

Herkelman's death was top story for 2015

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 31 December 2015 21:32 - Last Updated Friday, 01 January 2016 17:49



The saddest story of 2015 was also the top story of 2015 for the Metro Sports Report website.

Bill "Herk" Herkelman, the beloved assistant baseball coach and former math teacher at Cedar Rapids Kennedy High School, died unexpectedly on Friday, July 24, just a day after the Cougars won the Class 4A substate title and earned a trip to the state tournament.

Kennedy captured the substate title on Thursday night and the next morning, Herk was gone.

The story about his unexpected death drew 8,309 hits to the MSR website, making it our most-read story in 2015, but that's not the only reason we've selected his passing as our No. 1 story. Herk touched an untold number of lives during his career as a beloved and respected teacher at Kennedy from 1967 through his retirement as a teacher in 2012, and he helped shape the lives of countless baseball players during his 36 years as a head coach and assistant coach for the Cougars.

There was an outpouring of love and admiration for Herk at his funeral service, where the Kennedy baseball players and coaches wore special No. 29 Herk T-shirts in tribute to their fallen friend. The Cougars also wore those shirts at the state tournament in Des Moines, lining up before games for the National Anthem in a straight row of 29's.

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The Cougars, still somewhat numb, reached the semifinals of the state tournament, then hugged each other and paid a final tribute to Herk before heading home from Des Moines.

The Metro Sports Report has selected the Top 10 stories for 2015, based on input from readers, our staff and the number of hits these stories received. Jim Ecker, the president of the Metro Sports Report, made the final selections.

Here they are:

NUMBER 2: KENNEDY FOOTBALL

The Kennedy football team made a remarkable run to the championship game of the Class 4A playoffs and finished with a 13-1 record, just a year after the Cougars had a 3-8 record. Tyler Dralle broke the Metro single-season rushing record and Shaun Beyer amazed fans with his versatility on offense, defense and special teams, leading to a scholarship from the Iowa Hawkeyes.

NUMBER 3: JEFFERSON GIRLS TRACK

The sprint relay team from Cedar Rapids Jefferson tied the Iowa all-time best in the 4x100 relay at Drake and set a new Iowa all-time best in the 4x200 at the Class 4A state meet. Abbie Ranschau, Jasmine Blue, Morgan Meese and Lucy Schneekloth ran on both relays for the J-Hawks.

NUMBER 4: STEPHANIE JENKS

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Jenks swept the distance races at the Drake Relays and Class 4A state meet in the 800, 1,500 and 3,000 meters as a junior, giving her eight titles at Drake and eight titles at state entering her senior year. Jenks has a chance to finish her prep career as the most successful distance runner in state history. She will run in college at Cal-Berkeley.

NUMBER 5: MARION FOOTBALL

The Marion football team and the Marion community were rocked when assistant coach Nick Perkins was fired following an allegation of verbal abuse and head coach Tony Perkins was suspended for one game. The Indians finished the season with an 0-9 record, giving them a 17-game losing streak.

NUMBER 6: COE COLLEGE PROJECT

Coe College announced plans to spend \$20 for a new performance arena to replace Eby Fieldhouse, along with a fitness center, wrestling room and other new facilities on campus. Coe plans to break ground this spring.

NUMBER 7: MOUNT MERCY'S NEW LEAGUE

Mount Mercy University joined the Heart of America Conference following the demise of the Midwest Collegiate Conference. The Mustangs were denied admission to the Chicagoland Conference before gaining admittance to the Heart of America under the guidance of former athletic director Scot Reisinger.

NUMBER 8: JAPAN-METRO CLASSIC

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More than 600 fans attended the second Japan-Metro Classic at Veterans Memorial Stadium in August. Iowa Hall of Fame coach Jim VanScoyoc led the Metro stars in the well-played game, which ended with a 6-2 victory for the visitors from Yamanashi, Japan.

NUMBER 9: COACHING MILESTONES

Four coaches in the Metro area reached significant milestones in 2015. Kirkwood women's basketball coach Kim Muhl won No. 750, Kennedy baseball coach Bret Hoyer won his 600th game at the school, Marion baseball coach Steve Fish won his 600th career game and Xavier girls basketball coach Tom Lilly won his 500th career game.

NUMBER 10: BOYS STATE SOCCER TITLES

The Xavier Saints won their seventh boys state soccer title in school history and the Linn-Mar Lions won their first in 2015.