

# Richard Kortokrax Steps Down as Kalida's Basketball Boy's Coach

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Richard Kortokrax has considered stepping away from coaching basketball the last few years. And, although he was hoping to return to the Kalida bench for a 42<sup>nd</sup> season, recent conversations with school board members indicated that it probably would not happen as they were considering “going in a different direction.” With that in mind, Coach Kortokrax decided it was finally time to step away from a job he has held for four decades (it actually covered seven consecutive decades).

Kortokrax, 82, informed Kalida Superintendent Karl Lammers Friday morning of his decision to retire and it was announced at a press conference late Friday afternoon in the administration building for the school district. Family members, current and former coaches and players were on hand for the announcement Friday afternoon.

“While I still have a passion for coaching that allows me to continue to mold young men into successful teams, the Kalida School Board has decided to take the program in a different direction. I will truly miss sharing my love of the game with the players and coaches,” Mr. Lammers, a former player for Kortokrax at Kalida, read from a prepared statement. “I would like to thank all my former players from Fort Jennings, Ottoville and Kalida for the privilege of coaching them as they all share in whatever success I have been fortunate to achieve.”

“Also, I want to sincerely thank all my former coaches, including my son Rick, who has been by varsity assistant the last few years, my lifelong friend Joe Horstman and Bob Gerdeman, who have been with me since the beginning at Kalida.” “The support and love from my family has been most important throughout the years in giving me the energy and passion to approach coaching for all the right reasons. My family has stood by my side through every phase of my career.”

Coach Kortokrax retires as the winningest basketball coach in the state of Ohio with a record of 890-371, for a winning percentage of 70.6 percent, in 56 years of coaching at Fort Jennings, Ottoville and Kalida.

He coached 936 games at Kalida with a 665-271 record in 40 seasons. This past season the Wildcats were 13-10 overall and won a second straight Putnam County League title. He won a total of 20 PCL titles at Kalida, 24 overall and was the PCL Coach of the Year 13 times at Kalida, with five more at Ottoville.

Although the veteran coach said he has been toying with the idea of retiring from the game he loves the last couple of years, especially after his wife died five years ago, Kortokrax said the end came as a surprise when he was informed by the Board of Education President that they were considering going in another direction.

A special board meeting had been scheduled for Friday to discuss the matter but was cancelled when Coach Kortokrax decided to retire.

“The end came as a surprise,” Kortokrax said to a reporter’s question. “I’m not saying the board doesn’t have the right to do what they are doing, but I didn’t think it was going to happen. I told myself I wanted to go one more year, even though we had a devastating loss in the tournament again, with a group of kids I appreciated.”

“I did not feel what we were doing was that bad, my coaches and I. I thought we were doing a decent job, but what was missing was a tournament win.”

“I’m being told, I guess, it’s time for a change; there is a better way of doing it. I’m not going to argue with anyone. I’m not going to be bitter with

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anyone. Do you know how many coaches coach at one place for 40 years?"

"I was told the change was being made because no one supported me anymore, so this kind of surprises me. I wasn't going to make an issue of it to the point where we were going to have any kind of repercussions on my part. What I want to do is to compliment this guy, Mr. Lammers, my Athletic Director, Adam Huber, guys that have supported us, my son Rick and I, for the last couple of years; we thank them for it. That was enough for me. I said it was time to go."

Ironically, the Ottoville School Board decided the same thing after Kortokrax had coached there for 13 seasons going 199-82.

He felt that would be the end of his coaching career as he was going to stay at Ottoville as a teacher only. Instead, he was approached by a group from Kalida to possibly be their high school principal and their coach.

"I wasn't quite sure if I wanted to coach at Kalida because that was one of the teams I liked to beat when I was at Fort Jennings and Ottoville," Kortokrax said with a laugh. "I wasn't too high on being their coach but I wanted to be the principal. I came to Kalida and had the opportunity to coach and continue doing what I loved to do. And it worked out so well."

"Ottoville did me a favor but I didn't know it at the time, because it kind of hurt to a degree that they told me I couldn't coach there anymore, but when I came to Kalida unbelievable things happened."

Kortokrax retired from the principal's position in 1994 and continued to coach at the school until Friday.

Highlights from Kortokrax's coaching career included being elected to the Ohio High School Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Fame in 1999; being elected to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame from the OHSAA in 2002; and he was selected by the National High School Athletic Coach's Association as a Coach of the Year finalist for boys' basketball in 2003. He was inducted into the Ohio Basketball Hall of Fame in 2012.

Kalida made four appearances at the OHSAA final four winning the championship in 1981 as his sons Robert and Randy were members of that team. He coached two teams to state runner-up finishes in 1988 and 2009.

"I appreciate very much the support of Mr. Karl Lammers and the Kalida High School Administration through this process, as well as the people of Kalida who have allowed me to spend an amazing 40 years here coaching their sons," the statement said.

"I have spent my entire career playing at Ottoville and coaching basketball in Putnam County. I am so thankful for the spirited and friendly competition between all our local schools. It has indeed been a pleasure to compete with and against each and every one of you," the statement concluded.

As the press conference wound down, the coach asked two questions. "Do you know anyone who has coached 40 years at the same place?" And turning to Lammers he asked, "Do you think anyone will ever beat 890?"