

End of an Osage institution

Longtime Indian coach Les Hultgren retiring after this school year.

By BRENT MAYCOCK
The Capital-Journal

OSAGE CITY — Les Hultgren is wearing what he calls, “A big ole Indian smile” these days.

None of it really has to do with the fact that after more than 30 years in the education and coaching business, Hultgren is retiring at the end of the school year from Osage City. In fact, most of Hultgren doesn't want to give up doing a job he loves to do.

“It's going to be tougher than I thought,” said Hultgren, 57, who began his coaching and teaching career in 1968. “You always know that someday you're going to quit, but when it comes right down to it, it's pretty tough. It got into my blood and after that, it's hard to get out.”

Instead of wistfully looking forward to his post-teaching/coaching career, Hultgren is happily watching his final team flourish. His Indian baseball team is off to a 7-1 start — the best in school history.

And wouldn't you know it, the team is just the kind Hultgren loved coaching during his career. Osage's diamond crew is somewhat short on experience — five freshmen or sophomores start — but makes up for it with a blue-collar work ethic that symbolizes its coach.

“I like taking kids like this year, who don't have the most talent in the world, but who will work hard

and try to learn the fundamentals,” said Hultgren, who has been the only baseball coach in Osage City history. “I've had more success with kids like that — that flat out-work other people. That's the type of athlete I was. I wasn't the most skilled, but I'd outwork about anybody.”

Hultgren has taken that attitude from his playing days at Kansas Wesleyan and applied them at every stop on his coaching career. He began at Pratt and then made stops at Nemaha Valley, Peabody and Chetopa before finally settling down in Osage City in 1980.

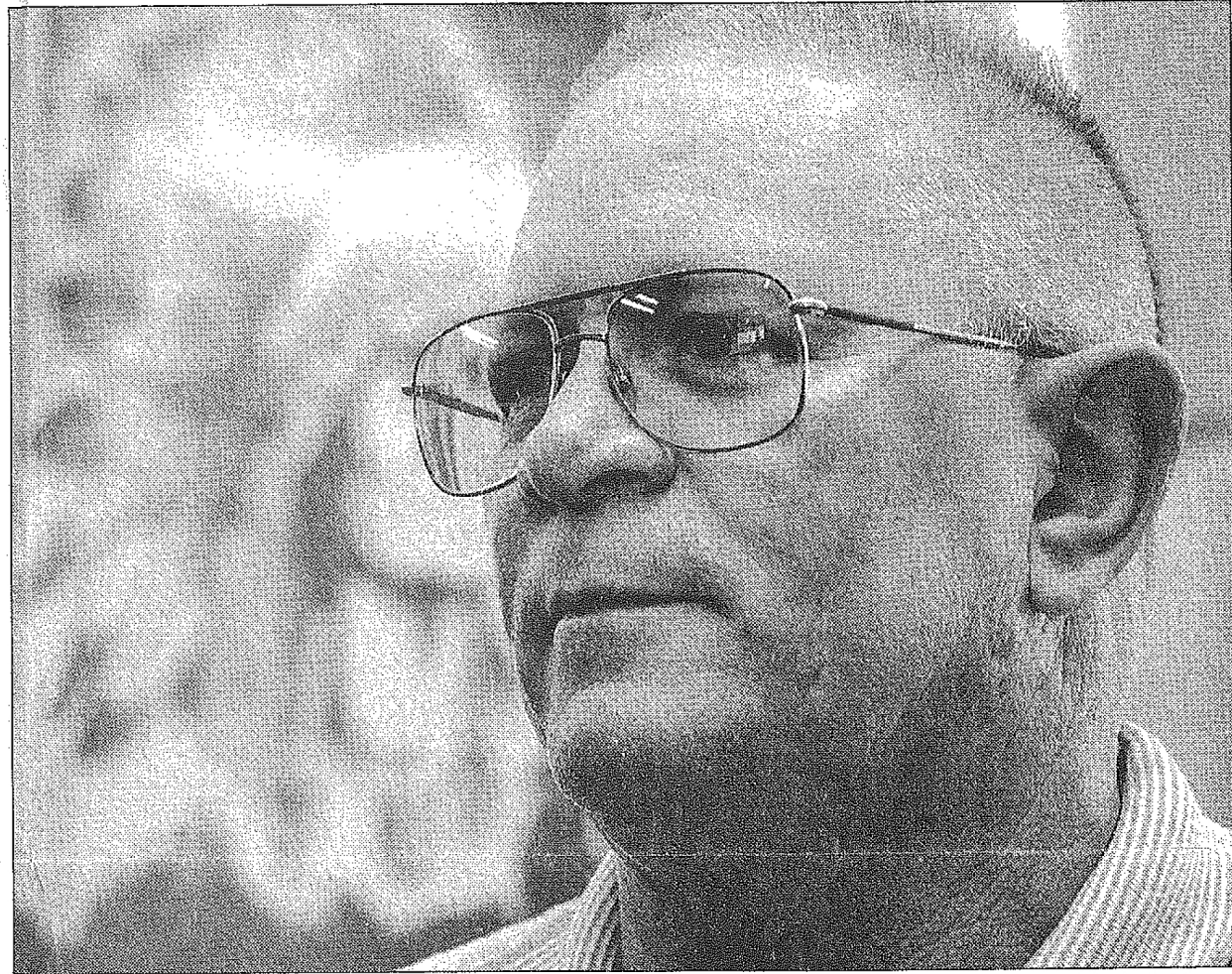
He didn't limit himself to any one sport in particular, coaching football, basketball, track and baseball. In fact, at one point during the middle of his stint at Osage City, he was the head coach for football, basketball and baseball at the same time.

“It was fun,” Hultgren said. “I was doing what I wanted to do. Whatever sport was in season was the one I liked the best.”

He stopped coaching basketball seven years ago and stepped down from his football job in 1996. And now, he will relinquish his final duties with the school at the end of May.

Hultgren knows he will miss it. “I like the classroom very much,” Hultgren said. “I enjoy teaching and coaching — I guess the two go hand in hand. But I'll miss teaching as much as coaching, I'm sure.”

As has become the case with most of today's athletes, “retired”



— Brent Maycock/The Capital-Journal

Long-time Osage City coach/teacher Les Hultgren will retire at the end of the school year after more than 30 years. Hultgren coached three sports at Osage City for several years, but now coaches just baseball.

is a relative term in Hultgren's world. Instead of hopping on a horse and riding into the sunset, Hultgren will be taking a seat in a patrol car. He's accepted a job as a sheriff's deputy in Osage City — a job he performed while attending college — and said he had a set of

goals surrounding the new position.

“Staying active and keep trying to help people,” Hultgren said.

But where you won't find Hultgren spending his golden years is on the golf course.

“I never got that attracted to

golf,” Hultgren said. “My wife told me that I love football and basketball more than I do her. I told her, ‘That may be right, but I love you better than golf.’”

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