

HIGH SCHOOLS

Retiring Ambrose takes a new track

He'll hit the road — to more meets

By Michael James
Of The Detroit News Staff

Kermit Ambrose, who has directed the Huron Relays for the past 20 years, is ready to step down. At 79, he has been involved in track and field for 55 years.

So how will the former Birmingham Seaholm coach spend his retirement?

Attending track meets, of course.



Kermit Ambrose

"I'm a track nut," said Ambrose, who began his career in 1935 while a senior at Wayne-Nebraska State Teachers College.

"I'll be 80 in January, so I'll work and finish the track season this year. After the cross-country season next fall, I'll just go around and watch meets and not do any officiating."

Ambrose, who has never married, says he cannot count the miles he has logged driving to meets across the country. He traveled all over the world to watch competition and has been to all the Olympic trials since 1960, except for 1976.

"I went to Helsinki for the '83 world championships and to the Rome championships in '87," he said. "And I took in a meet in Munich and Brussels."

In addition, Ambrose said, "I've seen all the NCAA indoor championships and officiated all those. I've seen them all since they started in the 1960s at Cobo Hall in Detroit."

In fact, there is not much Ambrose has not seen since he started coaching football, basketball and track at Creston (Nebraska) High in 1935. While teaching general science, Ambrose did what most coaches of the era did: he became the coach.

"You had one coach at the school and there were three sports," Ambrose said. "So you coached all of them."

He was successful in each.

After several years in Nebraska, Ambrose earned his master's degree in health and recreation at the University of Michigan. From there, he went in 1940 to coach football at Northwestern Military and Naval Academy at Lake Geneva, Wis.

Fall 1941 took him to Roseville High in Illinois, where his football team tied its first game, then won eight in a row as the fifth-highest-scoring team in the state. His basketball team almost made the Illinois Sweet 16, winning 23 of 26.

Then came World War II and Army service. Ambrose spent most of

the next three years as a weather forecaster stationed in Italy.

Immediately after his discharge in 1945, he returned to coaching, this time as an assistant at Maine Township High in Illinois.

"I was released on a Friday and had two interviews on Saturday," recalled Ambrose, who took the job at Maine that Sunday.

Ambrose moved to Michigan to coach at Birmingham Seaholm when it was built in 1953. He continued teaching until 1976 and coaching till 1967.

At Seaholm, Ambrose concentrated on track and cross country, amassing 55 championships and two state titles. His teams twice were state runners-up. The cross-country team won 95 of 112 meets and was a state qualifier 12 of 13 years, never finishing lower than seventh.

In 1963, the cross-country team won the title with seven runners in the top 25. Seaholm's record 41 points stood until 1988, when Monroe High totaled 38.

Ambrose's track team won 94 of 100 dual meets and set a still-standing record of 76 consecutive dual-meet victories.

Ambrose said he would have liked a few more championships.

"There's always something you would like to change," he said. "But there have been a lot of memorable moments, and I've enjoyed them all. I have no regrets. I've had a fantastic life."

Ambrose has spent much of his time in recent years as a meet director, organizing high school events and officiating. Other meets he organizes include the Oakland County Cross Country Championships, his namesake Ambrose-Eccentric Relays, and the Birmingham Middle School Championships. He has run a cross-country camp each summer for 20 years.

As an ambassador of track, Ambrose has received countless awards for devotion to the sport. During his final year at Seaholm, Ambrose was voted Teacher of the Year. When an all-weather track was put in during the 1980s, it was named in his honor.

Looking forward to his 80th birthday and to taking it easier, Ambrose plans to work his way around the country, going from meet to meet. He is not worried he will grow tired of the sport or get lonely.

"I'm the luckiest guy in the world," he said. "There have been a lot of fantastic people I've (taught) over the years. Now they are a lot of doctors and lawyers scattered around out there. I have more young men and women to call my own than anyone else in the whole world."