

Opinion: Lohse left lasting legacy



Louisburg coach Jeff Lohse spent 17 years as the Wildcat baseball coach, but he was more than a coach to several involved with the program.

When you do something for as long as Jeff Lohse has, you tend to get a little sentimental, especially when you know it is coming to an end.

For the last five months, Lohse has known that his time left as Louisburg baseball coach was told in days and not years. When he took the field in Paola to start the season, Lohse knew it was going to be his last season opener.

On senior night against Ottawa, he knew this was his last senior class. When the Wildcats lost to Spring Hill in the regional semifinals, he knew he was going to have to say goodbye.

He was going to have to say farewell to more than just his team, but to the sport he loves and the program he spent 21 years of his life with.

It is a way of life that was tough for him to leave behind. No matter how difficult it will be in the future, the decision was ultimately an easy one.

Lohse couldn't turn his back on the people he cares about the most – his family. His love for his children and to watch them grow up outweighs his passion for the game he played since he was a 5-year-old.

"It is time to stop coaching and just be a dad," Lohse said.

A lot of us have wrestled with similar decisions in our lives. I know I have, and still do. You only get to watch your kids grow up once and I have nothing but respect for a person who puts his family before himself.

But Lohse was more than just a baseball coach to this community and his players – he was someone kids could look up to and try to emulate. He was a coach who loved his players and wanted to see them succeed the way he did when he was in their shoes back in his days as a Wildcat player.

Very rarely do you see a standout athlete in high school, who had success in college, come back and raise his family in his hometown and coach at his alma mater. For 17 years, Lohse gave back to the school and to the community he grew up in.

He was patient with his players and treated them with respect. You could tell there was a mutual respect on both sides every time I was in the dugout.

I never saw a player roll his eyes or talk back to him. They always listened to what he had to say and they tried to get better.

"I appreciated his organization of his program and his leadership as the head coach," Louisburg High School activities director Darin Gagnebin said. "He always treated his players with respect and taught them how to be good young men. Jeff will be missed as a part of the Wildcat baseball team."

For me personally – it was a depressing day when I found out

Lohse was stepping down.

My first full season of covering sports in Louisburg was in the spring of 2008 and the first sport I covered was Louisburg baseball. Coach Lohse was kind enough to let me into the dugout, take pictures and he didn't know that much about me.

Since then I have always looked forward to baseball season for the time I get to spend in the Wildcat dugout and have gotten to know a few of his mannerisms. For those former players and coaches who have heard or seen these before, you know what I am talking about.

After a good inning, he could often be heard saying "Thatta baby!" Or maybe something like "89...lets go," referring to the spot in the batting order coming up.

"Tough with two," he said when he wanted his pitchers to bear down and get that third out.

"Diving bodies, save a run," he yelled with a runner on second with two outs.

Assistant coach Jarrod Worthington had his favorite.

"After every win, he'd always shake hands with assistant coaches right away," Worthington said. "Those never got old."

Maybe my favorite of all time is when a hitter has two strikes and a Wildcat hurler pounded the zone for an apparent third strike. Lohse could often be seen coming out of the dugout clapping his hands ready to congratulate his team on a good inning and trying to sell a call at the same time.

Sometimes it worked.

Other times he would come out of the dugout clapping, only for the ump to call a ball and Lohse would have to do a quick about face back into the dugout yelling "Looked good!"

Those are the types of things I will remember and it was a privilege to be able to cover his teams.

Since he was a 5-year-old boy, Lohse has always put on a jersey come baseball season. For two years in high school and his 17 years as coach, he put on the No. 12 every spring – it was almost like clockwork.

“It will be weird not wearing that uniform,” Lohse said. “I have done it as long as I can remember.”

Long enough to create a lot of great memories. Thanks for everything “Lohs.”