

# Kalida Not Denied 1981 State Basketball Title

Putnam County Sentinel – March 24, 1981

“And this is to Richard Kortokrax, whose team concept of coaching and basic fundamentals is an inspiration to all high school basketball teams.”

That was the statement of Robert Morrison, principal of Colonel Crawford High School and a tournament director presenting the veteran coach the long awaited state championship Class A trophy after the team’s 58-44 victory over previously unbeaten Columbus Academy Saturday at Ohio State University.

It was exactly teamwork and basic basketball fundamentals that allowed Kalida its first ever state title and the first for Putnam County since Miller City did it 31 years ago in 1950.

“This game belongs to the team,” said Kortokrax in a post-game interview. “Out there was the finest example of teamwork you will ever see. Our entire job as coaches is to instill the fundamentals and to bring out the best in the players. I just love these kids.”

The media forced Kortokrax to speak about some individual efforts, specifically Dan Utendorf and Greg Verhoff, the catalysts to this year’s 27-1 final mark. “Dan and Greg decided that they were going to do everything physically possible to come back here to Columbus.”

Utendorf was named player of the tournament in Class A outranking a pair of first team all staters, Dale Blaney of Kinsman Badger and Academy’s Kevin Richardson. Utendorf was joined on the all-tourney team by Blaney Richardson and teammates Greg Verhoff and Keith Hamburg. Hamburg came in to his own at the state tournament and was 12 of 13 from the field for the two games, four of four at the foul line and had ten rebounds.

Both Kalida and Academy reached the finals with first ever semi-final victories. The Wildcats whipped Richmond Southeastern in the tournament opener 73-56, the most points Richmond Dale had given up all year while Academy edged the states’ No. 1 team, Badger, 49-47.

Though Columbus Academy coach Jack McMullan stated after the game that he did not let his club take the Wildcats for granted, his cagers seemed a little too loose at tip off time in the 11:00 a.m. Saturday finals.

The 14,000 fans could even sense that Academy looked as if they thought the state tourney was already signed and sealed, but Kalida was not about to let the trophy be delivered.

The Wildcats had something to prove to Columbus as six teams from the county in the last five years had been to the state playoffs but none had been able to reach the finals. And when Kortokrax’s crew won the opener Thursday, they were hungry for more.

Half the population from Putnam County had never witnessed a state championship team and this year’s club won it with style. Kalida outplayed Academy in every facet of the game and never once trailed as both teams ended the season at 27-1.

Kalida placed three men in double figures and had nine players score. Academy had only one man, Richardson, grab twin digits and just the starting five lit up the scoreboard.

While Kalida had a superior effort, the crowd could not help but single out Utendorf who was invaluable to the pair of victories.

Overflow crowds witnessed the senior guard display outstanding shooting (10 of 14 for two games) with great defense (ten steals in two games) and superb jumping ability blocking seven shots and controlling jump balls against taller opponents.

On Utendorf’s play Coach Kortokrax stated, “Dan worked to be as fine a guard as there is in Class A in Ohio. Dan had trouble last year handling the pressure against Summit Country Day. He did not back down this year. As you could see, he went right after them.”

As said before through, it took a whole team to win the state title. Hamburg came around when he was needed as did Verhoff with clutch baskets that kept the Wildcats in front practically the entire tournament.

Senior center Rob Kortokrax opened the scoring tabulation Saturday with a ten foot turnaround on a feed from Ute and Al Miller came back 40 seconds later by canning a 15 foot shot from the left baseline. From then on Academy never tied the score.

Richardson finally got the Vikings on the board after 1:14 had expired but Kalida answered with three more points and had a 13-6 lead on an inside shot from Verhoff.

The Wildcats failed to score for the next three minutes and 54 seconds until Ute fed Hamburg on a breakaway at the 6:55 point of the second quarter to go up 15-12. A 15-footer by Utendorf stretched the lead to five and the PCL Co-champs, though not scoring the last three and one-half minutes of the half, still enjoyed a six point lead 24-18.

Man-to-man pressure had gotten Academy into the finals as they forced Kinsman into numerous costly turnovers but with Utendorf doing most of the ball handling for Kalida, the Vikings found that defense was not going to be enough to stop Kalida. Columbus had averaged giving up just 47 points a game while on offense put in 68 per contest. But unable to shake Kalida, the undefeated Vikings were in trouble.

Kalida ran off five of the first six points in the second half and when Utendorf came up with another brilliant steal, which was batted around on the floor until Verhoff flipped it to Hamburg for two more,

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the 'Cats had a 31-19 lead and from there Academy threatened only once more.

Miller ended the third period with a pair of free throws and Utendorf opened the fourth with two more free ones. But, except for a Ute bucket, Kalida stumbled the next four minutes.

Richardson missed front ends of one-and-ones for Academy, but Todd Alexander put one back in and Richardson got another rebound that made it 40-33. Martin Nesbitt netted a jumper from the key for a 40-35 score with 5:18 left.

Verhoff hit a clutch shot for the Wildcats at the key and Richardson retaliated with a lay-up that kept the difference at five, 42-37. Then after a Kortokrax free throw, Chris Durst hit a lay-up to pull with four, 43-39.

Kalida missed the next time down and it looked like Columbus was going to keep a Northwest Ohio team from the title. That is when Ute showed his presence again, splitting the two Viking guards and collecting his fourth steal of the contest, feeding to Hamburg and Kalida was back up six, 45-39.

The Wildcats ended the game at the free throw line, six by Verhoff, four more by Ute and a pair by Joe Verhoff to seal the win causing Columbus to totally lose their composure by forcing shots and turnovers in the last minute and a half.

The clincher, Utendorf felt, came at the 0:56 mark. "I knew we won when Joe Verhoff sank two free throws. They wanted to foul him because he was a sophomore, but we knew he could make them. When he did it was great."

A loss is never easy to take, especially after 26 consecutive wins, but Coach Jack McMullen of the Vikings had no qualms. "Kalida has a great team. They beat us on the boards," as his team was out rebounded 24-9 the first half. "I thought it was 14-9 the first half and I still told the kids we were getting killed on the boards. This was a great tournament," said the Academy coach whose team was a mere 1-18 two years go.

Originally from Pennsylvania McMullen stated, "I have never seen such great crowds. All the way through, people were so courteous, first class all the way. Hey, we have 43 kids in our senior class and there are over 14,000 people at the game. That's great. A team can be 0-20 and still be in the tournament. In Pennsylvania, you have to win a league to play in the state tournament."

Back to the game McMullen said, "We wanted to play man-to-man. But they shot 28 free throws and that hurt us. They hit the boards well too; they positioned themselves really good underneath."

Once more Kalida had to play undersized but still took the rebounding total 35-27 with Verhoff hauling in nine and Kortokrax six. For Academy, 6-7 center Alexander had ten caroms and Richardson nine.

Kalida had trouble getting the offense set up but, once they did, it accounted for 48 percent floor shooting on 18 of 37 and a red hot 22 of 28 at the foul line for 79 percent.

Columbus made three more shots from the field on 21 of 52 (40 percent) but was only 2 of 8 at the foul line for 25 percent. Academy also had one more turnover 15-14.

Utendorf nailed 17 points for the state champs on 5 of 7 from the field and 7 of 8 freebies, while Hamburg and Verhoff tallied 12 each. Kortokrax added five points.

Academy, who had been rated No. 2 in the state before beating No. 1 rated Badger had 21 points from Richardson and Alexander chipped in seven. Nesbitt and Durst added six apiece.

Academy was not the only storybook team in the tournament after having gone 1-18 two years ago. Badger had a similar fate having a worse 1-20 mark in 1978-79, before making the regional finals last year with 19-6 mark.

Kalida	fg	fga	ft	fta	reb	pf	pts
D. Utendorf	5	7	7	8	2	1	17
K. Hamburg	5	6	2	2	5	1	12
A. Miller	1	2	2	3	2	0	4
G. Verhoff	3	10	6	6	9	2	12
G. Vorst	1	1	1	0	1	2	3
C. Schnipke	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
J. Verhoff	1	3	1	2	4	1	3
Rob Kortokrax	1	9	3	7	6	5	5
Randy Kortokrax	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
M. Stechschulte	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
D. Recker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
T. Heitmeyer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Team	0	0	0	0	6	0	0
Totals	18	37	22	28	35	12	58

Academy	fg	fga	ft	fta	reb	pf	pts
M. Nesbitt	3	10	0	0	0	4	6
M. Crawley	2	11	0	0	0	4	4
K. Richardson	10	18	1	4	9	2	21
C. Durst	3	5	0	0	3	5	6
T. Alexander	3	6	1	4	10	4	7
K. Helfant	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
M. Ziegler	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Team	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
Totals	21	52	2	8	27	19	44

Kalida	13	11	12	22	58
Academy	10	8	9	17	44