

Story from Patrick Touhey - Kevin's Brother - A 1000 Point Scorer at Dover HS and former college basketball player and high school Basketball Coach.

They say rivalries involve teams that have both won their share of games against each other. In the Dover vs. Morris Knolls high school basketball games, that wasn't the case. Morris Knolls dominated the series, but other factors still made it personal for both schools. When these teams met, the gym was always standing-room-only.

I first learned about this rivalry as a little boy in the late 60s and early 70s, when my oldest brother, Kevin, and his best friends, Danny, Benz, Mike Gruber, and David Loeb, played basketball for Dover High School. My twin brother, Tim, my younger brother, Michael, and I were in awe of them. You could say they were our heroes. Whenever they came over, they always took time to talk to us and make us feel part of the basketball family. This group of guys was very talented, and going into their senior season, the anticipation of a championship season was sky-high. And maybe we would beat Morris Knolls twice. Unfortunately, Mike Gruber suffered a season-ending knee injury in the first or second game. He was the point guard. The second coach on the floor. The head of the beast. His loss would be significant. Don't get me wrong, we still won a ton of games, but could we beat Morris Knolls? The day of both games against them was filled with excitement and the thought that this would be the year. If you didn't

get to the gym by the start of the JV game, you weren't going to get in to see it. The bad news is we lost to them twice. I still believe, to this day, that if Mike Gruber hadn't gotten injured, we would have beaten them. Even as a boy, I remember thinking that when I played for the Dover Tigers basketball team, we would beat these guys.

Fast forward to 1978, when my twin brother and I were seniors on the Dover Tigers basketball team. We beat Morris Knolls during the regular season in our junior year, but in 1978 we met them in the quarterfinals of the Morris County Tournament. This was a big game for the Dover community, school, and fans. Would this be the year we beat Morris Knolls in a game with so much on the line? What made this more interesting was that one of our childhood heroes, Danny Benz, a Dover Tiger, was now coaching at Morris Knolls. Danny meant everything to Tim and me. He played basketball with us the summer before our senior season. He inspired us to want to succeed. He was a great player, mentor, and coach. Danny Benz was another brother to us. We loved him very much. In all honesty, due to the personal nature of this rivalry, it was hard for me to process one of my heroes coaching against us. Just before we went out for warmups, the head coach of Morris Knolls, who had beaten Dover for so many years, took the time to personally wish us the best. During warm-ups, Danny extended the same message. It was game time. I remember having mixed emotions about Danny being their coach, feeling the weight of so many teams in the past who lost to Morris Knolls, wanting to show redemption, and wanting so badly to win for Kevin Touhey, Brian Touhey, Danny Benz, Mike Gruber, and Dave Loeb, who lost to Morris Knolls in the first round of the tournament when they were seniors, except for Brian, who was a freshman.

I was a very good high school player. I knew I would have to play one of my better games if we were going to beat them. On paper, we were probably evenly matched. If I remember correctly, we were slightly favored to win. Morris Knolls controlled the opening tip. When they started their offense, I tipped a pass, stole the ball, and raced to our basket for an easy score. I thought this would be our night. I don't know if it was all the emotions or pressure I was putting on myself, but I played a poor game. We lost, and it was yet another night that Morris Knolls beat Dover with something meaningful on the line. I was heartbroken. The feeling of disappointment was gut-wrenching. Even more painful was how poorly I played. I felt as though I let so many people down. Especially my teammates.

As I reflect on the Dover vs. Morris Knolls basketball games so many years ago, I learned great lessons from those matchups. I met so many wonderful people on both sides. I have a great deal of respect for what Morris Knolls built and all the championships they won. And it does not surprise me in the least that Danny Benz was

a significant part of that success as a coach and teacher during the many years he was at Morris Knolls.

Whenever I think of Danny Benz, a slew of emotions come to mind. The first is the love I have for him and always will. Others include joy, happiness, hope, confidence, and humility. I am eternally grateful to Danny. He is one of the most selfless people I know. His success speaks for itself. How blessed am I that my path crossed with Danny Benz at such a young age. His influence and impact on me are immeasurable. And it all came about because of an orange ball with black stripes.