It was the spring of 1974. Time for a junior in college to consider the future. I had sent over one hundred letters to major colleges inquiring about the availability of graduate assistant positions in their football programs. Just three universities responded with the possibility of G.A. openings—Penn State, Stanford, and The University of Akron.

Our first trip was to NCAA Division II Akron. Having been raised in a small college atmosphere, the facilities were impressive. The folks in the graduate school, led by Andy Maluke, were awesome. The Rubber Bowl was special. My Dad and I reminisced of the times that Baldwin Wallace battled
the Zips in the mud at the Rubber Bowl. The meetings with Head Coach Jim Dennison and his staff were fabulous.

In mid-December, Dad and I had ventured to State College, Pennsylvania, to visit the Nittany Lions. Head Coach Joe Paterno had Penn State heading to the Cotton Bowl. The day we visited they were practicing in their indoor football facility. We were extremely impressed by their indoor field.

This small-college kid from Northeast Ohio was blown away. As we began the trip home, I announced to my Dad, I’m going to Penn State!” My Dad responded, “No you’re not, you are going to work at Akron.” I was stunned. Had he not seen everything that I saw at Penn State? Did he really think Akron was a better choice than the great Penn State?

I tried once more but to no avail. Finally, I asked the question, “Why?”

My Dad replied, “Jim Dennison is why! You will have much more opportunity with Coach Dennison, and he is the right man in the right situation for you. Believe me.”

As usual, my Dad was right. Beginning in 1975, Coach Dennison, his staff, faculty, and the Zip players, sent me on the coaching-teaching journey of a lifetime. Positive mental attitude, work ethic, organization, compassion, toughness, awareness, togetherness, and every other skill that a coach would need for a successful career were on daily display.