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# BACK-SEAT BADMINTON COACH - A LOVE FOR DOGS LEAVES HIM HOMELESS

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*By ANN KILLION, Mercury News Staff Writer May 13, 1992 Publication: San Jose  
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Tied to a fence by the cool blue waters of the Saratoga High School pool, Precious and Scoots are waiting for the end of badminton practice. When Roger Hedge turns the corner, the reunion is a flurry of tail-wagging and head-scratching. With one passion over for the day, Hedge -- the Saratoga badminton coach -- turns his attention to his other passion.

Badminton and pit bulls are an incongruous coupling. But they are the two most important things in Hedge's life and have combined to help create his current situation.

Hedge is homeless.

The privileged surroundings of Saratoga provide an unlikely backdrop for a story of homelessness. But Hedge, who is coaching Saratoga students in the De Anza Athletic League playoffs this week, calls home a beat-up 1985 Mitsubishi hatchback.

He lives in the car with his two dogs, parking in industrial areas of San Jose to sleep. When he awakens he rearranges his belongings, tends to his pets and heads to Saratoga to shave, shower

# Back-seat badminton coach

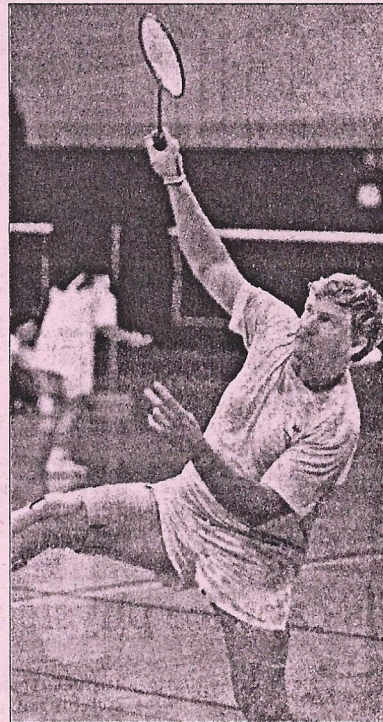


GARY PARKER — MERCURY N

Roger Hedge is greeted at 'home', his 1985 Mitsubishi hatchback, by one of his two pit bulls.

## *A love for dogs leaves him homeless*

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Hedge is paid \$1,500 to coach badminton at Saratoga High School.

and coach. None of his players was aware of his situation.

"I'm very surprised," said Julia Kamchatkina, a Russian exchange student. "I knew the U.S. had this problem. I expected a lot of homeless in L.A. and New York. But Saratoga is a rich place."

Hedge, 50, however, doesn't truly count himself as a member of the huge U.S. homeless population.

"I'm marginally homeless," he said cheerfully.

Hedge's status carries lots of qualifiers. He's sleeping in his car, but he will pay property taxes on a condominium in Oregon this month. He is homeless during badminton season, but lives the rest of the year with his girlfriend in Oregon.

The general reason for Hedge's homelessness is his dogs. The specific reason is badminton.

In 1987, Hedge was living in Sun River, Ore., in a condominium he and his sisters inherited. At the time, pit bulls were generating negative news, and Hedge's two dogs, Mama Dog and Precious, were making neighbors nervous.

Hedge said his dogs were no threat to anyone but that the condominium complex kept a complaint file on them and eventually passed a law against pit bulls. Hedge said he was told to either get rid of the dogs or move. Instead, he went to court.

"They passed a law just so they could target me," he said.

After a yearlong fight, Hedge lost in court. Rather than give up his pets, he rented the condominium and moved into the woods with his dogs.

"My dogs are worth more to me than my home," Hedge said.

Still owes \$6,000

About \$12,000 more. That is what he estimates the court fight cost him. He said he paid \$6,000 to his attorney but still owes the rest in legal fees to the condominium association.

Mama Dog was eventually shot and killed after attacking livestock, an event Hedge said

psychologically traumatized him. He replaced her with Scoots, a pit bull blend.

Hedge's first round of homelessness ended when his girlfriend took him in. But for the past three springs, Hedge has left the comfort of her home to live in his car and coach badminton in the Bay Area.

"There are no badminton programs in Oregon," said Hedge, who coached in 1990 and '91 at Overfelt High. "I couldn't use my teaching."

Hedge, who has a degree from San Jose State in natural science, has played competitive badminton for 20 years. In March, he won the 50-and-over doubles category at the U.S. Senior Badminton Championships in Portland, Ore.

"He's very good at coaching," said Andy Gouw, who owns a sporting-goods store in San Jose and who has helped Hedge land coaching jobs.

Team improving

Ray Goni, Saratoga's athletic director, said he has seen tremendous improvement in the team. In part, that is due to another Russian exchange student, Katya Enikeeva, who is undefeated. But Goni also credits Hedge.

"He is very knowledgeable," said Goni, who didn't know of Hedge's living situation when he hired him but isn't bothered by it. "He's done a terrific job."

In addition to his coaching salary -- about \$1,200 a season from March through May -- Hedge works nights delivering pizza. That is his primary occupation when he's in Oregon.

"I know he has always had difficulty working with bosses," said his friend Curt Dommeyer, a badminton player and college professor in Southern California. "He has a low tolerance for putting up with things that annoy him. It's just some kind of character flaw."

Won't sell his condo

Hedge still owns one-third of his condominium and by selling it he could get out of debt. But he wants it to appreciate.

In addition, the unit has a lien against it for the past-due legal fees. And Hedge converts his wages to cash immediately so the funds can't be diverted toward the debt.

Delivering pizza and driving to California to coach have worn out his car. He has fallen deeper into debt because of repairs.

"I'm trying to get ahead," he said, "but I'm just scrambling to get caught up."

Hedge's friends worry about what will happen to him if he has health problems. Gouw provides Hedge with a mailing address and has offered him a place to live. But Hedge's dogs aren't welcome.

"I have a 6-year-old," Gouw said. "I wouldn't want to risk it."

Hedge has given up so much for his dogs, he's not about to abandon them now. "When people have failed him," Dommeyer said, "his dogs were always his loyal friends."

Hedge said: "Someone told me, 'You can always tell about what you love by what you put first.' I love them."

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