

VonSossan Retiring as Fort Jennings Basketball Coach

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Retirement Comes after 309 Wins, 52 Years and a State Title

John VonSossan, the boys' basketball coach at Fort Jennings High School since the 1986-87 season is retiring.

VonSossan, who led the Musketeers to the 2000 Division IV State Championship and won 309 games in his career, is ending a coaching career that stretches over 52 years, including time as a varsity assistant, freshman and junior high coach.

"They always say you'll know when it's time but I never really came to that situation," VonSossan said. "I never had a hard time going to practice. I love the games, I love the competition. I like to be around the kids. I didn't retire now because of any special reason. I decided to let some young guy take over and go for it," he said.

Fort Jennings has settled on a replacement for VonSossan but Fort Jennings superintendent of school, Nick Langhals, would not name the candidate until the board of education formally hires him at a meeting next Wednesday.

VonSossan became Fort Jennings' head coach in the 1986-87 season. The Musketeers were 19-4 that season and won the Putnam County League title, the first of five PCL championships they won in his 27 seasons.

Fort Jennings also won four district titles in those 27 years. The pinnacle, of course, was winning the state championship. After losing to Edgerton in a regional championship game in 1999, Fort Jennings came back to win it all with a 24-3 record in 2000.

At that time, Fort Jennings had 147 students in high school and 469 from kindergarten through grade 12. To win the state, the Musketeers had to get through two of the most storied programs in Ohio small school basketball – Berlin Hiland and St. Henry.

Fort Jennings won the state title game 64-58 over St. Henry.

"I've had a pretty good ride," VonSossan said. "The thing I was most proud of probably was the stretch we had from 1998-2008. We won about 150 games in that era and were to the regional four times, reached the regional final twice and won the state. For little Fort Jennings, we had our share of athletes."

VonSossan was not a teacher. He founded his own concrete contracting company in 1963. He also was Fort Jennings' ACME League baseball coach for 30 years.

He has talked about retirement before it actually happened.

The first time was 37 years ago when his oldest son Tom, who was Ottoville's head coach for many years, reached junior high age. He told the school he didn't want to coach his children but the school refused to accept his resignation.

More recently, he considered retiring a couple of times since 2006. "I had done it a couple other times when I told them that was probably it. When I finally did it, nobody really believed me," he said.

VonSossan said one of the things he wanted before retiring was to think the program would be in good hands after he left.

"It's a community pride thing and a school thing and that's the way I want it to continue," he said. "I always talk in terms of 'We'. It's not about me; it's about the kids and everybody else. I was only a small part of it."