

# Former Players Reminisce on L. W. Heckman Years

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The most visible measure of a high school coach's success is his record of wins. A less tangible, but perhaps more lasting, measure, is the regard in which he is held by his former players.

Louis Heckman's record of wins is impressive. In his 30 years of coaching at Ottoville High School, he coached over 1,000 basketball games and won over 750. To further gauge Heckman's success, two of his former players were interviewed to determine the nature of their coach-player relationship.

Robert Honigfort and Richard Kortokrax, two former players on Heckman teams, were asked to comment on their former coach. Honigfort, Columbus Grove, played high school basketball under Heckman for three years, from 1946-1949, while Kortokrax played on the last team Heckman coached before retiring from coaching in 1951. Kortokrax later went in to high school coaching and is currently head basketball coach for the Kalida High School team.

"He was the finest," states Honigfort. "He knew basketball. I can remember at halftime we would go into the shower room and he could tell what every player on the other team was going to do," Honigfort explains. "He also knew the potential of this own boys right down the line – that's how he won ball games."

Honigfort recalls Heckman's policy on practice. "We never had any really tough training rules. Everybody respected Heckman and knew pretty much what the coach expected." "We only practiced two nights per week, after supper," explains Honigfort, "but when we were there, we practiced."

Honigfort was asked to recall the greatest game he played under Heckman. "I can't recall one particular game above the others. During the years that I played, we had some pretty good ball teams and we weren't too used to losing. I can remember that we beat Columbus Grove.

Honigfort commented on Heckman's style during games. "He wasn't the type of man to jump out on the floor and shout at

referees. He was pretty calm during games. He didn't stand for unsportsmanlike behavior. He taught us more than just basketball," he recalls. "He taught us sportsmanship, and how to get along with other people. Sometimes we thought he was tough on us, but that is the kind of thing that makes a man out of you."

"One year only 22 boys came out for the two squads, so your chances of playing were pretty good," recalls Honigfort, who adds that the team had some pretty good cheerleaders, such as his wife, the former Illa Bohm. "We had some good ball players, but no real stars. One night it would be one player, the next night another."

Honigfort, who has been a resident of Columbus Grove since 1951, remembers Heckman as a teacher as well as a coach. "He taught about every math course. I had him for algebra, geometry, chemistry and physics. He taught parents, their children and their grandchildren."

Richard Kortokrax also recalls Heckman's qualities as an educator. "I think first of all, I learned the fact that education came first with him. And I also believe that firmly. I have tried to follow that particular philosophy."

"I felt at the time I played for him, that he was a living legend. He had my tremendous respect, and I don't think there is anything better for a coach-player relationship."

Kortokrax recalls points he learned from Heckman that helped him in his own coaching career. "He was a fine defensive coach. He instilled in me a liking for defense. He taught me to appreciate both ends of the floor. He gave me a tremendous appreciation of the important parts of basketball."

Kortokrax commented on Heckman's behavior during games. "I felt he conducted himself like a coach should. He didn't ride the officials, yet he expected the officials to do their job fairly. He was the coach, he did his job. He expected everyone to do their job, also. I don't

recall the man ever getting a technical. Kortokrax's teammates included Tom Weber and Don Altenberger, two Heckman players who went on to become high school coaches. "We tied Columbus Grove for the co-championship of the county that year. We won the Putnam County Tournament and got beat on the fourth game in the District Tournament by Deshler."

Kortokrax noted that the most important thing he learned from Heckman happened not on the court, but in the classroom. "I was being overbearing one day and he called me outside the classroom. He told me "When I stop talking to you then you had better start worrying. Because it means that I have either given you up as hopeless, or have my eye on someone else. He expected the right type of behavior in the classroom and on the ball floor." Kortokrax stated that he has told his own player and pupils, in this 18 years of coaching, the same thing. "I think that lesson was the most important thing that stuck with me," said Kortokrax.

Kortokrax compared his style of coaching to his former coach's. "I think that my type of coaching is the same in many ways. He taught you to be a winner; he stressed the fundamentals and taught his players the importance of both ends of the floor. He put a lot of stress on teamwork. I believe in teaching the players to be winners, also. I think we have enough losers in life. I believe in education first. I believe in stressing the fundamentals and I believe in teamwork."

Kortokrax said that the ways in which his coaching style differed from Heckman's are ways that are dictated by the changes in the game of basketball. "Now we have the fast break, the pressure offense, and the games are played faster and under more pressure. There are more facets of the game to learn and the sport is more time consuming.

**Mr. Heckman ended his 30 years of coaching with 448 wins. At the conclusion of the 2016 season, Mr. Kortokrax retired after 56 years with a record of 890-372. He is the winningest boys' basketball coach in Ohio.**