

Workshop is net gain for coaches

Former Clemson coach Kriese shares knowledge

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Chuck Kriese's far-reaching tennis journey has spanned eras from Rod Laver to Rafael Nadal, but last weekend the wildly successful former Clemson men's coach was sharing his insight to about two dozen south Georgia coaches at Camden County High.

In a two-day workshop at the CCHS courts, area net teachers — many of them middle and high school coaches — had the chance to work with and listen to Kriese, who directed the Clemson program for 33 years and won four national Coach of the Year awards.

In his Saturday presentation, Kriese touched on many subjects, including the physical and mental sides of the game, stroke production, the effects of equipment advances, symmetry between movement and ballstriking, managing matches, and giving young players more options on the court. He urged coaches to become passionate about what they teach to their kids, since adolescence is when they are the most impressionable.



CHUCK KRIESE, WHO coached the men's team at Clemson University for more than 30 years, came to Camden County High last weekend to work with south Georgia tennis coaches. (Tribune & Georgian photo/Andy Diffenderfer)

"This is the age kids start to go for their dreams," he said.

Kriese met CCHS head tennis coach Dan Vonk about four years ago at a Professional Tennis Registry convention in Hilton Head, S.C., at which both were recognized as coaches of the year, Kriese for college and

Vonk for high school. He was moved by what Vonk had to say and wanted to get to know the top tennis 'Cat.

"When he spoke, he spoke from the heart and spoke of things that were not frivolous or material," Kriese said.

Kriese said as athletes have gotten bigger and stronger

and equipment has advanced fundamentals, to some degree, have suffered. "The flash and cash," he said, has overtaken substance, and "we've got to make some adjustments, not just in tennis."

Vonk, who has worked Kriese's summer camps the

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last four years, believes the workshop was an excellent opportunity for coaches to gain knowledge from a high-caliber clinician and put it to use in their programs. In fact, Vonk said a good portion of what he teaches comes from Kriese.

"I'm a student of the game and I have that drive to want to learn more, and I think there are other coaches out there like that," he said. For them, "they couldn't find a better workshop. The guy is one of the

legends of college tennis. He's got a brilliant tennis mind and he's passionate about doing things the right way."

Kriese grew up in Indiana and started his tennis career as an apprentice under the legendary Australian Harry Hopman, a tough, no-nonsense instructor who once worked with John McEnroe, among other champions. Kriese, who said he never took a lesson but "just went to the park and played," was hired at Clemson in 1975 and coached there until 2008, winning

11 Atlantic Coast Conference titles in the process.

After a decorated college career, he became technical director for the Southeast Asia Tennis Federation, training top players from 10 nations. Now he's based in College Park, Md., at the Junior Tennis Champions Center, home to 120 budding players, 50 of whom are nationally ranked.

According to Vonk, the weekend clinics were well-received.

"Everybody I talked to was happy and loved it," he said. "They're all anxious to

get back to their courts. I heard a lot of very positive comments."

Starting out, Kriese believed his calling was to coach high school basketball and tennis. After decades of study and examination, the messages of the latter are ones he is happy to share with eager learners.

"I feel like I'm the luckiest person in the world to spend my life in tennis," he said.

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