
TEACHER: Has been tutoring football players since 1988

FROM PAGE C1

Oregon State wide receiver Travis Brown of Phoenix Maryvale High.

One of Fazio's most noteworthy pupils is former ASU All-American Terrell Suggs, who was considered a long shot to qualify academically when he signed his letter of intent in February 2000.

Now in his fourth year of working with prep signees who have yet to qualify for freshman eligibility, Fazio says he applies a familiar instructional technique.

"They have a background in the methodology that I'm doing," he said. "I come up to them and say, 'This is just like football. I'm going to coach you just like your coach coaches you in football.'"

A brief video of his

approach includes a clip from the movie "Karate Kid," in which the teenage hero learns his hand movements from doing mundane tasks of painting a fence and waxing a car.

"It's all personalized," he said of his instruction. "It's you practice, I coach, you learn. It isn't I lecture, you listen, you learn."

"It's practice to do, not lessons to learn. It's following directions for what to do, not understanding instructions for how to do something. It's responding to what the person is doing, not prescribing predetermined information subject matter."

The athletes benefit from individual tutoring by Fazio.

Michael Johnson, who red-shirted at ASU during the 1986 Rose Bowl season, said he owes his career as an NFL

assistant to Fazio after he flunked out of ASU.

"I wouldn't be where I am without him," Johnson said. "I was lost academically after I left ASU."

Under Fazio's guidance, Johnson passed 26 hours in one semester so he could transfer to Akron to continue his football career. Johnson said he awakened at 5 a.m. every day in the spring of 1988 and went to bed at midnight. He took classes at MCC and Phoenix College.

"The NCAA thought somehow, some way, I had cheated," said Johnson, who as quarterbacks coach for the Atlanta Falcons tutors All-Pro Michael Vick.

"Gene provided the structure, the guidance to help me through it. He put the tutors in place, provided class studies,

arranged rides to PC, helped organize the tests. But I had to do the work."

After helping DeAndre Johnson become eligible last winter, Fazio in the spring helped another Phoenix Maryvale alumnus, Robert James, become the second member of ASU's 2002 recruiting class to erase his status as a Proposition 48 non-qualifier. James, a defensive back, has been approved by the NCAA Clearinghouse for eligibility this season. In April, James had told ASU's Daryl Lightfoot, a former Maryvale teammate, that he was considering enrolling at a junior college to play football.

"It took a long time but it finally clicked," Fazio said of James. "He believed he could do it. People kept telling him he could do it."

High school athletes seeking Fazio's assistance are initially surprised.

"They think I'm a test-taking service," he said. "I tell them you're on a trip and your purpose is to transform your reading and writing. Passing the ACT and SAT is your frequent-flier miles. I'm not here to help you pass the test, go on to college and flunk out."

Fazio's 1-credit, 15-hour class, which costs \$50, has been approved by the NCAA, he said.

Fazio's motivation to help marginal students comes from his own experiences.

A dyslexic, Fazio said he was told by a high school teacher "to be realistic" about attending college. He ignored the advice and with the encouragement of a college teacher graduated from

Phoenix College and ASU. He's been teaching since 1970.

"I know what it's like to live without hope, to live with pain and with failure," he said. "I want to pass on to others what one person did for me."

In turn he hopes students do likewise. Both Wright, who starred at Nebraska and later with the Los Angeles Rams, and Johnson have established foundations to help at-risk teens.

"He said, 'All I want from you when you make it is make sure you give back,'" said Johnson, whose First and Ten Foundation is located in Duluth, Ga. "That's the kind of person he's always been."

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GENE FAZIO
MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

Saving players' futures

MCC instructor helps football stars qualify or regain eligibility

By BOB MORAN
TRIBUNE

You've probably had the same thought.

Gene Fazio, an English instructor at Mesa Community College, often wondered how football players who struggle in the classroom can master a thick, complicated playbook.



Gene Fazio

"All these guys are intelligent," he maintains. "They couldn't lack intelligence and master what they do on the

football field."

That belief led Fazio to begin working with academically deficient athletes, which is part of a larger goal of improving literacy in the Valley.

Fazio has been instrumental in helping several well-known Valley football players either qualify for an athletic scholarship or regain their eligibility after falling behind in their schoolwork.

Among the 30 athletes he's worked with since 1988 are former Arizona State quarterback Michael Johnson, Dobson High School alumnus Toby Wright, Tempe High graduate Lynzell Jackson, current ASU

linebacker DeAndre Johnson of Phoenix South Mountain High and

Mercury remain focused

By BRAD FALDUTO
TRIBUNE

John Shumate has a message for anyone who gave up on the young Phoenix Mercury after they started the season so poorly.

"You can't be a fair-weather fan," said Shumate, the Mercury's first-year coach. "In our country, we always get so used to everything being instant

Mercury at Fever

When: 5 p.m. today

Where: Conseco Fieldhouse, Indianapolis

TV/radio: None/ESPN (860 AM)

Records: Phoenix 3-11; Indiana 7-6

gratification, so if it doesn't work right away, then we kind of give up on it and we

go to the next thing. These ladies have some special qualities. We still have some things that we have to add. They just fight, fight, fight, and they are getting better."

Actually, Shumate has been saying all of that since the season opened May 22. He finally got some credibility on Saturday when the Mercury went into Detroit and pulled off a 68-65 upset of the Shock, who entered

the game with the best record in the WNBA.

The victory — the Mercury's first on the road this season against six losses and only their second in their last 29 road games — gave the 3-11 Mercury something to celebrate in a season mostly void of victory parties. The Mercury, though, had to quickly end

SEE MERCURY • PAGE C9



YOUNG DREAMS:

Sydney Burlison, a 13-year-old from Carmel Valley, Calif., is one of several teenagers competing in this weekend's U.S. Women's Open in North Plains, Ore.

JOHN GRESS,
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Look out for teenage drivers

Open loaded with young girls with sweet swings

By DOUG FERGUSON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NORTH PLAINS, Ore. • At any other major championship, Sydney Burlison would look out of place. She fits right in at the U.S. Women's Open.

The 13-year-old girl with big dreams, wide eyes and a full set of braces just finished the seventh grade at All Saints

As the sun tried to fight through low clouds hanging over Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club, Burlison took her place on the practice range Tuesday, just down the row from defending champion Juli Inkster, 43, who has a daughter the same age.

Sure, Burlison is the youngest player in the 156-woman field, but only by nine days over Michelle Wie of Honolulu.

And remember Morgan Pressel from Boca Raton, Fla.?

Two years ago, she became the youngest qualifier in U.S. Women's Open history and

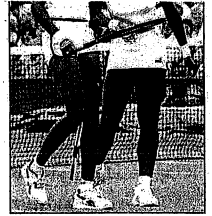
year as a 15-year-old, only this time she's old news.

Teenagers are taking over the most prestigious tournament in women's golf.

Burlison, Wie and Pressel are among 14 teens on parade at Pumpkin Ridge, the most anyone from the U.S. Golf Association can recall. No one knows because for years the USGA only asked for the handicap, not the age.

If it's a record, it might not last long.

"I think you're going to see it every year," said Cristie



TENNIS

STEP CLOSER: Venus and Serena Williams each win to advance to the Wimbledon semifinals. **C8**

FOOTBALL

HONOR: Former Arizona Cardinal Pat Tillman and his brother Kevin, who left pro sports careers to serve their country in the Army at wartime, have been named recipients of the Arthur Ashe Courage Award. **C2**

COLLEGES

DENIED: Washington athletic director Barbara Hedges rejects football coach Rick Neuheisel's appeal to keep his job. **C8**

Scoreboard

Baseball/C6-7

National League
Colorado 7, Arizona 4
N.Y. Mets 7, Montreal 6
Philadelphia 4, Chicago Cubs 3
Cincinnati 5, Pittsburgh 3
Florida 20, Atlanta 1
San Francisco 5, St. Louis 1
Houston 6, Milwaukee 5 (10)
San Diego 7, Los Angeles 1

American League
Detroit 5, Toronto 0
Kansas City 6, Cleveland 3
Chi White Sox 6, Minnesota 1
Baltimore 7, N.Y. Yankees 3
Tampa Bay 4, Boston 3 (11)
Anaheim 7, Texas 5
Oakland 3, Seattle 2 (11)

U.S. Women's Open

When: Thursday-Sunday

Where: Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club, North Plains, Ore.

TV: ESPN (Thursday-Friday, 1-5 p.m.) and Ch. 12 (Saturday, 1-4 p.m.; Sunday Noon-4 p.m.)

Purse: \$3.1 million

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