



By JASON EPP

#### Leader & Times

In my short time of covering area athletics I've been blessed to get to know some great people. Whether it has been bookkeepers who make sure I get as much information and stats for stories as possible, coaches who have given me some great quotes and insight, photographers willing to share their far better than mine photos, or someone nice enough to hand me a hamburger when I have headed straight to cover games after a full day at work at the paper, I have been blessed.

I have also gotten to know some great fans I now consider friends, and followed players as they went on to play in college or just live life.

But above the all the great relationships that have come from covering the area sports teams, my favorite has to be the one I have with Barry Mellen.

Barry and I do not see each other that often and really do not talk that often either. Coaches are busy people, and have far more important people in their lives to spend it with than a reporter.

But Barry is a unique person.

He has asked me about my wife and children. He asked me about my mom when she was facing her final battle with cancer. Barry has never met any of my family. No matter how long it has been since we last spoke it is like talking with a lifelong friend.

I do not think that is because I have a closer relationship with Barry than others.

That is just how Barry Mellen treats everyone.

Barry is the kind of person you look forward to being around because he makes you feel better about yourself. You do not get a chance to meet many of those people in a lifetime.

Southwestern Heights is losing one of the best coaches the state of Kansas has ever seen. But they are also losing one of the finest human beings I have ever met.