
A History of Harvard Squash during the

JACK BARNABY

COACHING ERA 1937-1976



FOREWARD

The experience of writing about Jack Barnaby's coaching career at Harvard was at once thrilling and humbling, and even a bit terrifying. I am not sure that any writer is capable of truly doing him justice (certainly I didn't feel that THIS writer was) and there was an intimidating sense that a large number of people were counting on me and that I didn't want to let them down. Most importantly, I didn't want to let JACK down: even though he passed away a dozen years ago and even though it's been nearly 20 years since the last time I saw him, in January 1996, at the 50th and final Harry Cowles Invitational weekend at the Harvard Club of New York --- during which I failed to defend the title I had won the previous year in the tournament named for Barnaby for players age 30-and-over that was part of the event --- I still was very aware of his presence, and very aware as well of the mismatch between the magnitude of the man and the limitations of the person writing about him.

At times during the construction of this History I felt almost as if I were a member of one of Barnaby's teams, entrusted with playing an important match that I desperately wanted to win for him. Jack was always kind, encouraging and supportive to me, always generous with his advice, even when I was still at Yale; my four years in New Haven dovetailed with the final four years of his official coaching tenure at Harvard, though of course his "retirement" in 1976 was in name only. I am certain that he would have acted that way even if my Yale teams had won more than three total matches --- none of them prior to my senior year, and none of them by me --- during those four years. I think he just sensed how much I wanted to improve and that made him want that for me as well. I absolutely revered the man and when he sent me a handwritten letter congratulating me on a win (over one of his former players, no less), I was in tears as I read it. Praise from the absolute top.

Writing these Histories of Harvard Squash during various coaches' eras has been the most fulfilling experience in my several decades as a sports journalist, and getting to write about Barnaby's coaching era is the ultimate honor. Whether I was able to come through for him is for his players and the readers to decide, but I know for sure that I put my best effort into doing so, and that's all that Jack would have asked. I am enormously thankful to his legion former players, some of them now in their 80's and even in their early 90's, as well as people who worked with him and even some who played and/or coached against his teams. Many of them made time to meet, to speak at length (and often multiple times) over the phone, to communicate with email exchanges, and, in the case of Dinny Adams '66, to spend several hours reviewing the text with me. They were all acting out of respect for my assignment and out of their affection for Coach Barnaby and what he meant to them; to the extent that this project succeeds, they are the principal reason. Many of the interviewees who previously were not already my friends have become so during the course of our interaction, and ALL of them have my immense gratitude. Of all the many lessons that I learned during the crafting of this History, the one that resonates more powerfully than any other is that Jack Barnaby could not have asked for better or more enduringly loyal squash offspring, or for a more praiseworthy group of people to carry on his example, his teachings and his legacy.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert D. Dinerman

May 31, 2014



Wall to wall, net to baseline,
the pre-eminent coach, teacher and sportsman,
ever dedicated to the game for the game's sake,
he gave Harvard the winning edge
while helping build the character
of countless student-athletes.



The citation on the Harvard Medal awarded to Jack Barnaby '32 during Commencement Exercises in June 1985. A small number of such medals are given each year by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Barnaby is one of only three Harvard coaches among the 114 individuals so honored since the award's inception in 1981, the others being William McCurdy (Track) in 1992 and Harry Parker (Crew) in 2012.

NINE FROM NO. 9

The Harvard men's squash team was dead in the water on this dreary, frigid late-February 1962 afternoon in New Haven, and everyone shoehorned into the undersized gallery on the fourth floor of Yale's Payne Whitney Gymnasium knew it. One year earlier, in 1960-61, the Crimson, captained at the time by future U. S. National Security Advisor Tony Lake and having lost the top five players from the 1960 Ivy League championship team to graduation, had come incredibly close to completing and culminating what would have been an undefeated season before falling agonizingly short in a 5-4 loss to Yale in which several airtight matches, including Lake's, had barely slipped away. Now, with the Ivy League title yet again coming down to the season-ending Harvard-Yale meet between the two undefeated arch-rivals, the Yale formula that had worked so well all season was once again playing out exactly as the Elis, top-heavy with stand-out products of the venerable Merion Cricket Club junior program, had laid it out.

All year long Yale had successfully relied on its powerful top trio of Ralph Howe (who would capture the Intercollegiate Individual title that year and the next), Bob Hetherington and George West to sweep the Nos. 1-3 slots. They also knew that they had a guaranteed win in senior three-year letterman and former No. 5 player Joe Holmes at No. 9, which meant that they only had to pick up one match in the Nos. 4-8 slots to clinch the team outcome. On this day they had already gotten the expected wins from Howe, Hetherington and West, as well as the needed mid-lineup victory from Fred Smith, who edged out John Vinton by a single point at No. 7.

For their part, the Harvard players, beset by illness for much of the season (with three of their number, including captain Roger Wiegand, felled for long stretches by mononucleosis), had mustered four wins of their own, including one by Wiegand after he trailed Yale's Charlie Frank 2-0, 14-11, to deadlock the team tally at four matches apiece. But in the last remaining match on court, at No. 9, the dependable and undefeated Holmes, a talented racquets man in several sports and later an eight-time national age-group platform-tennis champion, three-time national squash tennis doubles champion and two-time national squash tennis singles runner-up, though surprisingly pushed to a fifth game (after leading two games to love) by Crimson sophomore John Francis, had inexorably marched to a commanding 11-6 lead. The outcome, and with it a second straight undefeated season, Ivy League title and 5-4 win over Harvard, now seemed well in hand.

Certainly no one in the arena, not the visibly confident Elies (including in particular one young woman in front who was wearing a Yale scarf and boisterously cheering every time Holmes added to his tally), not the increasingly discouraged Harvard supporters, and not anyone else, could have possibly sensed it at the time, but in the nine spellbinding points that followed, all of which landed in Francis's column, a dynasty of unequalled proportions would be born, the history and trend of the most venerated rivalry in college squash would be permanently transformed, and the legend of the greatest coach in the annals of college squash would be burnished to a degree that still reverberates today, more than a half-century later. Francis's nine-point run to glory jump-started a Harvard dual-meet winning streak over Yale that would extend for TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS, as well as a 15-year skein from 1962-76 in which the Crimson teams, led by their bespectacled and avuncular but peerless coach John Morton "Jack" Barnaby II, who retired at the end of that 1975-76 campaign, would earn either the regular-season nine-man national championship or the postseason six-man championship, later christened the Potter Cup, or (usually) both. Never before or since has a college squash program accomplished this feat over such a lengthy time span.

By the time Francis's match ended, he had become so overcome by ecstasy blended with exhaustion as to render him nearly incoherent for a few moments. He would become a legendary figure in his own right by again displaying his penchant for season-rescuing eleventh-hour comebacks two years later when, as a senior, he rallied, this time at No. 8, from 10-14 to 17-14 against Cuthbert "Cuffy" Train in the deciding match of Harvard's season-defining 1964 5-4 victory over Princeton. In both matches Francis relied heavily on his hard serve (which he would "save" for crisis moments) to key those late-fifth-game comebacks. In both matches he benefited by the several errors each of his opponents committed as the momentum swung against them. And in the Holmes match he wouldn't have even played at No. 9 had he not barely (15-14 in the fifth) survived a challenge match against No. 10 player Clark Grew just prior to the Yale meet.



Harvard Men's Squash 1961-1962

MORE THAN NUMBERS

In a way it was poetic justice that Francis, who forever afterwards would be affectionately referred to by Barnaby as “my clutch player,” emerged from that 1962 clash with Yale sporting the hero’s mantle. Barnaby more than any other coach recognized that a win at No. 9 counted just as much as a win at No. 1, and he consciously made a point of boosting his lower-tier players in accordance with a philosophy of “coaching deep” that made everyone in the Crimson program truly feel like an important member of the team, no matter their position on the varsity ladder. Barnaby is best known to history for the extraordinary numbers that his teams compiled during his nearly 40 years at the helm --- 17 national crowns, 16 Ivy League titles, 10 postseason six-man championships, 378 wins, a .929 winning percentage (91-7) in Ivy League competition. Eight of his players (namely Kim Canavaro in ’40, Henry Foster in ’51, Charlie Ufford in ’52 and ’53, Ben Heckscher in ’56 and ’57, Victor Niederhoffer in ’64, Anil Nayar in ’67, ’68 and ’69, Larry Terrell in ’70 and Peter Briggs in ’72 and ’73) won a total of 13 Intercollegiate Individual championships, and four members of that octet --- Heckscher, Niederhoffer, Nayar and Briggs --- went on to win the U. S. Nationals as well.

But these statistics, compelling as they are as measurements of Barnaby’s coaching accomplishments --- while contemporaneously guiding the men’s varsity tennis team as well throughout that four-decade span to a 371-158 record and six Eastern Intercollegiate Tennis Association (EITA)/Ivy League titles --- barely scratch the surface of how many lives he deeply affected, how far his influence extended, how he reveled in the achievements of “supporting cast” players like Francis, whose successes meant at least as much, perhaps more, to him as those of his superstars, and how enduring and inspirational a legacy he had created by the time he passed away in February 2002 at the age of 92. He is survived by Charlotte, his wife of 61 years (known as Chussy, and still alive at age 98 as of this Spring 2014 writing), and their three children, John Robbins “Rob” Barnaby, Charles Spencer “Chip” Barnaby and Margaret Bouton Barnaby, as well as one grand-child, Nicholas Robbins Barnaby, the son of Chip and his wife, Cynthia Birr.

Briggs singled out Coach Barnaby as the only constant in his life during the turbulent period of the late-1960’s and early-1970’s while the Vietnam war raged, the civil rights movement convulsed American youth and a host of other contentious issues roiled every college campus in America. Glenn Whitman, who as a member of the class of ’74 succeeded Briggs as captain and whose runner-up finish in that year’s Intercollegiate championship marked the eighth time in a nine-year period in which a Harvard player reached this tournament’s final, praised the freedom which Jack granted to his players to integrate their commitment to the squash team into the larger context of their overall liberal arts educational experience at Harvard.

Dinny Adams ’66 admirably noted his coach’s unique ability to develop players of widely varying traits, maximizing each player’s potential and talents --- an especially meaningful statement coming from a player who, despite having what he described as somewhat limited athletic skills, played No. 1, won many matches for Harvard, served as team captain and later made it into the top 10 in the United States Squash Racquets Association (USSRA) rankings. He also played No. 1 on the first American team entered in the World Team Championships in softball in Johannesburg in 1973.

Jay Nelson ’62, who went undefeated during his two varsity seasons and contributed a key win to that 5-4 dynasty-launching ’62 victory over Yale, later earning more than 25 national age-group titles, related how heavily his mentor’s obvious respect for the game had influenced the way Nelson himself came to view a sport that he had previously under-valued. And Dave Fish ’72, captain of the Harvard squads in both squash and tennis, who courageously succeeded Barnaby as head coach of both programs and went on to compile an enormously impressive record in his own right, marveled at the extraordinary and rare blend of professorial sophistication and boyish enthusiasm that imbued his role model’s attitude throughout Jack’s seven decades of direct association with Harvard racquet sports.

Ironically in light of the colossus Barnaby would later become, his life and racquet-sports involvement both had humble beginnings. He was born on September 9th, 1909, in the small town of Tenafly, New Jersey, attending nearby Hackensack High School (where he showed some initiative by founding both the tennis and chess teams) and then taking a post-graduate year at Williston Academy before entering Harvard in the spring of 1928. Barnaby's paternal grandfather and namesake had graduated from Harvard Medical School in 1863 (Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. was one of the people who signed his diploma) and Barnaby's father had insisted that Jack attend Harvard, declaring that "Harvard has PRINCIPLES," with an incisive assertiveness that ended the discussion. When the Watergate scandal broke some 45 years later, Barnaby frequently alluded to how honorably Harvard alumni Elliot Richardson and Archibald Cox had acted in resigning their positions as Attorney General and special prosecutor respectively rather than cover for President Nixon and his ethics-challenged cronies.

Though he racked up a good record as Hackensack's No. 1 player, Barnaby was so lacking in confidence that he signed up for the B flight of the Harvard freshman tennis tournament, which he won. The Harvard tennis and squash coach, Harry Cowles --- one of a number of crack coaches appointed in the early 1920's by Director of Athletics William Bingham '16 in accordance with President A. Lawrence Lowell's directive to improve the athletics department --- was struck by his young charge's determination and on-court intelligence and encouraged him to pursue both sports. Barnaby grew to revere everything about Cowles, whom he, in later years, insisted was by far the best college squash coach ever and whose teams never lost a formal college dual meet. By the end of his junior year, he had improved enough to work his way to the last spot on the Crimson varsity team that won the first of two consecutive USSRA Five-Man national team championships in Buffalo, proving superior to the best quintets that cities like New York, Philadelphia and Boston could muster.

In the middle of his senior 1931-32 season, Jack had advanced all the way to No. 2 on a roster that included his classmates Beekman Pool, who won both the U. S. Nationals and the inaugural Intercollegiate that year, and Willing Patterson, who would win the U. S. Nationals in 1940, the seventh and last Cowles protégé to accomplish this feat. In the semifinal round of the 1932 USSRA Five-Man tournament at the Baltimore Athletic Club, against a strong contingent from New York, Barnaby beat Nathaniel Glidden, who one year earlier, as a Harvard senior, had been ranked seven spots above him on the Crimson ladder as the No. 3 player in a lineup that had captured the 1931 USSRA Five-Man event. Fifty-one years would pass before Harvard would again garner both the U. S. Nationals winner among its current players and the USSRA Five-Man Team Championship in the same year, when the Crimson won the team event and Kenton Jernigan captured the singles (over Harvard teammate David Boyum in the final) in San Francisco in 1983.

Upon graduating cum laude that spring with a degree in Romance Languages (with concentration in French literature), Barnaby immediately accepted Cowles's offer to become his assistant coach, viewing it at the time more as a stop-gap measure (jobs were scarce in the midst of the Great Depression) than as something that would become his life's work. To supplement his income, Jack gave lessons at the Harvard Club of Boston in the mornings and then help Cowles coach the Harvard players in the afternoons. Cowles at that juncture was well into his 40's and he needed a young assistant to practice with the team's top players, the best of which was Germain G. Glidden III, Nathaniel's younger brother, who arrived on campus in September 1932 having been the No. 1 player on the first-ever Phillips Exeter Academy team the previous winter.

The left-handed younger Glidden possessed remarkable quickness, anticipation, touch and stamina. His only weakness --- and it was a major one --- was a backhand that was so poor that Barnaby as one of his first assignments in his new role was charged with transforming it from a horribly weak stroke into a solid technical asset. He first had to convince a skeptical Glidden that significant changes in the swing were necessary, which he did by telling Glidden that he could beat him simply by hitting every ball to Glidden's backhand and then doing just that. Chastened by this result, Glidden endured the short-term losses and tribulations that ensued while his new backhand was fashioned and perfected.

By the middle of Glidden's junior year, when he won the first Boston Open, ironically defeating Barnaby himself in five games in the final, he was poised to embark on a stellar career highlighted by a trio each of U. S. Nationals (1936-38) and U. S. 40-and-over titles (1954-56), which he added to the Intercollegiate crowns he won his junior and senior years. He also partnered with his Harvard teammate Rotan "Tanny" Sargent, the 1934 Intercollegiate

champion, to win the 1935 Canadian Doubles title, and later teamed up with Richard Remsen to annex the U. S. National Doubles crown as well. Glidden eventually became a first-ballot U. S. Squash Hall of Famer as one of 15 inductees in the inaugural class of 2000, one year after his death and one year before Barnaby's induction in 2001, months prior to his passing. Barnaby always considered the remaking of Glidden's backhand the greatest technical triumph of his long career.

A History of —————
**HARVARD
SQUASH**
————— 1922 - 2010

Written by Rob Dinerman

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