
Ad Astra

with Michael Shonrock



Coach Kramer's Biggest Play

Earlier this year our community celebrated the life and legacy of one of the winningest football coaches in our history — Larry Kramer. I never met Larry but I've thought a lot about him in the weeks that have followed his Feb. 1 memorial service. Many details of that day have stayed with me, and have inspired me so, that I want to share with you a little bit about what I have learned from Larry Kramer.

Let me back up just slightly and give you a picture of the church that day. It was early February, cold and with a fair amount of snow on the ground — nothing particularly noteworthy about a winter day in Kansas. But inside the church, the pews were filled edge-to-edge with a sea of starter jackets — some red, some purple, but mostly black and gold and from every decade of the past 40 or so years. The styles and letters and subtle shifts of color were like a historic timeline of Hornet athletic prowess.

Broad-shouldered men ranging from 20-somethings to former players with gaits that grow-from-the-cane filled the pews. The service was standing room only in a sanctuary that is likely the largest in our community.

Throughout the celebration, Coach Kramer's family, former players and friends painted a picture that brought the man and his legacy into clear focus. However, his best friend, Charlie Dieker, shared with us not winning seasons, humorous anecdotes, or the dedication of a family man.

Charlie shared with us Coach Kramer's one regret.

Larry Kramer was the only unanimous selection to the 1964 All-American team and was drafted by the Baltimore Colts prior to his senior year at Nebraska but later signed as a free agent with the Minnesota Vikings. A native of Minnesota, this was a dream come true for Larry.

As Charlie told it, Coach Kramer knew what was in store when he headed to training camp that summer of '65. The Vikings head coach, Norm Van Brocklin, had a reputation for his hard-nosed approach to young new recruits in the or-

ganization. And shortly after reporting to camp, Kramer ran right into the Van Brocklin wall.

It was a warm summer in Minnesota and as the afternoon practices wore on, the temperatures often soared into the 80s and 90s. One day, deep into the summer, Van Brocklin had decided upon a particularly strenuous stretch in the late afternoon. The team had been working a sweep play and Van Brocklin did not like the way things were going.

Ultimately Van Brocklin ran the sweep play 36 times that afternoon. Over Van Brocklin's shouts of "run it again," one player, an offensive guard, did not get up. Heat exhausted, dehydrated and unconscious, Larry was taken to the local hospital to recover. After missing a few days of practice and reaching out to his mentors in Nebraska, Larry made the difficult decision to leave the Vikings organization. Years later, he told Charlie, that decision was his only regret.

Of course we all see the irony of this story. Had Coach not left the Vikings organization he would not have touched the lives of so many young men in such profound ways. To a man, the former players I met that day shared with me the sense of honor and privilege they felt to have played for Coach K.

This particular disappointment shaped Larry's lifework.

He wanted each man prepared to run that sweep play 36 times and not walk away at the end of the day.

The coach's life is an inspiration for all of us. Larry Kramer took his biggest disappointment and channeled it to change the lives of his students for the better.

Thank you Charlie Dieker for sharing this story with us. And Godspeed, Larry Kramer.

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