect them and they respect me in return," Brother Peter says. "At least I think they respect me. After all I'm old and I'm the vice-principal."

Whatever the reason, respect has paid off in a 12-year, 176-53 record, a 19-2 record this year, and coach-of-the-year honors, chosen by his peers in the Bergen County Coaches Association.



Brother Peter Russell

Eighty players annually show up for the first day of practice in the spring and Brother Peter keeps 25 on the team, an unusually high number. "If you make the team, you're part of the team and play for St. Joseph," he says.

"The team concept is vitally important. I think we do so poorly at the Bergen County championships each year because it's primarily an individual event and we don't have each other around to depend on."

Tennis is one of the sports that defies the standard definition of coaching. Brother Peter knows he can't alter the shape of a match but he can change the way a player thinks about the game, his opponent and himself.

"You have to give the player some knowledge of his own strengths and weaknesses which he sometimes doesn't realize," Brother Peter says. "That insight, plus some moral support goes a long way in making a tennis player."

The system must work. Brother Peter also was selected coach of the year in 1970.

—MIKE FARBER