

Niemeyer resigns for health reasons

Written by Tom Fruehling

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Legendary high school softball coach Larry Niemeyer will not be in the dugout this summer for his 53rd straight season after all.

A recurrence of chronic kidney problems has forced him to step down as the new coach of the Waterloo West girls team, his son Nick said Sunday afternoon.

Niemeyer, who holds the national record for most career softball wins by a high school coach with a record of 2,089-429, was dismissed last July by Jefferson Principal Chuck McDonnell after posting a 36-6 record in his 34th year with the J-Hawks.

McDonnell cited a "change of philosophy" in deciding not to renew the veteran coach's contract.

Jefferson won the MVC Valley Division crown last season with a mark of 25-1 year but fell to Davenport West 2-1 in the regional finals.

Niemeyer's one-time assistant and successful Xavier head coach Brian Erbe was named to replace him in August.

In October, Niemeyer accepted an offer from Waterloo West Athletic Director Dr. Tony Pappas to take over the Wahawks' struggling program. The two are old friends and longtime rivals on the girls basketball court.

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Nick Niemeyer, who was his father's chief assistant at Jefferson for the past eight years and had joined him at Waterloo, said his dad was hospitalized Friday for the kidney ailment that has plagued him for a number of years.

The elder Niemeyer missed nearly half of last season after being hospitalized.

"It's the same problem he's had in the past," Nick Niemeyer said. "His doctors didn't think he should be coaching this summer, being out in the heat and getting dehydrated."

With his dad reluctantly turning in his resignation for health reasons, Nick Niemeyer said he too would give up his assistant's position.

"Dad really hated to do this," his son said. "He feels like he has let people down. But he has to take care of his health first."

Larry Niemeyer, who was featured in Sports Illustrated two summers ago when he set the high school mark for softball victories, retired as a business teacher at Jefferson in 2011. He resigned as girls basketball coach the following year after posting 871 wins both at Jefferson and in 18 years at Adel in central Iowa.

His J-Hawk basketball team won the state tournament in 1993. He won state softball titles at Adel in 1970 and at Jefferson in 1983, 1997 and 1998. Under his helm, Jefferson went to the state softball tournament 18 times.

The softball complex at Jefferson is set to be named in Niemeyer's honor later this summer.