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The X's and O's of married couples in WNY high school sports

- [Miguel Rodriguez](#)
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Eden girls basketball coach Joe Dougherty is married to West Seneca Athletic Director Marisa Dougherty. The two celebrate their second wedding anniversary on Valentine's Day.

Derek Gee

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Valentine's Day is the wedding anniversary of Joe and Marisa Dougherty. It's obviously a special day for them and one they always will cherish.

But they aren't planning to do anything out of the ordinary, although some may do a double take upon finding out what the couple's itinerary list for the day includes.

"He's got some basketball practices and I have a hockey game to go to," said Marisa Dougherty, formerly known as Fallacaro. "For us, it's business as usual. We're pretty last-minute planners."

If anything, their plans serve as a reminder of just how busy the high school winter sports season can be, and just how in-sync a couple must be in order to be happily married while running the scholastic activities they also love.

"I think that's another reason why we're good for each other," Marisa said. "I don't think other girls would understand the importance of a basketball game or scouting, but I get it."

The Doughertys get each other. They're not the only married couple in scholastic sports in Western New York who have combined love for each other and sports into a blessed union.

In the case of the Doughertys, the two met at a basketball game at Holy Angels 14 years ago. Marisa, then the girls basketball coach at Eden, attended the game to watch a former player while Dougherty, a basketball official and girls coach at Nardin at the

"We started talking because he had seen me coach and I had seen him as a referee," she said. "We started talking about some of the players and team. At that time, he was coaching an AAU team. I asked about getting some of my Eden athletes on that AAU team."

The next thing they knew, they were coaching the AAU team together. After four months, Joe, a divorcee who is 16 years older than Marisa, asked her out. She said yes.

"We just kept working together and got closer and eventually started dating," said Joe, who also is a sergeant with the New York State Police. "We have the same interests. She seemed pretty cool, same likes. It just seemed a natural type thing (to ask her out)."

After dating for a year, they moved in together. Six years later, they became engaged, with that status lasting longer than the final two minutes of a close game.

“It’s nice to have that commonality,” Marisa said. “Coaching is a difficult world as far as the commitment level. The late nights, the games scouting. It was nice being with someone who understood that.”

“It just kind of fell into place. It just happened. We would go to each other’s games.”

When they finally set the wedding date for Feb. 14, 2019, they literally caught most people by surprise. Part of the reason they remained engaged so long was because of their coaching/work schedules. Marisa coached girls basketball and softball at Eden and served as the school’s AD before giving up basketball in 2014 due to time commitments. She hired Joe as her successor and helped him by serving as Eden’s junior varsity coach. Later that year, she guided Eden to the state title in softball.

Still, it wasn’t until the two looked at the calendar and found an opening in their schedules that they set the date. That day was still busy.

Marisa attended a Section VI Executive Committee meeting and checked in on bowling sectionals before showing up at the courthouse in Lackawanna for her wedding. She had her dress on underneath her sweatpants. No one at the sectional meeting noticed until she told them afterward of her marriage plan.

Joe, meanwhile, ran practice at Eden. The day before, he informed the junior varsity and varsity girls basketball teams of the wedding.

They were so excited that they wound up being among the official witnesses of the union. Joe and Marisa also had family members there, too, so they got married in front of roughly 40-50 people.

A dinner followed at a nearby restaurant, then Marisa and Joe attended a boys basketball game because Joe was asked to fill in as an official.

“It was perfect,” Marisa said. “Most people won’t understand it and think it was kind of corny and crazy but for our basketball corner and world, it was perfect.”

The secret of why it works for the Doughertys?

“She backs what I do and I back what she does,” Joe said. “It’s not always easy, but it seems to work out in the end.”

The Buccieris and Bookers uttered similar words when explaining how coaching and marriage works for them.

“We’re not afraid to laugh at each other and have a good time,” Jeff Buccieri said. “We always felt relaxed around each other and it’s worked since.”

Julie and Jeff Buccieri coach girls lacrosse at Lancaster. Jeff also coaches football and girls basketball at Maryvale. Erin Booker is the Clarence girls basketball coach while her husband Rob coaches boys soccer at Holland.

“It’s always been so much more than a hobby to me and Jeff,” said Julie about coaching in their lives. “We’ve never thought once about not coaching.

“I feel like he has my back at all times (on the lacrosse field). People always say they couldn’t work with their husband but I’m thankful to have him on our sideline. He’s a great father and a great coach.”

The Buccieris will celebrate their 15th wedding anniversary on March 18, a day after their eldest of two daughters turns 12.

There must have been something about Jeff. His longtime coaching partner and friend Steve Griffin introduced him to his niece Julie during a Super Bowl party in 2003.

“Griff always said to anybody who dated us, ‘Mess with my nieces, I’ll break you into pieces,’ so it was funny he even introduced me to one of his coaches,” Julie said.

Jeff and Julie’s first date happened the weekend after the Super Bowl as they hit it off because they’re both teachers and individuals who had a passion for coaching. At the time, Julie worked and coached girls lacrosse at Niagara-Wheatfield. Jeff regularly attended N-W games. She in turn then attended Maryvale games in which Jeff coached. She took over for her high school coach Kathy Majeski, at Lancaster in 2004, and has been there ever since, building the top girls lacrosse program in Western New York. She also runs an offseason team in Lancaster. Jeff has gone from filming games and being an eye in the sky to coaching the defense for the Legends girls lacrosse team the past five seasons.

Julie admits she yells at Jeff occasionally during games but it's because she doesn't like when he shouts at officials, especially since she knows a number of refs. Call it a football coach thing since yelling at officials is the norm in that game.

But they consider themselves lucky not only to have found each other but also getting to share in something more – an extended family.

“We've just always been so lucky to have amazing girls and families in our lacrosse program who care not only about us as coaches but our girls and us as family,” Julie said. “They're such good role models for our girls.”

The Bookers met in 2008 at an airport. Erin was heading to D.C. and Rob to Baltimore. Erin had a friend traveling with Rob. Since the flight was light on passengers, Erin's crew and Rob sat together. That's when Erin and Rob started talking and the two physical education teachers and coaches hit it off.

They went on their first date shortly after that and got married in 2010. They quickly extended the family as they have two daughters, ages 9 and 7. Both play soccer and basketball.

The Bookers haven't coached together and likely won't since they coach different sports, but each knows how hard the other works. They get each other.

That's why it works.

“We definitely have passion in coaching and we respect that in each other,” Erin said.