

March 20th, 2022

Football state that we are, in the year 2000, the *Daily Oklahoman* polled many area sportswriters asking who they thought was the Greatest Football Coach of the 20th Century. Writers were from Kansas City to Texas to Denver. To the chagrin of many Oklahomans, Bill Snyder won, but Bud Wilkinson was second. Knute Rocke got 3rd place. I would like to nominate Nadia's Dad as, hands down, the Greatest Coach. I have this story only verbally, but I think it is verifiable for someone willing to go to Russia where Nadia was born and raised.

Nadia's dad was a futbol coach--soccer, as we refer to it. He coached grade school kids and even younger. His teams were unbeatable. Parents lined up hoping to get their son a placement on his teams. It was a small town in Russia, where he lived and he had another job that was actually his livelihood. But futbol seemed to be his life. Best of all, the parents said, were the inspiring talks he gave the athletes. They weren't so much about futbol as the Lessons of Life. Children who played for Nadia's dad would often become much better students, obeyed their parents, paid attention to teachers and became successful in life. He was offered better jobs to coach at the college level, but Nadia's dad always declined, saying he was wedded to the small community and the young children.

Communism fell in 1991 and Nadia and Bill had escaped to the USA in the 1950s. To the amazement of the West, 1/3 of Russians had secretly remained Christians in some form or another during 75 years of communist atheism and gulags. Russian Orthodox churches blossomed with the new freedom. Enclaves of secret Protestants were discovered. The story goes that several young communist party members in the town of Nadia's now-deceased father got curious about this "religion thing". Why were people so drawn to it? What did it teach? They were atheists, of course. One has to be godless to join the communist party. Perhaps they could attend church to find out what it was about and plan a strategy to turn society from it. But because everyone in a small town would recognize them, they decided to do it together for moral support. Ten of them ganged together and marched into the stunned congregation that day. The young priest became very nervous, but he had his sermon written so he read it with a shaky voice. His topic was "The Parables of Jesus" As he read the words, the communists were floored. They mobbed the priest after the service asking how they could join the church. Those stories were the very stories they had modeled their lives around! You see, Nadia's dad had taught those stories to his futbol teams, changing them slightly so that they sounded like wise, old Russian stories. "And who is your neighbor? A certain man went down from Moscow to Gorky and fell among thieves, who robbed him and beat him and took his clothes, leaving him to die in the snow at the side of the road. Now by chance an apparachik was going down the road but he passed by on the other side..." (The story of "The Good Pole", which you would recognize)

God, is where you find Him. Or rather, where He finds you.