

Butka retires from coaching sports at Amherst High, will still teach

by **PATRICK J. NAGY**
Reporter

A familiar face roaming the sidelines will be missing once the basketball season begins this winter.

Ken Butka, who has coached basketball for 29 years and sports at Amherst High School for 32 years, is retiring from coaching. Butka will continue to teach math and serve as math chairman at the high school.

Butka cited the demands of teaching combined with not being able to coach sports in his own style as reasons for hanging up the whistle.

"I really found myself dragging myself to practice sometimes rather than always looking forward to it," said Butka, who made the announcement public at the Amherst winter sports banquet. "I think I did a good job this year, so I would rather leave while people thought I was doing OK than have them talk and say 'Why doesn't he leave?'"

"He's been like a rock," said Amherst Athletics Director Nancy Riccio. "Whenever I need a second opinion, he's always someone I can depend on for sound advice. He's a good role model for coaches and is a great teacher."

Butka called leaving the coaching realm as "the toughest decision I've ever had to make."

"I'm sad about it right now," said Butka. "When November comes around, people have told me I'm going to have a tough time."

The always high-energy Butka leaves behind an impressive coaching resume. After a two-year stint as girls ninth grade cheerleading coach, he coached girls varsity tennis coach from 1977 to 85, accumulating an overall record of 116-2, including a winning streak of 81 matches, nine division titles, and in eight of the nine years, sent girls to the New York State Championships. Seven out of the nine years they were the No. 1 team in Western New York.

In 1985, WKBW-TV awarded him Super Seven Coach of the Year. To gain more notoriety, Butka's players had T-shirts created called "Butka's Babes."

"At that time, tennis was a big sport," said Butka, who with Ray LaPorte won the Town of Amherst doubles title at a bicentennial event in 1976 and won the Town of Amherst singles title in 1980. "I always tease myself I was the right person at the right place at the right time."

In his tenure as basketball coach from 1978 to 2007, 21 of his teams had a winning record or at least a .500 record. Butka coached five years as boys JV coach, two years as girls varsity coach where he coached his daughter, Kristin, but loved the 22 years he coached boys ninth grade basketball.

"It's probably the last time teaching is most important and winning is secondary," said Butka. "No one's going to remember if you go 14-0 on modified but people will remember if you went 2-14 on varsity."

Butka's place in the history of Amherst athletics has not gone unnoticed. On June 7, he was inducted into the Amherst Athletic Hall of Fame. Deputy Superintendent Paul Wietig, a longtime friend of Butka, nominated him.

"Whether in the classroom or on the playing fields of Amherst, Ken is known for his impeccable level of integrity and concern for the whole student — academics and sports are part of the total athlete," Wietig said in his nomination letter. "He sets high standards and is an exemplary role model for all."

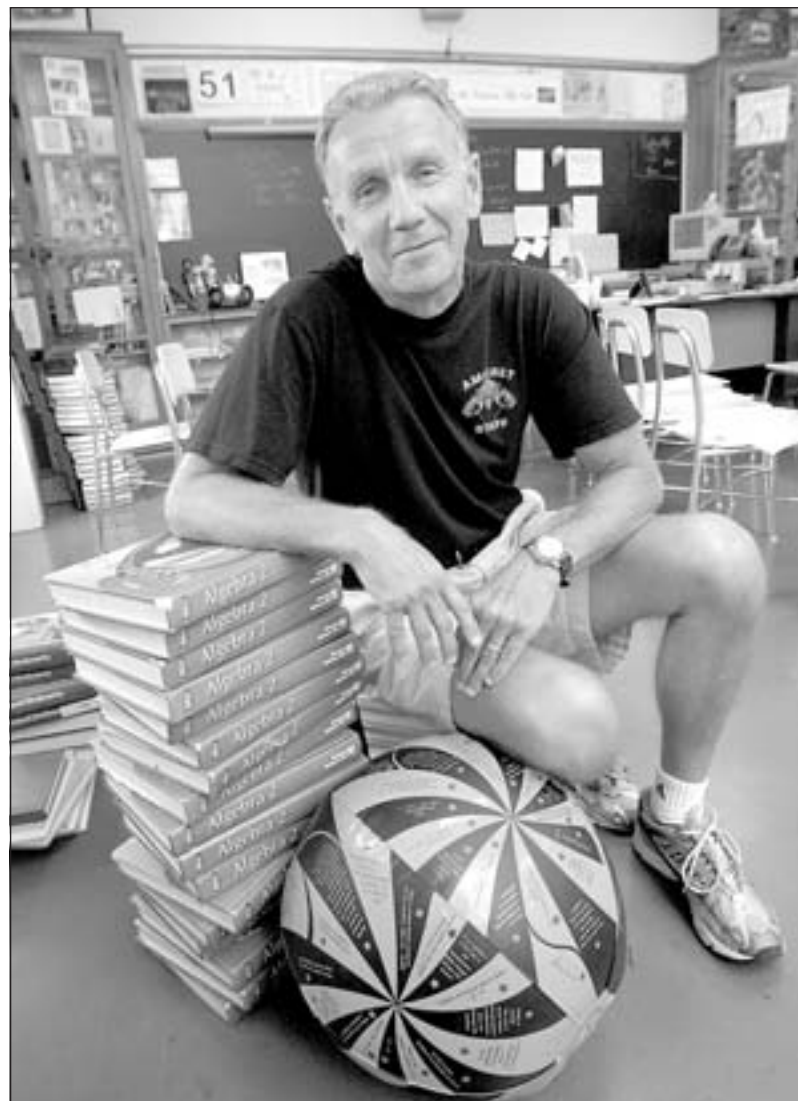
"There are maybe 75 people in the Hall of Fame and only seven or eight coaches," added Butka. "It's an unbelievable honor."

While Butka won't be coaching full-time, he might help out the varsity boys basketball team in some capacity this winter.

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Memorial charity golf tournament slated

The Howard and Sandy Voss Memorial Charity Golf Tournament will be held on Monday, Aug. 20 at Glen Oak Golf Course, 711 Smith Road, East Amherst. Registration and lunch are at 11 a.m. with the tournament starting at noon. Dinner, awards and basket raffles are scheduled for 5 p.m. The cost is \$150 per player or \$525 per foursome. Dinner only is \$50. All proceeds will go toward Meals on Wheels of WNY. For more information, call Maria Fox at 868-1538 or e-mail mfox@vossdentallabs.com.



Ken Butka has retired from coaching sports at Amherst High School but will remain a math teacher and chair of the sports department.

Photo by Joe Eberle

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Canisius College hosts golf classic, auction

Canisius College will hold the tenth annual Blue and Gold Golf Classic and Auction on Monday, July 30 at Brierwood Country Club in Hamburg.

The event will feature tee times of 7:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. with a 124-golfer limit at each start time. The cost for the event is \$175 for one golfer or \$650 for a foursome. The price includes a full day of golf, lunch, on-course refreshments, and an open bar and sit-down dinner following the event.

Tee signs are available for \$100, which is a four-color photograph of a Golden Griffin athlete on an 18x24 sign placed on a designated tee. The sign, which is suitable for framing, is given to the sponsor at the conclusion of the day's activities.

A corporate foursome costs \$750 and includes all golf events for four people along with a tee sign and recognition at dinner. Admission to the open bar and dinner,

which starts at 6:15 p.m., costs \$60 per person. Sponsorships are available for a wide variety of opportunities, including golf balls, lunch, dinner, driving range, putting contest and shootout.

The event benefits the Blue & Gold Club, the official fundraising organization for Canisius College athletics.

To sign up for the event, visit gogriffs.com or call event chair John Maddock at 888-2977.

NHL Draft doesn't switch DeSimone's routine

by **PATRICK J. NAGY**
Reporter

Phil DeSimone didn't want to change his Saturday routine although it wasn't a typical day.

That's because the East Amherst resident was selected by the Washington Capitals in the third round, 84th pick overall, of Saturday's NHL draft.

Instead of hearing the good news at Nationwide Arena in Columbus, Ohio, site of the draft, DeSimone checked his voice mail after completing his usual morning workout at the Buffalo Athletic Club by the Eastern Hills Mall.

"I saw I had 10 voice mails and on one of them, my advisor, Jay Fee, told me I was drafted," said DeSimone. "I thought he was joking. I listened to the next message

and the next one and each person was saying congratulations."

Passed over by every NHL team last year, DeSimone's draft eligibility expired on Saturday. DeSimone thought he was going to be drafted in a later round.

It's no surprise DeSimone was chosen. Two months earlier, the 5-11, 193-pound center earned United States Hockey League Player of the Year honors for the Sioux City Musketeers, finishing second in the league in scoring with 26 goals and 47 assists for 73 points. He also had a plus/minus rating of plus-13.

"Just because I was drafted doesn't mean I will stop working hard," said DeSimone. "I've only done something that someone took notice of. Now I have to play even harder if I expect to play in



Phil DeSimone

the NHL." Washington was one of three

NHL teams DeSimone thought would draft him. The front runners were the New Jersey Devils and Dallas Stars.

DeSimone and top overall draft pick Patrick Kane, selected by the Chicago Blackhawks, were the only two players from Buffalo selected.

Twenty-six players from the USHL were taken, including DeSimone's Sioux City linemate Max Pacioretty, who went No. 22 in round 1 to the Montreal Canadiens. Pacioretty was named USHL Rookie of the Year.

"Linemates getting drafted doesn't happen often, so that was pretty cool," said DeSimone, who will attend Washington's rookie camp in two weeks.

DeSimone, 20, finished his three-year career with Sioux City

with 56 goals and 92 assists for 135 points. He will be headed this fall on a full scholarship to play hockey at the University of New Hampshire.

DeSimone has played hockey since age 6 and played travel hockey with the Amherst Knights and Buffalo Regals. He attended Nichols his freshman and sophomore years of high school. He lived in Canada for the first half of his junior year, playing in the Western Junior "B" league of the Ontario Hockey Association, then transferred to Williamsville South for the second half of his junior year. Between his junior and senior year, DeSimone was drafted 21st out of 200 players to Sioux City.

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