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REMEMBER THE TITAN: Kinsman leaves legacy

Detroit Mercy bloomed under longtime AD

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BY VINCE ELLIS

FREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER

It was August 1971, and Brad Kinsman had a decision to make.

Kinsman, who had just finished graduate school at Minnesota, had sold his car and most of his possessions because he was on his way to Australia for a two-year high school teaching job.

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Then he received a message.

It was from the University of Detroit, also offering him a teaching position. He had interviewed with Detroit in April, but had never heard back from the university.

Kinsman thought: "That's a pretty good deal, to get into college right off the get-go to teach."

Two weeks later he was at Detroit Mercy, and the plan was to "teach only a couple of years because I wanted to still do some traveling."

Well, a couple of years became 35 years of devotion and service to the city of Detroit's only Division I university. Kinsman stepped down Dec. 31 after a 25-year stint as athletic director at Detroit Mercy.

"Brad has done a good job of raising Titan athletics during his time there," said former UDM

basketball coach and AD Dick Vitale, who picked Kinsman to head up the fledgling golf program in 1978. "He is truly a Detroit Titan. He will be sorely missed."

Caught off guard

Kinsman was named interim athletic director in 1981. The job became official six months later on Feb. 9, 1982.

During his 25 years, the Titans have grown from eight NCAA-sanctioned teams to 16 and have won 28 conference championships in 10 programs. He gave up coaching golf in 1990.

But the timing of his decision to step down caught some in the athletic department by surprise. In 2008, Ford Field will host regional games in the NCAA men's basketball tournament. In 2009, the men's Final Four will come to the downtown venue.

Detroit Mercy will be the host school for both events, just as it was in 1988 and 1991 for NCAA tournament men's basketball regionals at the Silverdome.

So why step down now?

"It was getting to the point that it was becoming more than just my job," Kinsman said recently. "The job consumes you and your identity becomes the job."

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(ROB WIDDIS/Special to the Free Press)

Detroit Mercy athletic director Brad Kinsman, center, and shot-clock operator George Kirchner, left, share a laugh at Calihan Hall during Kinsman's final days as AD.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Kinsman's memories

- **On Alfrederick Hughes, a forward at Loyola (Ill.) in the '80s who is 10th on the NCAA's career scoring list:** In 1985, in a 127-100 loss at DePaul's Alumni Gym, "We're scoring, like, 100 points, we're scoring points from everywhere, but the problem is they're scoring, like, 130. ... At some point late in the game, Don Sicko was our coach, and he took a time-out. And he gets the group together, and he looks up and in the middle of the huddle is Alfrederick Hughes, and he says: 'Coach, I don't know what you are going to call, but it ain't going to work.' "

- **On former UDM coach Ricky Birdsong, who was killed in a hate crime in 1999 in the Chicago area:** "If there was anyone who loved mankind, it was that man. I still get emotional about it. He was a dear friend. He was a lot more than a basketball coach to me. You look back and say 'Why him?' But maybe he was chosen because of what he stood for. Here was a kind, caring man, and he is killed by someone at the other end of the spectrum."

- **On cutting the baseball program in 2004:** "That was the most difficult thing I ever had to do. And I made a promise to myself I would never do it again no matter what. We tried to do the right thing. We found places for some of them. Those that stayed ended up with access to scholarships. It was one of those things where you

"It's very easy to enjoy it to the extent you don't need anything else. That was becoming an issue."

So he approached UDM vice president Michael Joseph about stepping down more than a year ago. Joseph persuaded him to wait and help lay the groundwork for a smooth transition.

Kinsman announced his decision to leave Dec. 4. Senior associate athletic director Keri Gaitner was named interim AD and is a candidate to replace Kinsman.

"I was shocked," said Mark Engel, UDM's golf coach and sports information director. "It's funny, I was sadder than he was when he told me. He looked at peace."

Many changes

To say the landscape of college athletics has changed since Kinsman, 59, became UDM's athletic director would be an understatement.

At the time, the NCAA was just starting to get serious about enforcement of rules. Gender equity and Title IX were starting to become a focal point for athletics. ESPN and the exploding popularity of the NCAA tournament were changing fundamentally the way athletic departments conducted business.

"ESPN came on board and suddenly everyone was clamoring to get on television," Kinsman said of the cable network that was formed in 1979. "At that point the dynamics of the business started to change because now it became a question of 'how can I get on television?' because that was the way to get your program noticed."

At one time, Calihan Hall was the place to be. The intimate arena rocked during the glory days, when Vitale took the Titans to the NCAA tournament and knocked off bigger schools. The team enjoyed a renaissance in the late '90s, when current coach Perry Watson led the Titans to NCAA berths in 1998 and '99.

But crowds are sparse at Calihan now.

The Titans, 4-9 this season, haven't had a winning record since 2003-04, and entertainment options for sports fans have grown over the years.

"Trying to build a season-ticket base or a fan base is difficult because tastes have changed," Kinsman said. "And with your fan base getting older, I think things can get worse."

"But that being said, if you can have a good start like Butler (the fellow Horizon League member is ranked 13th), you can gain some attention. But that's what it takes for some of these programs to get noticed. How often is that going to happen?"

Kinsman doesn't think rebuilding is a lost cause.

"I think what we have to do is make the product as good as you can be, do what you can to make it comfortable and convenient for people to come to games," Kinsman said, "but at the same time if you are thinking it's going to be like the days of the '70s ... it's just another day and you have to come to accept that."

Kinsman's future

Kinsman has been offered the opportunity to stay at UDM to head up some projects. He hasn't decided, but the administration would love for him to remain in some capacity.

Meanwhile, he plans to golf more and take classes "to learn some stuff on the computer that my staff thinks I can't do."

He also wants to spend more time with his wife, Georgene. The couple has two daughters, Stephanie, 22, and Jennifer, 24. And the Nova Scotia native will finally get around to traveling.

But you can still count on seeing Kinsman cheering UDM at athletic competitions.

Hey, he's still a Titan.

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knew you had to do it. We went ahead and did it, but I'll carry that with me forever. That's my biggest negative as I look back on the years.

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 • On getting an NCAA men's basketball tournament at-large bid in 1998, if you look back at something that gives you goose bumps, that was it. Sitting in the Titan club room watching on TV and have no idea if you are in the name pops up and the weight of the world is off your shoulders. That was the high point. You look forward and see the fans and you realize they deserve it."

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