

Kortokrax Can Tie Heckman's All-Time Mark Friday

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When Louis Heckman coached Ottoville High School's first basketball team back in 1918, he probably never thought he would guide the Big Green to 448 victories over a span of four decades before retiring after the 1951 season.

And Richard Kortokrax, who played on that 1951 Ottoville team, says today that he never visualized that milestone of victories would ever again be reached by a Putnam County coach. But the veteran mentor, who began his coaching career at Ft. Jennings following graduation from Anderson College, can actually tie that 448 victory mark this Friday when he takes his Kalida Wildcats to, and what could be more appropriate, Ft. Jennings for a Putnam Count League battle.

The coincidences here are hard to imagine, even for Kortokrax. "I played for Louis and was on his last team," said Kortokrax who was a bit leaner then and good enough to start for the Big Green as well as for Anderson. "Louis was a great man and a great coach."

"I knew he had a lot of victories, but never knew exactly how many. And when I started coaching I never even thought about reaching his victory level. It was beyond comprehension."

In his 28th year of coaching, Kortokrax has learned that he can only take one game at a time; and that equaling Heckman's mark won't be a simple task. Ft. Jennings has a strong 8-2 team and the longtime rivals won't give in to coaching sentiments.

"Ft. Jennings and Tinora (who Kalida plays Saturday) will be waiting for us. I hope our kids are in the right mental mood. They have had some adversity this year (currently 5-3) but have shown strong work habits in striving to play their best."

The career coaching milestone also comes in the wake of son Randy Kortokrax, who is becoming a legend of his own at Findlay College. His father attended last week's game at Ashland College, where Randy became the school's all time leading scorer.

Is having to follow his son's steps along with his own a double burden? Kortokrax says no. "Actually, following Randy's career is an avenue of relief. I don't have to do any coaching at his games, though sometimes I get the urge to. I can just sit back and watch how he's doing and how his coach (former Ottawa-Glandorf) and Lima Senior coach Ron Nienkamp) is doing."

Kalida has a couple of potential college prospects on its team right now in 6-3 junior Dave Hovest and 6-5 sophomore Brian Vorst; but their youth along with a couple of problems at the foul line, have made the Wildcats a question mark.

The team lost to Patrick Henry, Archbold and St. Henry, allowing all three clubs to produce big scoring sprints, a trait uncharacteristic of Kalida defenses.

Our kids have dug some holes this season and just can't get out of it," said Kortokrax. "Watching Findlay College play and they can dig a hole but their experience allows them to figure a way to get out of it."

He knows his Kalida team will face an experienced Ft. Jennings squad that is off to a great start. "They are big and they are all seniors," said the Kalida coach.

Ft. Jennings boss John VonSossan is relatively happy with his team's start, though in both losses, to Antwerp and Crestview, had some offensive lapses that were costly.

"In the Crestview game (the finals of the Van Wert Holiday Classic) we played some terrible basketball. We got our offense going again against Columbus Grove (winning 84-70)."

"Our next couple of league games will tell how things are going," VonSossan added. "We know Kalida has a couple of big boys (Hovest and Vorst)

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that can play. We might have an advantage in our experience. Ft. Jennings has had trouble with Kalida in the past and I don't know why, but I know we're gonna play some ball this Friday."

Ft. Jennings has to come back Saturday as well and play Ottawa-Glandorf. "We're worrying about Kalida right now. We'll worry about Ottawa-Glandorf Saturday. We'll try to run with them and see what happens. If we get blown out we get blown out."

Also Friday Miller City is at Continental, two teams at the opposite ends of the PCL ladder. MC, which took 8-1 Pandora-Gilboa to overtime, last Saturday, is currently 0-2 and 1-8 overall while Continental, ranked 6th in the latest AP Class A poll, is 1-0 and 8-0.

"Miller City will be pumped up for us," said Pirate skipper Don Huber, who has worked some minor miracles the last year and half, compiling a 27-3 mark in that span. "It doesn't matter what Miller City's record is. They play hard and do a lot of things right."

Miller City coach Kevin McGlaughlin is the first to state that the 1-8 start is no fun. "It's tough. The loss to Pandora-Gilboa last week was a real tough loss to take."

"It's come to the point right now where we wonder which team of ours will show up. We know we can play with other teams on our schedule. But we have to shoot well to do it. Our defense has not been real good and if we don't shoot well it hurts us."

As to Continental he says, "They are going to be in every ball game they play because of their great defense. It's going to take a great effort by us. We will have to put four good quarters together. We know Continental has a very good team but we are not fearful. We are capable of playing good ball and we've proven it against some very good opponents."

Continental plays on Saturday as well, traveling to Ayersville to meet the Pilots. Conti handled A-ville 58-49 in the finals of the Defiance Holiday tournament.

Fort Jennings	
Year	Record
1959-60	11-10
1960-61	15- 8

Ottoville	
Year	Record
1961-62	8-12
1962-63	16- 6
1963-64	18- 5
1964-65	20- 4
1965-66	21- 4
1966-67	12- 7
1967-68	22- 2
1968-69	18- 4
1969-70	8-13
1970-71	16- 5
1971-72	17- 5
1972-73	15- 4
1973-74	8-11

Kalida	
Year	Record
1974-75	17- 7
1975-76	16- 5
1976-77	17- 4
1977-78	20- 3
1978-79	17- 5
1979-80	24- 2
1980-81	27- 1
1981-82	20- 3
1982-83	20- 3
1983-84	11-10
1984-85	11-11
1985-86	15- 6

At the time, it was thought that this would be win #448. The actual tying win came the next game when Kalida defeated Leipsic 68-54. Win #449 was when Kalida defeated Ottoville 67-43.

Year by Year Records