

Roloff retiring as Kennedy boys track coach

Written by Jim Ecker

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Dennis Roloff has decided to retire as the Cedar Rapids Kennedy boys track coach after this season. He'll finish his 15th and final year as Kennedy's head coach at the state meet in Des Moines this week.

Roloff planned to make the announcement at the team's annual banquet Tuesday night.

Roloff, 57, decided in January to take early retirement as a teacher from Cedar Rapids Community Schools. He will continue as Kennedy's girls basketball coach next season, but will step down as boys track coach following the state meet.

Roloff said basketball and track are two different sports, one indoors and one outdoors, with different responsibilities. He thinks it would be difficult to coach a track team with 80 to 100 members without being in the school on a regular basis.

Roloff was a state 440-yard champion at Cedar Rapids Jefferson in 1971 and was a champion quarter-miler at the University of Northern Iowa. He's been involved with the sport since he was a seventh grader, either as a runner or coach.

"Track has been my true love my whole life," he said.

Roloff has coached athletes who have set Iowa all-time bests, won titles at the Drake Relays and won state championships, but he said he simply relishes the sheer joy of the sport.

"I think any time there's a close race - and I don't care what level it is - it's pretty exciting to see the competition," he said.

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For example, he pointed to the girls 4x400 relay at the Class 4A district meet in Iowa City last week. He was a spectator for that race, but got emotionally involved.

"It came down to three teams fighting and Kennedy was in third place, and our anchor girl passed them both on the homestretch to win it. That was exciting," he said. "We were standing up and cheering. It was just a great race."

The next race was the boys 4x400, with Anthony Crawley running the anchor for Kennedy.

"And then Anthony Crawley does the same thing," Roloff said. "He's in third place coming around the corner and he wins it on the homestretch. Back-to-back victories that way. It was so exciting to do that."

Roloff will turn 58 on Thursday, which coincidentally will be the first day of the state track meet. The Cougars have qualified in several events, so Roloff will spend his birthday in Des Moines, coaching his athletes and enjoying the event.

His last day as an industrial tech teacher at Kennedy will be on June 3, but he plans to stay busy this summer with the girls basketball program.

"Camps and leagues and all that in basketball start right away, so I won't miss a beat," he said. "I probably won't miss it (teaching) until we go back in August and they all have to be at that in-service day and I'll be home. Then I'll know, well, hey, I'm done."

Roloff thanked all the "great coaches, great mentors and great athletes" he's had in track through the years.