

Retired Mountaineer football coach Denny Hicks going into Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame

(Third in a four-part series of this year's Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame inductees. The dinner and ceremony are May 14 at 6 p.m. at Kings Mountain High School. Tickets are \$10 and are available from any member of the Hall of Fame Committee).

By GARY STEWART
Editor of The Herald

There's an old saying that behind every good man there's a good woman. In Denny Hicks' case, make that two.

If it hadn't been for an early-life lesson from his mother about seeing things through, Hicks may not have become a football coach.

And much of his success as a high school coach can be attributed to the support of his wife, Catherine, who was at every game cheering on his teams and making sure players from both schools were fed after the game.

Hicks had the longest tenure (12 years) and won the most games (65) of any football coach in KMHS history. His 1985 team was the first since 1964 to participate in the state playoffs, and his 1986 team was the first since '64 to win a conference championship.

Three of Hicks' teams competed in the state playoffs, and two of them knocked off top-ranked teams along the way.

In addition, Hicks coached the KMHS golf team to five consecutive undefeated seasons and the 1990 state championship. He was also

a head track and wrestling coach at other schools before coming to Kings Mountain.

Hicks credits his success to the Lord looking out for him and his family, fellow coaches, good athletes and administrators that supported him and gave him the time and opportunity to be successful.

But that early advice - or order might be a better word - from his mother was what started it all.

As a ninth grade student in Burlington, Hicks went out for football without telling his parents, and after three days wanted to quit. When he told his mother, she said she told him "you started and you're going to finish."

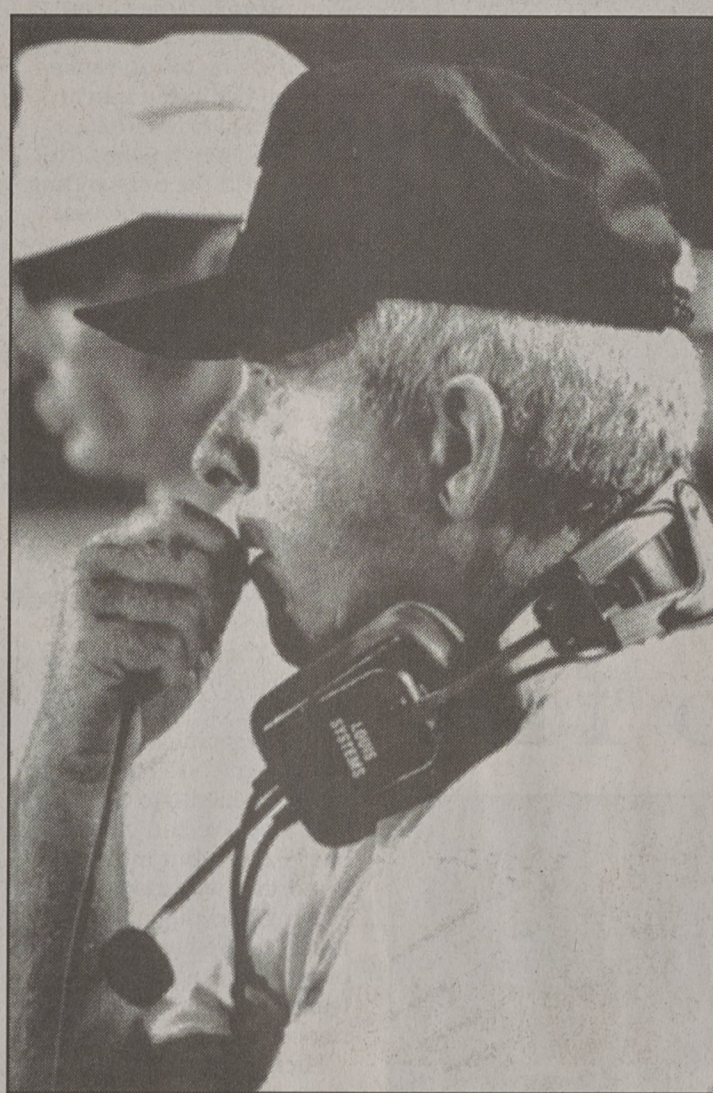
After a few more days of practice, Hicks said he began to experience some success on the field and grew to love the game.

Before his sophomore year the family moved to Wadesboro, and Hicks says he knew that year that coaching was something he wanted to do.

"The Lord knew that I had to get focused pretty early," he said. "From that point on I tried to do what I had to do to get in college. The Lord blessed me with a wife that gave me even more focus while I was in college. I needed it."

Prior to landing his first head football coaching job at Swannanoa Owen, Hicks spent several years as an assistant under North Carolina coaching legends.

His first job after graduating Gardner-Webb College was as an assistant under Ed Emory at Wadesboro. Emory later coached on the colle-



Denny Hicks served the longest tenure (12 years) and won more games (65) than any other football coach in KMHS history.

giate level for several years, including a stint as running backs coach at Clemson when the Tigers won the NCAA championship under Danny Ford. Emory is now head coach at Richmond County High School.

Hicks later moved to West Henderson, where he was defensive coordinator under Don Slaughter.

"I guess that's where my

philosophy developed," Hicks said. "The kids were hard nosed and would do anything in the world for you. I realized we could practice offense for four hours a day and weren't going to outscore everybody. If we could play good defense and have a good kicking game and keep games close we'd have a chance to win."

Later, Hicks got a call from Jim Levine offering him the defensive coordinator's position at Owen. However, he was also offered the defensive coordinator's job at Asheville under another NC coaching legend, Lou Fogle. He accepted that job and stayed there when Fogle left and Bruce Peterson came in as head coach.

After Hicks was at Asheville for three years, Levine resigned as head coach at Owen and recommended Hicks as head coach. Hicks took the job and over the next five years led Owen to a 35-15-5 overall record.

Owen had gone 1-9 the year before Hicks arrived, and had only two starters returning. One quit the team during summer practice.

Hicks recalled walking by the gym one day and seeing a tall young man shooting a basketball. He marveled at the youngster's quickness, especially his foot quickness.

"I could tell he would be an outstanding quarterback," Hicks said. "He hadn't seen me watching but I went up and asked if he played football. He said, 'no.' I told him if he'd play football he could be the quarterback."

The young man, Kerner Long, accepted Hicks' invitation and led the team to a 9-1 record and earned a scholarship to Appalachian State.

After five years with the Warhorses, Hicks received a call from KMHS football coach and AD Dan Brooks, who was looking for a defensive coordinator. Lou Fogle had suggested to

Brooks that he contact Hicks. Hicks accepted the job and over the next two seasons turned the Mountaineer defense into one of the toughest in the area.

"I'm still mad at Dan for leaving," Hicks joked. "I enjoyed those two years under him. He was another great influence in my coaching philosophy. His work ethic and ability to deal with kids was phenomenal."

After Brooks resigned to go into college coaching, KMHS promoted Hicks to the head job.

His first team, 1983, finished 6-4 after going 3-7 the year before.

"We started with a totally new staff, and I really liked the coaches that came in with us and the players responded well to what we were doing," Hicks said.

"They worked hard and did everything we asked them to do. We had a little bit of philosophy change and they responded to it. We kept a lot of games close and lost a couple of close ones."

Hicks and the Mountaineers were dealt a severe blow just prior to the start of the 1985 season when their outstanding running back and linebacker Tracy Johnson transferred to Kannapolis. The Mountaineer coaching staff had built their offense around Johnson, who had gained over 2,000 yards the previous two seasons, and they slipped to a 1-9 record.

The Mountaineers played a lot of young players, and it would pay off the next two

See Hicks, 2B

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