

Jeff Graham: Eliminating the athletic director spells trouble for South Kitsap

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Six years ago, I wrote a [feature story on the various roles athletic directors fill](http://archive.kitsapsun.com/news/kitsaps-prep-athletic-directors-filling-a-demanding-role-ep-298556747-355847781.html) (<http://archive.kitsapsun.com/news/kitsaps-prep-athletic-directors-filling-a-demanding-role-ep-298556747-355847781.html>) at the high school level.

All athletic director jobs are different, but here are some of the responsibilities inherent to the position: game scheduling, transportation, lining up officials/referees, budgeting, grade checks, hirings/firings, maintenance and/or facility oversight, game/tournament supervision, league/district/state responsibility, maintaining relationships with athletes, coaches, parents, media, school administrators, community members.

Athletic directors are the point men and women for athletic departments. There's tons of work done, both in plain view and behind the scenes.

South Kitsap's athletic director at the time, Ed Santos, summed up the position perfectly.

"The job has so many different pieces to the puzzle," Santos said. "There are so many different hats you have to wear."

All those hats fell to the floor Wednesday night [after the South Kitsap school board voted](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2019/05/09/fewer-pink-slips-come-south-kitsap-school-board-walks-back-cuts/1153395001/) (<https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2019/05/09/fewer-pink-slips-come-south-kitsap-school-board-walks-back-cuts/1153395001/>) — based on the recommendation of Superintendent Karst Brandsma — to cut several administrative and teaching positions to save money heading into the 2019-20 school year. One of the positions being eliminated is the athletic director position, currently filled by Kelly Kirk.

Kirk, who replaced Santos prior to the 2016-17 school year, declined to comment Thursday when I asked him about his job being cut. He said he plans to seek employment in school administration in the immediate future.

More on South Kitsap budget: [Fewer pink slips as school board walks back cuts](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2019/05/09/fewer-pink-slips-come-south-kitsap-school-board-walks-back-cuts/1153395001/) (<https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2019/05/09/fewer-pink-slips-come-south-kitsap-school-board-walks-back-cuts/1153395001/>)

More on South Kitsap budget: [Teachers blast district's plan to cut 47 positions](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2019/05/02/south-kitsap-school-district-plan-cut-teaching-positions/3648876002/) (<https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2019/05/02/south-kitsap-school-district-plan-cut-teaching-positions/3648876002/>)

More on school funding: [Here's what the levy lid lift means for Kitsap taxpayers](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2019/05/04/heres-what-levy-lid-lift-means-kitsap-taxpayers/1090134001/) (<https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2019/05/04/heres-what-levy-lid-lift-means-kitsap-taxpayers/1090134001/>)

Not surprisingly, the news that the largest high school in the state would be operating without an athletic director, who oversees close to 50 varsity, junior varsity and C-team sports, was met with feelings of skepticism and disbelief.

"As a former SK athlete and now a coach at a much smaller 2A school, I can attest to the hours our AD puts in working with comparably fewer teams, athletes, and coaches," tweeted South Kitsap alum Caty Lieseke, who coaches softball at W.F. West in Chehalis. "I cannot imagine how this will work."

"That is a huge job that impacts all sports and lots of kids," South Kitsap wrestling coach Chad Nass added.

South Kitsap softball coach Paul Cermak called the decision "lunacy" and said it could affect his decision to continue coaching.

"They fire the one guy whose job was to support us," Cermak said. "He cared about the sports and the kids. To be honest, I'm not sure I'll be willing to coach without Kelly, let alone no athletic director at all."

Here's one of my favorite reactions from Chronicle sports writer/Winlock High baseball coach Jordan Nailon, a master wordsmith: "Spring sports with no AD sounds like a biblical nightmare."

How rare is it for a high school to not employ an athletic director?

"It's not very typical," said Mike Colbrese, executive director for the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association.

Colbrese said some high schools have vice principals fill the athletic director role — and that's certainly a possibility for the Wolves moving forward: having a vice principal in-building working in tandem with an athletic secretary and perhaps a district-level administrator. The South Kitsap School District hadn't responded to requests for comment as of press time Thursday.

Several years ago, Kingston High filled its athletic director position with a vice principal: Rachel Davenport for one year and Mark Kluth for two years.

The reviews weren't great — and not because anything Davenport and Kluth did wrong.

Kingston boys/girls soccer coach Craig Smith, who has coached for the Buccaneers since the school opened in 2007, said it the amount of work that suddenly needed to be handled by the vice principal and athletic secretary proved to be a burden for all parties involved — including coaches.

"It was unfair to them and everybody else," Smith said. "Lessons learned."

The Buccaneers eventually switched back to a full-time athletic/activities director. Richard Henert has worked in that role since 2016.

"South Kitsap doesn't need to go through what we went through," Smith added.

North Kitsap athletic director Matt Stanford didn't comment on South Kitsap's situation directly, but has been around long enough to know the vital role ADs play at the high school level.

"I don't think I have enough experience to know what is the best formula," Stanford said, "but knowing the other ADs I work with ... the time and energy that is put in to support the school's programs is not a part-time commitment."

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Jeff Graham (Photo: File photo)

