



ERNIE KIRKMAN

ATHLETIC DIRECTOR & COACH 1951-65

Known as the “father” of track & field at Portage High School. Arriving in 1951, Ernie Kirkman laid the foundation of Mustang athletics that is carried on today. Serving as coach & athletic director during Portage’s growing years, he saw the additions of the gymnasium, and the golf, wrestling, and cross-country teams. As the cross-country coach, he led the Mustangs to a state championship in their 2nd season. In 1957 Kirkman stepped down from coaching to focus on the planning of McCamley field. Coach Kirkman is also credited with starting one of PCHS’ most storied athletic traditions: putting championship pictures on the wall. As PHS split in 1965, Kirkman retired from the AD position, but continued to care for McCamley field and was a track official until he retired from teaching in 1977. *Biggest thrill in athletics- “coaching state championship cross country team, taking PHS from KVA to the Wolverine to the Big 6, designing and overseeing PHS’s gym and McCamley Field”.*

PORTAGE HIGH SCHOOL and OTHER HONORS

Portage High School Accomplishments

- Served as Athletic Director from 1951-1965
- Varsity Basketball Coach from 1951-1954 winning one district title
- Started the Cross Country program in 1955 placing third in the state
- Coached the 1956 Cross Country team to the Class B State Championship
- Track coach from 1951-1957
- Retired from coaching in 1957 to supervise the design and construction of McCamley Field along with a majority of the present athletic complex.
- Served as Athletic Director from 1951-1965 taking Portage Central from the Class C KVA Conference to the Class B Wolverine Conference to the Class A Big 6 Conference.
- Continued as a Portage Central teacher and track starter until his retirement in 1977

Personal Accomplishments

- Ernie graduated from Delta High School in Ohio. He was a captain of both the football and track teams leading his track team to two

state championships. He personally was a state champion winning the 440 yard run

- Played Varsity football and ran track at Adrian College from 1938-1941. He was offered a contract by the Detroit Lions shortly before Pearl Harbor, but opted to serve in the Army Air Corp from 1942-1945.
- Became the Head Track coach at Adrian College in 1948, and was then hired in 1949 as the Head Track Coach, Assistant Football Coach, and Athletic Director at Kalamazoo College.
- In 1951, Ernie was then hired by Portage Township High School to serve as instructor, coach, and athletic director.
- For those who knew Ernie, he was known as one of the nicest man one would ever meet up until his death in August of 2002. He was a person who never sought the spotlight or praise for his efforts in any field. He was a master of many talents and used them to further the hopes and ambitions of many people.