



## Chuck Karnop

### MTATA Hall of Fame



3/22/02 BOZEMAN, Mont. - For Chuck Karnop, Montana State's head athletic trainer for over three decades, it is simply a matter of re-directing his energy. "I think that this is just the right time to step away from athletics and use my energy in some different areas," Karnop said of his retirement, which becomes official this March after 34 years as the Bobcats' head trainer. "There are a lot of activities and interests that I want to pursue, and the time has

come for me to make those things happen."

Karnop's 34 years is believed to be the longest an individual has worked in MSU Athletics. The Department's Senior Associate Director Dan Davies said that Karnop's retirement forces MSU to replace much more than just a person. "Chuck has been so much a part of what this department has come to be," said Davies, who had Karnop as a trainer while he was a Bobcat football player in the 1970s. "He served as a sounding board and counselor for a countless number of players and coaches, and his commitment to the athletes and to this school is something that he has been able to pass on to many, many people."

After "just tagging along to school in Bozeman with my good friend Jess Langston" in the fall of 1958, Karnop graduated from Montana State in 1963 with a degree in secondary education, and earned his master's degree in zoology in '67. He taught at Ennis High for two years after graduation, and taught at Dickinson, N.D., State for one year after completing his graduate coursework. The Harlowton native returned to MSU for good in 1968, taking over as head athletic trainer. Joe Tiller, now the head football coach at Purdue, was a Bobcat football player and assistant coach early in Karnop's tenure. "He certainly doesn't have a vocation, but rather an avocation, to Montana State University, with the years he spent serving Bobcat athletes," Tiller said. "In his role, he touched as many lives as anyone at that University. In addition, he was such a great mentor to a to a lot of outstanding student trainers that came up through the ranks. He affected their lives in a very positive manner, and I'm sure that comes back to the University in a ripple effect from throughout the state and all over the country. Chuck is truly a great ambassador for Montana State."

From his time as a Montana State undergrad in the late '50s, Karnop saw the Bobcats win two

national championships and nine Big Sky titles in football, as well as five Big Sky basketball championships and several titles in rodeo and track and field. Karnop said those achievements will remain with him. "I don't think people understand how hard it is to win a major championship, what goes into it, how hard the players and coaches work, how things have to fall together, and how much good fortune a team has to have. So much of it chemistry between the players and coaches and support people, and so much of it is luck. But it's such a special, special accomplishment, and I'll always remember those."

Karnop experienced the transition of the athletic training profession from a one-man operation largely dedicated to football to one responsible for many sports and a wide array of administrative duties. And he helped position the MSU Athletic Training Room to fulfill its expanding role of serving all student-athletes. "When I first started it was a nine-month position, and we had to find other work in the summer," Karnop said. "(Former Athletic Director) Gene Bourdet really moved to make it a full-time position, and (Bourdet's successor) Tom Parac got that done in the early '70s." As an athletic administrator at MSU from 1977 to the mid-'90s, Dr. Ginny Hunt was the only person to fill the position of Women's Athletic Director on a full-time basis. She said Karnop's personality was a driving force behind the training room's commitment to all student-athletes. "In my 40 years in athletics, I've never met anyone with more integrity than Chuck Karnop," she said. "(Women's Athletics) had a small training room in the women's lockerroom, and Chuck said we would move it over (into the main training room). It was fully integrated by 1980. When athletes walked into Chuck's training room they were never asked what sport they were with. I never once had a coach complain that the training room wasn't treating athletes well regardless of what sport they were with, and I never had that feeling myself. Chuck did a wonderful job."

Danny Sprinkle said that Karnop's ability to connect with athletes and keep things light was something all Bobcats could count on. "Chuck used to drive me crazy because he'd make me shave my ankle and tape me straight to the skin, and it was something to get the tape off every day," Sprinkle laughed. "He loved to put me through that torture. But I never rolled my ankle after he started doing that. He was awesome. No matter what happened, no matter how down or how high I was, he was always there, and he was always the same. I think I probably forced him into retirement because after I left he didn't have enough to do, but he was always able to brighten my day."

Since stepping away from the daily operations of the training room about a year, Karnop has found a new way to enjoy athletics. "Any time that I spend on the sideline now, I don't want to be under the gun of being an emergency care guy," he said. "I'm over that part of it. You really don't have time to be into what's happening on the field because you're hammer is always cocked. I've found that it's enjoyable to just sit in the stands and watch the game, and sometimes to B.S. with the people around you and not even pay much attention to what's happening on the field." One of Karnop's main strengths was the day-to-day mechanics of being an athletic trainer, said long-time MSU football coach and Athletic Director Tom Parac. "Chuck's integrity and ability to evaluate injuries and make decisions on behalf of the kids was always well-respected. It seemed like he was always on top of his profession. I never got the

impression that a situation wasn't what he said it was."

While he says he doesn't miss the travel and the daily grind of the administrative duties assigned to the head athletic trainer, Karnop does miss the people. "I really miss the day-to-day contact with people, particularly the athletes," he said. "Being able to be involved with young people at that particular period of time when they've left home and they're taking on the enormous chore of being a student-athlete is special. Being a college athlete is an unbelievable challenge. I do miss being a part of that."

Montana State honored Karnop for his contributions in 1998, he has earned a meritorious service award from the National Athletic Trainers Association for his outstanding work, and he was inducted into the Northwest Athletic Trainers Association Hall of Fame recently, as well. He indicated that he will continue to be active in the business venture Perspectives run by his wife, Janie, and daughter, JoAnne Graff. He also said he will undertake some lawn and garden work, as well as some educational outreach projects in the athletic health care field. Karnop said he will always remain close to the athletic program he has been part of almost continually for about 45 years. "I came to school here in 1958, and had a tremendous experience as a student as an undergrad and also as a grad student. I really can't see myself ever not in touch with what's going on in this program, and not having strong feelings for the Bobcats."