

Dean calls it quits

By Tom Baer
staff writer

It was hard for some fans to imagine Ken Dean as a basketball coach. It'll be even harder for them to imagine a North Farmington High School basketball team without Ken Dean at its helm.

Dean, who resigned recently after 12 years as the Raiders' basketball coach, didn't play the game in high school (Bay City Central) or college (Western Michigan University), but managed to parlay his experience as a student manager into a 23-year coaching career.

Dean's actual participation in sports was limited to a year of varsity golf at Bay City Central. But he spent plenty of time on the football field and in the

gym as student manager of the football and basketball teams.

"When I was in the eighth grade, I couldn't wait to turn 16 so I could quit school," said Dean, recalling how he became involved in athletics. "When I was in the second grade, I skipped so much school that they held me back a year."

"But the (high school) drafting teacher lived two doors down and he happened to be one of the coaches. He got me interested in managing the teams. I never had trouble in school again."

AFTER GRADUATION from Western in 1959, Dean took a teaching job at Ionia High School and applied for the position of ninth grade basketball coach.

"When I was interviewed, I told them

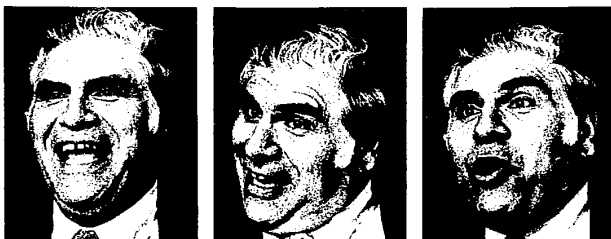
that I'd never taken a course in coaching," Dean said, "but that I'd been to a few practices (as a student manager) in my life and I knew what it was like in a gym and a locker room."

After two years of coaching lower-level basketball and football at Ionia, Dean moved to North Farmington, where he was an assistant football and basketball coach until taking over the head basketball job.

Dean, who teaches drafting at North, cited excessive demands on his time — especially in the summer with the obligatory camps and scrimmages — as his main reason for leaving coaching.

"I got to the point where I didn't want to give as much time in the summers as I think you have to run a run

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photos by STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Ron Luciano: "(Mark) Fidrych talked to the ball because he wanted it to do good things for him. I talked to the fans because I didn't want them to boo me. And I talked to the players and managers because I can't keep my mouth shut for 2½ hours."

Ramblin' man

Luciano talks a good game

By Jim Hughes
staff writer

It only takes one word to get Ron Luciano talking: Baseball.

Given the lead, the former American League baseball umpire will ramble for hours on end.

Luciano currently is on the eastern tour. He will visit Chicago, Baltimore, Washington, Boston, New York and Atlanta before he goes west to perform the same functions.

Luciano currently is on the eastern tour. He will visit Chicago, Baltimore, Washington, Boston, New York and Atlanta before he goes west to perform the same functions. The 6-foot-4 ex-umpire, who gained much publicity as baseball's most eccentric non-playing participant, is known for his unusual antics on the baseball diamond. During his career, which spanned from 1968 to 1978, Luciano talked with players, fans, managers, and virtually anyone who would lend an ear.

In lieu of calling base runners out, he shot them out with an index finger held

like a hand gun. Instead of twirling his finger in the air to signal a home run, he'd jump up and twirl his massive frame in a spinning motion. If a ball was foul, Luciano would let everybody within hearing distance know the ball was indeed foul.

HE IS AS outspoken about baseball as Ralph Nader is about the automobile industry. But now, after years of conversations with players, countless rhubarbs with Baltimore manager Earl Weaver, and flight after flight from one city to the next, Luciano is traveling to help push the sale of his book.

"Traveling is easy," the 44-year-old New York native said, "because the pilot drives. I just get on the plane, have a few drinks, and I don't worry about a thing. That's the easy part. It's hard to sell my own book. If you ask me if it was hard to write it, yes, it's very difficult, because you had to get up at 9 o'clock and say 'OK, now I'm going to write a chapter.' I wrote the thing — and I'm a great journalist, just super — 600 pages, and it had one period. It was the world's longest sentence."

Needing help, Luciano contacted Da-

vid Fisher, an author of 16 books, who worked in the baseball commissioner's office. Fisher co-wrote the book to give Luciano the direction he needed.

"Then it was easy," Luciano recalled. "And the tour is easy, mostly because I'm talking about baseball more so than the book. And every time I talk about baseball, my eyes light up, and I get all excited. It's a natural high for me."

"I sold insurance for a while, and I couldn't get excited about selling a million-dollar policy. I taught school for a few years. . . see, I played football for so many years, and when I taught school, if the kids got a 30 (percent), I gave them 100 (percent), because that's the way we did it in football. I couldn't get excited about school work."

"BUT IF Detroit comes into Cleveland, right? And they're trailing by four runs going into the top of the ninth, and somebody hits a grand slam, that's exciting. That's baseball. So that's why I wrote the book. Just to tell the good part about baseball. I'm sick and tired about reading the bad things about it."

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Ken Dean, pictured above just after his 1978 North Farmington basketball team had been knocked out of the state tournament, recently resigned his coaching position.



'Who's Bob Elson?' Sox fan remembers

Bob Elson died. It took 13 months for the news to reach me.

"Who's Bob Elson?" asked a co-worker after I'd proposed writing this little remembrance.

"Where've you been?" chided another, known for his clever remarks. "The first time I heard of him was 11 o'clock this morning."

OK, wise guys, have your joke. Bob Elson was from another place (Chicago) and another time (early 1960s). And the news of his passing — on March 10, 1981 at the age of 77 — stirred some memories of my formative years in suburban Milwaukee.

Bob Elson, for everyone's information, was a sports announcer with a long and storied history with the Chicago baseball teams.

He announced the Cubs games in the late 1930s, getting the commercial across by ordering his listeners to "Watch the Fords go by." By the time he got me for a listener, he was doing the White Sox games on WCFL, which used to bill itself as "The Voice of Labor in Chicago."

After the baseball season, Elson would do a daily and nightly interview show on "The Voice of Labor" from the Pump Room of the Ambassador East, a posh downtown hotel.

In 1979, he was inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y.

OF COURSE I listened to Bob Elson. Didn't everyone in "Chicagoland"? I was a member of a large (but devoted) group of Elson fans. We would have called ourselves Bob Elson groups, I suppose, had that word existed.

We followed the Sox — winners of the 1959 American League pennant after a 40-year drought — more closely than the hometown Milwaukee Braves. And after the season we tuned in every

night to see who Bob would be pumping in the Pump Room.

The thing about old Bob was his almost total lack of emotion in broadcasting. He always came across as the composed and dignified gentleman never mind that Earl Torgerson had just



clouted a ninth-inning homer to ensure Early Wynn's pitching victory, or that Luis Aparicio had just stolen his 50th base.

The man just would not get excited. In many ways, he was the exact opposite of the late Bob Ufer, who regularly went berserk on the air over the exploits of his Michigan Wolverines.

It was the same with the Pump Room program. After the theme music ("Around the World in 80 Days"), Bob would come on and say, "And now we're gonna talk to . . ." His routine was so predictable.

"An article was written about him,

and it mentioned his 'economy of style,'" remembered Elroy Coughlin, an old friend in Chicago. "There was nothing unnecessary in his broadcasting."

Said an executive for Chicago's WGN, which employed Elson at the beginning and end of his career, "He had his own special style, and it marked him as one of the great ones."

IN A WAY it was fitting that Elson got to broadcast the White Sox during their glory year. The 1959 team was known as the "Go-Go" Sox — thanks mainly to Aparicio's 55 stolen bases — but it wasn't so "go-go," really.

The team was a collection of old-timers nearing the end. There was Wynn (age 39), Gerry Staley (39), Torgerson (34), Billy Goodman (33), Nelson Fox (32). The average age, I remember reading at the time, was somewhere in the early 30s.

The team was kind of like its broadcaster — not too exciting, kind of staid, really. But it got the job done. And it had a big following.

Another thing that was nearing the end in Chicago was baseball on WCFL. Sometime in the mid '60s, the station dropped the sport — and Elson — and went rock and roll.

I heard nothing from Elson until 1976 when I caught him on the car radio in western Michigan. He was doing a sports update on WGN. He sounded just like the old days, and I remember wondering if he still did the Pump Room show.

"He was 77 (when he died), but nobody believed it," Coughlin said. "He looked so youthful and always seemed to have so much energy."

"He loved baseball and doing that interview show and playing gin rummy, but his biggest thrill was being inducted into the Hall of Fame."

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