

Challace McMillin made me a better person

Charged up about sports performance and passionate about students

BY DARIAN PARKER ('01, '03M)

When I came to JMU in the fall of 1996, I had already traveled the world as part of a military family. Naturally, I thought JMU would be just another stop, another notch on my belt of worldly experiences. Instead, I found a place I could call home for the first time in my life, and much of that has to do with one man in particular.

During my sophomore year, as I was sketching out my class schedule for the upcoming junior year, I overheard some students talking about a professor who was passionate about sports performance. That's all I needed to hear, because I decided to major in kinesiology because of my own passion for teaching others how to be physically active and my own wonder at how my body worked.

I enrolled in Challace McMillin's class, Coaching Principles, and almost immediately connected to his old-school teaching style. He loved using the overhead projector when everyone else seemed to use PowerPoint.

I sat in the front during all of his classes and enjoyed watching him get fired up about pretty much every issue related to coaching sports. He was tough but kind; straight-forward but completely professional.

I decided in his class that I wanted to be like him — as a teacher, mentor and coach — so I took several of his classes while getting



Professor Emeritus of Kinesiology Challace McMillin was named an honorary JMU alumnus in 2003. As JMU's first football coach, McMillin recruited his original 1972 team from class registration lines and other varsity teams. He led JMU to its first national ranking (No. 9) in 1978 and went on to coach three future NFL All-Pro players. Former JMU Athletics Director Dean Ehlers called McMillin "an exceptional individual and an outstanding Christian."



my bachelor's and master's degrees. While serving as his graduate assistant during my master's studies, I got to know Coach McMillin as more than a teacher; I learned that he is a wonderfully kind man.

He taught me so much about himself but even more about myself. I learned how to become a more respectful, diligent and determined person. Every weekday when I went to his office to help grade papers and write notes for his classes, I admired the degrees on his wall. I was particularly fascinated with his doctoral degree, hanging there all huge on his wall. All I could think about was how I would never be able to attain something like that because I was not smart enough. Dr. McMillin helped to change that poor attitude.

After seven wonderful years in Harrisonburg, I physically moved on from JMU, but my mind and spirit continue to think back to all the special people who helped shape me. Now, I'm general manager of a thriving high-end and exclusive fitness facility in Las Vegas. Like Dr. McMillin, I have my degrees hanging on my office wall. In addition to my JMU degrees is my Ph.D. from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Yes, UNLV was another journey that added to my life experiences. I had some good professors and some great times. Yet, nothing, and I mean nothing, compares to my Madison Experience and my time with Dr. McMillin. Thank you, Dr. McMillin, for changing my life forever. ■

About the Professor *Professor Emeritus of Kinesiology and JMU's first football coach Challace McMillin has been a mentor to generations of student-athletes and an inspiration to many students who become coaches themselves because of his example. He coached JMU football from 1972 to 1984. JMU's McMillin Center for Sport Psychology is named in his honor. The center's mission mirrors the coach's philosophy and supports student-athletes, coaches and parents in achieving success in sports and life. The Challace McMillin Academic Performance Center is also named for him. In 1999, McMillin received the James Madison Distinguished Faculty Award.*

About the Author *Darian Parker graduated from JMU with a bachelor's degree in kinesiology in 2001 and then completed his masters at JMU in kinesiology in 2003. He received a Ph.D. in sports education from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He is the general manager of Club Ridges, a private residential fitness property at The Ridges Community in Las Vegas. He also is a regional account specialist for WTS, a spa, fitness and recreation management and consulting company. Parker, a certified personal trainer, founded Connect to Fitness, a wellness networking group in 2009.*