

Kortokrax Reaches 600 Win Milestone

Putnam County Sentinel – Charlie Warnimont – December 18, 1996

Kalida boys' basketball coach Dick Kortokrax joined an elite club Tuesday night at St. Michael's Gymnasium in Kalida.

The veteran Wildcat coach picked up his 600th career coaching win as Kalida defeated Pandora-Gilboa 71-41 to open Putnam County League basketball play for the 1996-97 season.

Kortokrax joined an elite club as just four coaches in Ohio High School basketball history have achieved the feat. After Tuesday night's home win the veteran Kalida coach now has a career record of 600-210.

Ahead of him in the elite 600-win club is Paul Walker of Middletown with a record of 695-169, Bob Arnzen of Delphos St. John's with a record of 676-291 and Charles 'Red' Ash of Canton South Charles with a career mark of 636-202. Of these four coaches who won 600 career wins only Kortokrax is still active in the coaching ranks.

Ironically before the Wildcats game with Archbold on December 7, Arnzen presented Kortokrax with a longevity award from the state of Ohio for having coached at the same school for 20 years. Also receiving the honor that night was former Kalida assistant coach Bob Gerdeman and Coach Roger Luersman from Kalida.

"I'm very grateful, thankful and appreciative of the players and assistant coaches I've been associated with over the years," Kortokrax said. "To fulfill an opportunity like this has to do with your longevity in the game. There are two things that have helped me reach this level. First of all you have to have the health to stay in the game this long and you have to have a Board

of Education that is willing to give you the opportunity to coach and teach the kids. That's basically where it all starts."

Kortokrax has been coaching since 1957 when he took a teaching and coaching job at Fort Jennings High School. He stayed there for two seasons recording a record of 26-18. In 1961 he began coaching at Ottoville where he stayed for 13 seasons compiling a record of 200-82. In 1974 he came to Kalida where he has compiled a record of 374 wins and 110 losses as he started his 22nd year of coach at the school.

"The parents and community have been special in this unique success," Kortokrax added. "I really have enjoyed taking great kids who love and appreciate the game and seeing what can happen. I've been extremely fortunate to have been given the opportunity to coach at three very fine schools."

Although Kortokrax has coached 36 or 37 years on the high school level, it was almost a secondary decision to him. After playing high school basketball at Ottoville and playing college basketball at Anderson University in Indiana, Kortokrax moved on to play semi-pro ball. As he realized his basketball playing days were nearly over Kortokrax decided to return to college to work on courses that would allow him to teach school and possibly enter coaching.

"In school I had worked on courses that would allow me to enter the business world, Kortokrax said. "When I realized my playing skills would not allow me to move on I decided to return to college and take the necessary courses to get an education degree. I decided that if I couldn't play I could stay active in the game by coaching."

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Having been in the game for nearly 37 years as a coach he has seen many changes in the game not to mention how much is asked of the kids these days.

“The biggest change in the game today has been the transition game,” Kortokrax said. “Back when I started we had the set shot and players shot free throws underhand. Then when the jump shot came along that was a major change, but the transition game of today has taken it to a new level.”

“Also it’s amazing how much is being asked of these kids nowadays outside of the game. With players being involved in more than one sport it’s hard to find time to work on the skills. It’s almost inhuman what we ask of these kids nowadays. It’s amazing they find time to do it all and work on the classes they offer now that help prepare them for college.”

But through all 600 wins Kortokrax has been able to keep his two families separate and give each equal time. “I’ve always said I had two families,” Kortokrax said. “I have my basketball family and then I have my traditional family.”

“My wife Donna and eight kids have been great over the years. They have been very supportive of me and what I have done. When I thought about quitting after Ottoville let me go, I talked to them about quitting coaching and just teaching, but they encouraged me to continue on.”

“Also I had the opportunity to work with some of my sons as a coach. Rick helps out as a volunteer assistant and Rob would like to help, but with five children it is tough on him. Plus Randy has helped when he has the time. It all has been quite an experience for us.”

And although the Kalida coach has joined the exclusive club he hasn’t had much time to really enjoy it as he must prepare his young team for a very difficult upcoming weekend.

The Wildcats will enter the upcoming weekend with a 4-0 record, but will have their work cut out for them as they travel to St. Henry on Friday and visit Lincolnview on Saturday night.

Ironically enough the newest member of the 600 club will be facing a potential member of the club as St. Henry’s coach Fran Gilbault is sixth on Ohio’s all-time winningest coach’s list with 578 wins. This game should be a game both coaches will remember for some time.

At the time, it was thought that this was Coach Kortokrax’s 600th win during his 37th season of coaching and 22nd at Kalida. The actual 600th win came the next game against Delphos Jefferson when Kalida won 65-41. The Wildcats were 19-3 in 1997, losing to Leipsic in the District Finals. Dick was named the PCL Coach of the Year in 1992 and 1996 at Kalida for the 6th and 7th time, 12th overall.