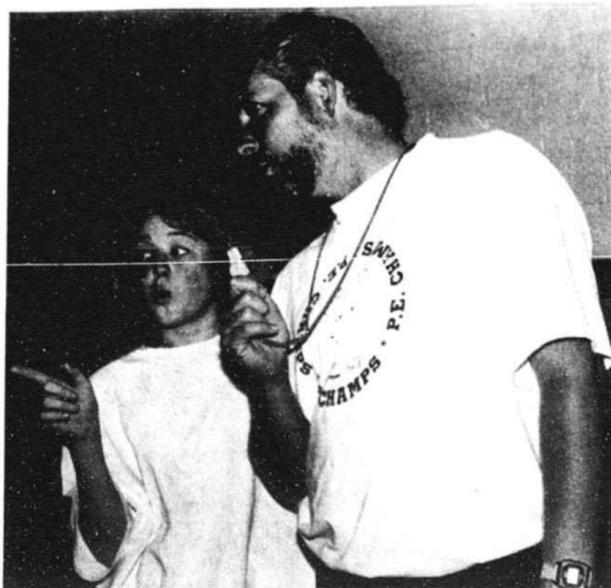




A WARM-UP ROUTINE is part of gym class for students and physical education teacher Ron Champion, center.



CRYSTAL LUDLUM points out a situation on the playing court to Champion. She's not his student, but was among the three classes sharing the gym on a rainy day last week.

STAFF PHOTOS BY SUSAN USHER

CHAMPION RECEIVES AWARD FRIDAY

State Physical Educator Of Year 'Champions' Fitness For All Ages

BY SUSAN USHER

According to Webster's a champion is the holder of first place or the winner of first prize in a contest, especially in sports; or a defender, advocate or supporter of a cause or another person.

Shallotte Middle School's Ron Champion is a champion by both definitions.

In his 18th year as a physical education teacher, the Holden Beach resident is a strong advocate of expanded physical education in the schools and of fitness as a lifestyle, and a solid role model for the children he teaches.

On Friday Champion will be honored as 1993 Middle School Physical Educator of the Year by the N.C. Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (NCHPERD) in Greensboro at its annual conference.

That same day he will also be installed as president of the 2,400-plus member organization, only the second classroom teacher to hold that office in the Alliance's 72-year history. His term as president-elect, which included responsibility for planning this week's conference, ends Friday. He has also served a term as vice president.

He was nominated last year by Principal Mark Owens, who has since retired but is expected to attend the awards ceremony along with the school's assistant principal, William Detrie.

Champion says he couldn't maintain his involvement in professional associations and his workload without the support of the school and his coworkers, especially fellow physical education teacher Richard Hubbard and Phil Wemyss.

He teaches full-time at Shallotte Middle, teaches a PE course for college transfer students at Brunswick Community College, serves as youth director for Brunswick County Parks and Recreation Department, and travels across North Carolina leading workshops and giving talks on physical education topics.

At Shallotte Middle he works with 11 classes of 30 kids each in grades 5-8. Students come to his class every other day.

In the little time Champion has with each class, his goal is to motivate students to take charge of their own fitness, encouraging them to adopt healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

"Sometimes you feel like you're kicking a dead dog, trying to get kids to care about themselves. The most frustrating thing is getting them motivated to accept some responsibility for themselves," said Champion. "It's hard to get an

eight grader to look ahead."

"What I like best is taking a kid who doesn't like to do something because he doesn't think he's competent, and getting him to do it."

To make that happen, Champion tries varied teaching methods, integrates PE with students' other work when possible and offers activities in which all children can participate. He also makes time to listen to his students.

At the start and end of the school year students are tested for fitness—abdominal strength, agility, cardio-respiratory endurance. In between they learn the fundamentals of a variety of team and individual activities: soccer, flag football, basketball, volleyball, softball, tumbling and jump rope and in winter, "lots of line dancing."

Shallotte Middle students also participate in the President's Challenge Fitness Program and in Jump Rope for Heart with the American Heart Association under Champion's direction.

"He makes it fun," sixth grader Jennifer Kennedy explains during a break as three classes play a rainy-day game of dodge ball in the gym.

Champion doesn't talk in terms of "winning" and "losing," especially when it comes to youngsters.

"I think too much emphasis is placed on winning and losing," he says. "They have enough pressure on them as they get older."

The T-shirt he's wearing sums up Champion's philosophy: "P.E. Champs" is printed on the front, "Play Hard, Play Fair—Be A Winner" on the back.

"He tells you to try, to do your personal best," says student Jewelia Belt.

After earning a bachelor of science degree at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Champion taught and coached four years at Youngsville High School, then came to West Brunswick High School in 1979. At West he taught physical education, coached football, basketball and baseball, and established an intramurals program that won statewide recognition.

Since transferring to Shallotte Middle School in 1986, he's been instrumental in organizing a physical education club and an intramurals program, and in getting a fitness course installed.

Going to school nights and summers, he earned a master's degree in physical education from the University of South Carolina.

The Alliance selects a winner in each of four divisions: elementary, middle, high and college teachers. Criteria include the nominees' service as a positive role model for stu-

dents, teaching methodology, service to community, professional growth and development, awards and honors, and significant achievements in their field.

Champion would like to see increased focus on fitness, particularly in the elementary grades where students often only see a physical education specialist once a week.

His concern echoes data from both national and state Children's Fitness studies that indicate North Carolina youngsters and their peers nationwide are in very poor physical condition and that not enough is be-

ing done either at home or in the schools to change that.

"Since parents seldom exercise with their children, schools must provide quality physical education programs that will improve the physical fitness levels of North Carolina youth," the study recommended.

"They need more physical education," says Champion. "Not just playing, but why, what is it doing for you."

"Once a week is not a lot, and it's been shown that a health body goes along with a healthy mind."

Thank You...

for your overwhelming support in last week's election. It's an honor to serve you, and my pledge is to represent the majority interest. I look forward to carrying on the programs the community supports to provide the services the town needs and deserves.

Ed Gore

Sunset Beach Town Council

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