

March 2001

# Lawyers As Leaders - The Coach & The Master

By Charles Trickey III, MCBA President

**Y**ou know them as Robbie Lang, defender of those oppressed by the government, and Mike Schaefer, defender of alleged tortfeasors. Yet others know them as Coach Lang and Master Schaefer.

**Coach Lang**, pictured here planning play strategy with members of the Eisenhower High School Junior Varsity Boys Basketball Team, has been a coach even longer than he has been a lawyer. Robbie coached 7th and 8th grade basketball at Wolfe Middle School while substitute teaching and attending Wayne State University Law School full time. After passing the bar, his coaching career has included: Lakeshore High School, assistant varsity coach (1994 State Class B Champions, the only school in Macomb County history to win a state basketball championship); Lakeshore High School freshman coach, Lakeview High School, junior varsity head coach and his current position with Eisenhower High School as assistant junior varsity coach.



As a high school player, Robbie was the starting point guard for the Lakeview High School basketball team that was the Macomb County Basketball Team of the Year for two years in a row. From there, he attended the University of Michigan on an academic scholarship. Yes, you read that correctly, an academic scholarship. Then it was on to law school and the beginning of his coaching career.

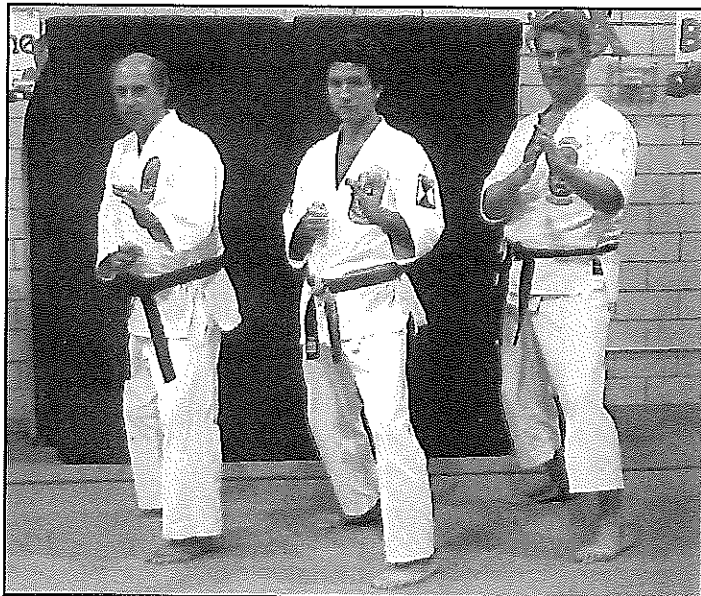
Why does he spend his time coaching while running a law practice? A major reason is he is able to give something back to the game. Robbie has great memories of his high school athletic career. Not only was it a time of fun, but his high school teammates became his friends for life. He counts from his own high school team three CPA's, an M.D., an engineer, and other businessmen.

He enjoys the competition of coaching, and, I think most of all, passing on his positive sports experience to young athletes. Coach Lang finds great satisfaction in having an effect on both the athletic and personal development of his players. He proudly states that some of his players have gone on to play college, the NCAA tournament and even the pros. Like any good teacher, Coach Lang has been visited after graduation by his former players who have told him how much they now appreciate his dedication to improving their game.

I attended the game pictured here, which was won by the young men Robbie coaches by a score of 68-28. It was a well-coached team that, despite their huge lead, never let up, and never stopped playing like a team. I came away thinking of how, thirty-five years from now when they are 50 years old, they will think of Coach Lang, and how he made their high school experience one that lasted a lifetime.\*\*\*

The gymnasium of Beacon Elementary School in Harper Woods (below) is suddenly filled with a sharp, authoritative command voice. Although the words are Japanese, all of the American men, women, boys and girls instantly respond. They are all students of **Master Schaefer**, and they are present to receive his instruction in Isshin-Ryu karate. This centuries old art has its origins in the Island of Okinawa, where it was developed by the native population as a way of resisting the invading and occupying Japanese Samurai.

Among the students are attorneys Tom Tomko and Ed Greenup (both pictured here with Master Schaefer). Other attorneys are Macomb County Probate Referee Diane Femminineo, Mark Grayell and William Schaefer (who,



**PRESIDENT'S COLUMN (CONTINUED)**

at least during lessons, must call his younger brother Master). Medical doctors, engineers and police officers have also received his training.

Master Schaefer became interested in karate in 1974. He has attained the rank of black belt, fifth degree, under the tutelage of his instructor, Grand Master Willie Adams, a ninth degree black belt. Master Schaefer is certified as an instructor, which, as any of his students will tell you, is something at which he excels. He instructs five nights a week and every Saturday. Besides beginning students, twelve black belts train under his guidance.

According to Master Schaefer, the art is 90% mental and 10% physical. Unlike most sport activities, where skills depreciate with time, in karate, skills can appreciate. It is the application of concentration and focus that brings success in karate, and, according to his students, especially when you are trained by Master Schaefer. Every one of his students that I spoke with admire his pure dedication to the art, and want to reach the same level of skill as Master Schaefer.

The class is structured. With the

opening command, the students form into lines predetermined by rank. Then, starting with the Master, the entire class goes through a series of exercises, each introduced by a student in descending order of rank. The cadence is counted in Japanese, and all participate. I was especially impressed by the inclusion of even the youngest student directing an exercise. Although it was the younger students who required the most correction by Master Schaefer, they were still given the responsibility of naming the exercise, demonstrating it to the entire class, and then, upon their command, the entire class, including the Master conducted the exercise.

After a half hour of this, the class shifted to the phase known as "kata". This is the execution of pre-determined moves against an imaginary opponent. During this phase, Master Schaefer moved around the room, supervising the kata performances that he had assigned.

At the end of this phase, the more advanced students each brought out their "bo", which is a six-foot long wooden staff that they carefully transport to each class in cloth sheaths. The room is then

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filled with the sound of wooden bos skillfully maneuvered by 21st Century Americans following 17th Century oriental concepts. Sparring between students, known as kumite, was not part of this evening's instruction, although I think it is something I need to see.

The students of Master Schaefer, with a great deal of admiration, informed me that he has won national championships. Sure enough, Master Schaefer is the 1994 Grand National Champion in weapons competition and the 1999 Grand National Champion in kata. After watching this class, and talking with his students, Master Schaefer impresses me as being the ultimate leader—one that inspires his students to reach the highest lever—his own. CTIII. ■

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