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From the Sidelines



Kiddles Sports owner Jay Shlifka shares the pride he feels watching local student athletes find success in college and beyond.

Just inside the front door of Kiddles Sports, you'll find sweatshirts from the Chicago Bears and Big Ten Universities like Michigan and Wisconsin. And tucked right next to these is a Notre Dame jersey with the #11, just like the one worn by Lake Bluff's Tommy Rees as Notre Dame's starting quarterback.

"Let's talk for a minute about Tommy," says Kiddles Sports owner Jay Shlifka. "I get a lump in my throat when I think about the first time I met that kid. He and his sister had a tandem bike that they rode up to the store and needed to leave with us so we could make some repairs. Susan, their mother, called ahead and asked if we might give them a ride home. Tommy was young enough that he was a little nervous about taking a ride from a stranger," Jay remembers with a laugh.

"Tommy and his brother Danny [who played football at UCLA] are perfect examples of the type of student athlete our community graduates," explains Jay. "Nice, nice kids with talent, who are hardworking, who want to do good things in the world. It's hard for me to watch these good kids go off to college and get treated like a number," he adds with a shrug. "And don't get my wife started on that coach at Notre Dame."

Jay and his sons, Lee and Aric, as well as longtime employee Howie Zolt, rattle off the names of student athletes who have passed through Kiddles over the years as if they're ESPN commentators on Sunday morning before the NFL games begin.

"The Turelli brothers played together at University of Iowa. Kevin Magnuson played hockey at University of Michigan. Georgia Waddle plays soccer at Northwestern. Rachel Quon at Stanford playing in the NCAA soccer championship game against Nicole Lipp from Duke...." And the list

goes on. "When these kids would come in for shoes or equipment, we'd hear their stories," Jay says. "I'd watch them walking toward the store, texting all the way, then the minute they walk inside, the phone would go in the pocket and they would be very polite. These kids have been taught well."

This type of customer is one of the reasons that have kept Jay and his family anchored in Lake Forest's Market Square since they bought the store from the Kiddle family in the late 1960s. "So many times over the years I've thought about opening another location," Jays says. "But I always worried it would take away from what we could bring to this store every day."

Had he opened another store, Jay may have missed watching Billy Douglas go on to play college basketball at the University of Wisconsin and then return to Lake Forest and coach his own children. "This is something that's very unique that I've never seen anywhere else—this desire to give back," Jay explains. "They don't have to coach, but they do."

Kiddles Sports is located at 258 Market Square in Lake Forest. For more information, call 847-234-0025, or visit kiddlessports.com.

—Ann Marie Scheidler