

How One Man's Dedication Impacted a Whole Community: A Feature Profile

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If you've ever been to a Blissfield athletic event, there's a good chance that you saw Phil Kerbawy sitting on the sidelines. Between football, volleyball, baseball, softball and girls and boys basketball, Phil has impacted countless students over the past 45 years.

Phil Kerbawy, 74, is a proud resident of Blissfield, Michigan. After attending Blissfield High School, Phil decided to stay in the small town. Despite living with a generalized learning disability, Phil has continued to inspire, encourage, and motivate students, carrying them to championships. Through thick and thin, Phil has been an important part of who Blissfield athletics are.

He can be spotted wearing Blissfield gear from head to toe. Phil's go-to outfit is his Blissfield varsity jacket, a Blissfield t-shirt, and cleats or basketball shoes, depending on the sporting event. You'll usually find him on the end of the bench during volleyball and basketball games, or on the sidelines with a water carrier during football, always ready to offer advice or encouragement to a listening athlete.

You can hear him clapping, cheering and offering support and advice during the game. He gives advice not only to players, but also to coaches—asking them how they think the team will

perform, sharing information regarding the other team, and emphasizing how important tournament games are.

From passing out water bottles on the football sidelines to preparing game equipment for basketball, Phil contributes heavily in preparing the teams to be game ready. The girls varsity basketball team makes it a point to let Phil shoot a basket at the end of warmups before every game. Phil said, “I scored 46 points shooting baskets this year.” This small gesture not only impacts Phil, but also the girls. It shows them how to show compassion and care for someone who deserves it most.

He is described by players and coaches as passionate, loving, selfless, and competitive. Phil is someone who brightens the room and constantly provides encouragement and motivation. No matter the outcome, Phil looks at the positive aspects of athletics.

“He is unbelievably passionate about Blissfield sports,” said Blissfield Varsity Football Coach, Ryan Love. Knowing Phil for 10 years, Love was able to develop a personal relationship with Phil that now carries off the field. He said, “We can take care of somebody who shows up all the time for us.” Phil has taught students, athletes, and coaches how to show compassion to those who need it most.

Phil still remembers key moments in Blissfield athletics history with striking clarity. “In 2007 we went to Ford Field and got runner-up... We lost 12-7, we should have passed more,” he recalled. Phil’s emotional connection to the games don’t stray far from those of the players. When talking

about how he feels during the season, Phil said this, “Well, I get excited. But on some games, like the big games, I get concerned because we want to win the tournament games.”

Abrie Louden, a graduate and former athlete from Blissfield High School, discussed how she experienced Phil’s impact throughout her athletic career. She explained how Phil remembers everything—your performance in a game, what the score of the game was, and even how to improve for the next game. “A big part of the way he influenced me, and other people, is just the sportsmanship aspect of sports. He was always there at every game... and is constantly cheering you on,” said Louden. The positivity that Phil brings is a huge aspect of Blissfield athletics. There isn’t a single Blissfield athlete who doesn’t know the name Phil Kerbawy.

Phil’s impact now reaches beyond athletics. Eric Schmidt, a former Blissfield athlete and now athletic director at Blissfield Community Schools, said this, “Everybody is usually a pretty big fan of Phil... The student section gets the ‘Phil’ chant going... He loves that and he waves to them. All the students, whether they’re athletes or the student section, just really embrace Phil, and I think he embraces them back.”

Phil recalls this tradition, saying, “They say ‘Phil! Phil! Phil!’. I get up and wave at them. That’s when they stop.” The positivity, support, and acceptance that is heard across these sporting events is heartfelt and motivating. The simple acts of kindness and support that the Blissfield community shows is enough to bring recognition to the small town.

The impact that Phil has had on this community is unmatched. He unites them during hard times and motivates them to victory. In 2023, the varsity girls basketball team made it to the Michigan Division 3 State Championship game at the Breslin Center. Phil talked about this day, saying, “Girls basketball got to go out to the Breslin Center back in ‘23. I was happy to be going to the Breslin Center.” Phil, like for any away game, got to ride the bus to the Breslin with the girls.

The support that Phil not only showed these girls, but the generations that came before them, is inspiring. Throughout the past 45 years, the number of students, athletes, and coaches he’s impacted has continued to grow. Whether it was on or off the field or court, Phil is someone who people look up to. They want to have his selflessness, passion, energy and love that carries both in and out of athletics.

“I couldn’t do this in another town,” said Phil. With these words comes honor, respect, and recognition. The love and support that the Blissfield community has shown Phil is unmatched, causing them to continually provide for Phil. He explained how the varsity boys basketball coach, David DeVantier, ensured he had a ride to the school during basketball season, while Love’s wife brought him soup when he wasn’t feeling well. Although these may seem like small gestures, they don’t go unnoticed or unappreciated by Phil.

In 2022, the Blissfield community decided to honor Phil by inducting him into the Blissfield Athletics Hall of Fame. This honor comes to coaches and players who have left a long legacy on Blissfield athletics. Usually, the inductee is a retired coach or a graduated athlete, but the

Blissfield community wanted to honor Phil and his hard work by inducting him while being an active member of the athletic community.

Phil Kerbawy is a role model for many. Those who do and will know him are continually blessed by the effort and time that he puts into Blissfield athletics.

From the bottom of our hearts, we say thank you to Phil.