

Roloff relishes spot in UNI Hall of Fame

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 30 September 2012 20:39 - Last Updated Sunday, 30 September 2012 20:42



He's been fired by Kennedy High School, hired by Mount Vernon and inducted into the University of Northern Iowa Hall of Fame.

It's certainly been an eventful seven months for Dennis Roloff.

Roloff, 59, was inducted into the UNI Hall of Fame Saturday in recognition of his exploits with the school's track team from 1972-75. He was an NCAA Division II All-American for the Panthers and set 11 school records, including a 440-yard mark that stood for 28 years.

Roloff and the other new members of the Hall of Fame were recognized Saturday night during Northern Iowa's football game against North Dakota State before a near-sellout crowd of 16,008 in the UNI-Dome.

Roloff paraded onto the field at halftime along with the other new Hall of Famers.

"That was the easy part," he said Sunday. "The five- or six-minute speech in the morning, that was the nervous part."

Roloff gave his speech during a banquet at the McLeod Center Saturday morning. He thanked the people who helped him succeed in college and had special words of thanks for former UNI track coach Jack Jennett, who attended the banquet.

"He was a fantastic coach and a father figure," Roloff said.

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Roloff enjoyed a long and successful career as a teacher, boys track coach and girls basketball coach at Kennedy. He compiled a 314-165 record in 21 years with the girls basketball program, including five trips to the Class 4A state tournament, but his contract was not renewed by school administrators after the 2011-12 campaign.

"I found out about the Hall of Fame probably two or three days after I was released at Kennedy. That was a real downer," he said about being dismissed by the Cougars, "and then all of a sudden it was, 'Hey, I'm going into the Hall of Fame!'"

"It's something you hoped would happen in your athletic career. There have been a lot of great athletes who have gone through there.

"That meant a lot to me. It's a great honor."

Roloff voluntarily retired as a teacher at Kennedy in 2011. He works occasionally as a substitute teacher and wanted to stay involved in high school athletics if he could, so he made a few phone calls after Bob Kintzel stepped down after a successful run as the girls basketball coach at Mount Vernon High School.

Kintzel led Mount Vernon to the Class 2A state title in 2010 and the Class 3A state runnerup trophy in 2011. Roloff liked what he heard about the school and the overall sports program and was delighted to be offered the job this summer.

"Following in Bob's footsteps is going to be kind of rough," said Roloff. "He's been pretty successful. He's done it all in the last five years."

Roloff is excited about his new assignment and looking forward to the start of practice in November.

"I think it's going to be a good transition for me and for them," he said. "It's going to be all new

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Roloff was discouraged at the way his coaching career ended at Kennedy, but he's got a new job at Mount Vernon and a shiny new spot in the UNI Hall of Fame.

He was thrilled Saturday to be remembered in Cedar Falls.

"I have a lot of great friends," he said. "It was great to be in there."