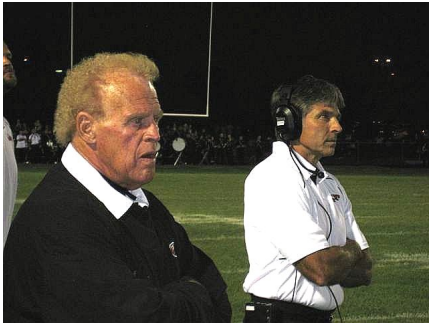


Former Prairie aide Hanzlik dead at 75

Written by Mike Koolbeck

Thursday, 05 May 2011 19:58 - Last Updated Thursday, 05 May 2011 20:03



Craig Jelinek wasn't so sure that bringing Kenny Hanzlik into the Prairie football fold was going to be such a good idea when one of his former assistant coaches suggested hiring him in 1998.

"Kenny had just retired from the Parks Department -- he was at the Jones Park golf course for a long time -- and Ken Cooperman, who had been an assistant for us, said that Kenny really wanted to get into weight training and helping our program," Jelinek recalled. Cooperman also happened to be Hanzlik's son.

"I thought, 'Yeah, a parent. I'm not so sure this is going to work out,' " Jelinek said. "But Kenny was gold."

Hanzlik died Wednesday at age 75 after a battle with cancer. He had been the weight training and conditioning coach for the Hawks for the past 13 years.

"There's no way we could have been as successful as we were without Kenny," said Jelinek, who retired as Prairie's football coach following the 2010 campaign after 21 years. Hanzlik also was stepping away, mainly because his health began to fail. Jelinek said Hanzlik was diagnosed with lung cancer four or five years ago and had a lung removed. Jelinek said a spot on Hanzlik's other lung was detected during an examination last fall.

"He started chemo right away and he appeared to be doing pretty well until February, but then they found cancer in a bone and not too soon after a spot on his liver," Jelinek said.

Jelinek said the mood at Prairie on Thursday was somber.

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"It was like a wet blanket was thrown on the whole school," he said. "Kenny worked with the athletes, boys and girls, and they all took it hard."

Hanzlik was a volunteer coach. He did not get paid.

"But he'd get in his truck and drive from Marion out here everyday," Jelinek said. "He never missed. The coaches would rotate so we wouldn't have to be there all the time, but Kenny was there everyday."

Memorial services for Hanzlik are 10 a.m. Tuesday, May 10, at Murdoch Funeral Home & Cremation Center in Marion. The family will greet friends from 4 to 8 p.m. Monday at the funeral home. Guests are encouraged to wear black and orange in honor of Coach Hanzlik.

The family has requested that in lieu of flowers, that memorials please be directed to the Kenny Hanzlik Memorial Fund through the Prairie School Foundation.