

Jesse Crawford Leaving Knox County R-I District

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By David Sharp

A desire to be closer to family and friends in Central Illinois has led Knox County High School head baseball and basketball coach Jesse Crawford to resign his KCHS teaching and coaching positions effective at the close of the current school year.

The Knox County R-I board of education accepted Coach Crawford's resignation in the Executive Session portion of the March 16, 2010 board meeting. High school principal Mr. Andy Turgeon declined comment citing the 72 hour law, prohibiting district administrators and staff from commenting on Executive Session actions for 72 hours from the meeting close.

Mr. Turgeon told the Edina Sentinel that he would comment for the district on Monday, March 22. Jesse Crawford was one of the most successful boy's basketball coaches in school history.

Mr. Crawford came to the Knox County R-I district in 2005 after graduating from Western Illinois University at Macomb. Jesse Crawford pitched three years for Illinois Central College and one year for the Leathernecks.

"When I came here, I made the commitment that I wanted to see at least one class make it all the way through," said Jesse Crawford. "When I started coaching, the seniors we have right now were freshmen."

"I have got to see the program develop full circle in the four years I have been here," said Coach Crawford of the Eagle boy's basketball program. Knox County won an average of eight games per year for a period spanning the mid 1990's until 2006. The Eagles had their first .500 season in several seasons during the 2006-07 campaign.

The Eagles beat Westran at Moberly Area Community College in 2008, winning their first boy's district basketball championship since 1971. Knox County beat Marceline in their home gym for their 2009 Class 2 district title.

Knox County R-I has won district or regional boy's basketball championships in 1965, 1971, 2008 and 2009. Knox County won 68 varsity basketball contests during Jesse Crawford's tenure.

Jesse Crawford was the KHQA and Quincy Herald-Whig area boy's Coach of the Year in 2008. He was the Kirksville Daily Express boys' Coach of the Year in 2008 and 2009. Mr. Crawford coached the Missouri team during the 2008 McDonald's Quincy Herald-Whig Classic.

He was the Northeast Missouri Sportswriters and Sportscasters Association Class 2 boy's Coach of the Year in 2008. Knox County won the Tri-Rivers Conference baseball championship in 2008. Crawford was the Conference Coach of the Year, and coached the East All Stars at the Missouri Baseball Coaches Association Class 1 all star game at St. Louis.

Jesse Crawford stated to the Edina Sentinel that he has not signed a teaching contract for the 2010-11 school year at this time. "I just felt like this was the time to make the move," Jesse Crawford said. "It was a tough decision. I wrestled around with it. After the season I went home and talked to my parents about it."

"Being away from your family that long, and not having the support network close makes it tough." Jesse Crawford grew up in the Pekin, Illinois area.

"My time here has been wonderful. I have enjoyed the community, the people here. It's been a great run for five years. We had a lot of success on the baseball field and basketball court."

The 2009 Eagle baseball season (4-13) was the only losing record of any Jesse Crawford head coached team.



Jesse Crawford, shown here coaching in the 2008 McDonald's/Quincy Herald-Whig Classic, is leaving Knox County. Crawford coached the Eagles to two of their four district titles.

Every other club was .500 or better. "I felt like I have been connected to the kids. That's going to be the toughest part, saying good bye to the friendships and some of the families you have come in contact with."

"Overall it's been a great experience," said Jesse Crawford. "It's been a great ride. You hate to see it come to an end. I hope I can find success at another high school in Central Illinois where I am from. If I end up at Knox County, or cross paths with them in the future it would be great."

Jesse Crawford was an assistant football coach, leading the Eagle defense during their 2009 District Championship season. "It's tough to leave my relationship with (KCHS head football) Coach (Steve) Ramer and (John) Weaver," said Jesse Crawford.

Knox County senior Tristan Lonberger has been part of the four year run of boy's baseball and basketball success.

"Coach Crawford is one of the best coaches to ever come to Knox County," said Tristan Lonberger. "He is like a father figure to most of the seniors around here. We look up to him in every way possible. He has helped this school's program."

"He brought a whole different look to basketball around here," said the 2010 all conference guard. "Our basketball team wasn't much until he came around. He worked with what he had and got one of the greatest (Knox County) basketball teams ever."

"I just want to thank everyone," said Jesse Crawford. "I never looked at this place as a stepping stone. If I could move this place two hours to the East, I would never leave."