

Mike Kornak: He might just be the best ever at the UofA — he might be gone.

by Pat Maguire

When you sit down with Mike Kornak, you realize he can be just as relaxed off the court as he is intense on the court.

You also realize that besides being one of the best athletes on campus, he also has tremendous insight into the ideals of sports and recreation.

Over the past four years, Mike Kornak has developed himself into one of the most exciting competitors on campus. Followers of Golden Bear basketball have watched #11 dunk, steal and score and have left enthused about the basketball program here.

They have also called him cocky and maybe even uninspired.

"Nak" graduated from St. Joseph's in 1982, after an athletically active high school career. He competed on basketball, volleyball, and track teams (a brief football stint was less than pleasant).

His first year at U of A was a hilt. "It was my most exciting year. There were a lot of good players and coach (Brian) Heaney had me starting. It was a thrill." The team finished seventh in the country and Kornak attributes a lot of that to Heaney. "He was great with player/coach relationships — he went out of his way for you."

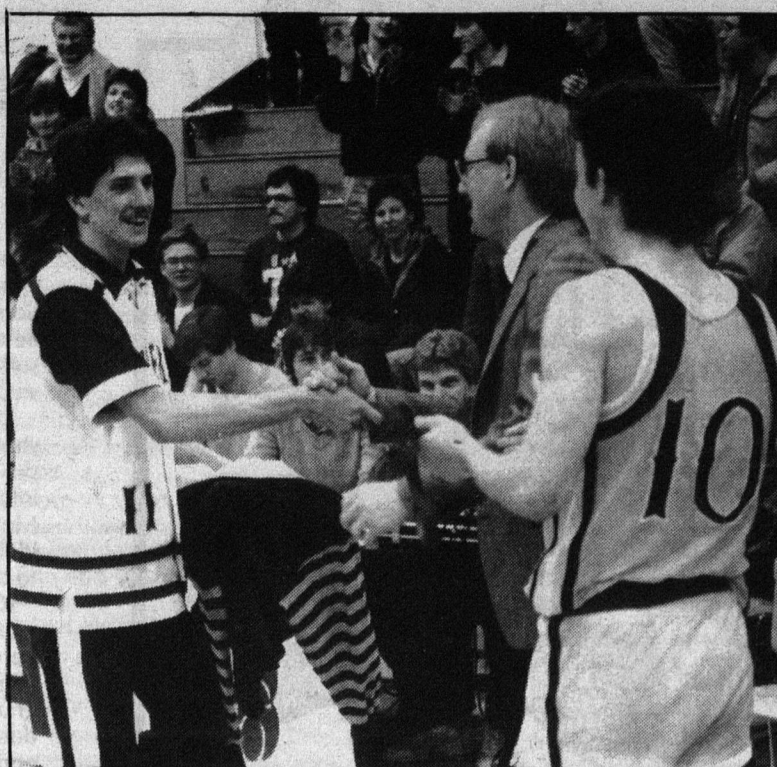


Photo Bill Doskoch

awards - Canada West all-star, several tournament all-stars, and the Wardlaw Porteous Trophy for outstanding contributions to Golden Bear basketball.

Mike has one year of eligibility left.

Mike Kornak has won plenty of MVP awards and has made plenty of lay-ups from underneath.

"I've been knocking on the door for so long, it is getting to the point where politics count, and that starts to take the fun out of the game." Favouritism for Calgarians at the national camp seemed, to Kornak, to be unfair. The 12 month basketball season takes its toll and the team setbacks frustrate.

"I don't know if the love for the game is still there. You start to want other things - a job, money, social life."

The support that the Bears get hasn't helped. "School spirit at the UofA leaves a lot to be desired."



pro-ball tryouts. If not, he still needs

ates quick points and has seemingly endless energy," says Horwood.

Next on Mike's agenda, however, is completing his student teaching. Coaching the game is a definite aspiration and one of Mike Kornak's regrets may become a goal as a coach.

"I'll try to develop each player's style - let them do what they do best."

"With Mike gone they keyed on me"

His play earned him a tryout with the Canadian National team and later that year he went with the Alberta provincial team to the Canadian championships where the team won a silver and Mike was named all-Canadian.

A bed of roses? Not exactly.

"The next year we lost a few players (Leon Bynoe, notably) and the coach. It is tough having to start over in the middle of building a program." The program fell into the hands of present coach Don Horwood. "Don is really positive and dedicated to the game. He thinks basketball 20 hours a day."

The last three years, the Bears have had a short team and, as a result, Kornak, 6'3", has had to play inside.

"I was changed out of St. Joe's, I had to go inside because we had no height. But I feel I'm better on the perimeter."

While not playing his game, Kornak set several records.

Some of the Golden Bear all-time career records he holds include most games played (134, 29 more than Jim Pratt), most field goals attempted and made (1628/-710), most free throws attempted, most rebounds (737, Leon Bynoe left with 542), and, most impressively, Kornak's record of 1651 points, 500 more than former great Bynoe.

Kornak also leads with most fouls and turnovers in a career.

His efforts have won him several

Talking to Mike Kornak, you can easily read his frustration. He seems to be fairly open about it. His team was three points from making second place, and they lost their last game by one point. The retirement of Mike Suderman increased the pressure put on Kornak.

"With Mike gone people keyed on me. That and rookie mistakes frustrated me."

Soccer is becoming more important to Kornak. This summer he played with the Edmonton Brickmen, the semi-professional soccer revival. He wanted to play soccer, as well as basketball at the UofA this year, but "Horwood said one or the other."

All these complaints may give the impression of Mike Kornak being a whiner. He certainly has critics that think so. But in a conversation, it comes across as some kind of reluctant honesty.

For Kornak, maybe basketball is starting to lose its appeal.

"Soccer or basketball"—Horwood

Sucks? "Yeah."

"Most people at the games are parents and alumni, where are the students?"

"The promotion people have to do their job - but you can't blame the present people (Steadward, Schula, et al), they need time."

Kornak's future is up in the air. He has a few options. Right now someone in Germany is deciding if Mike Kornak should come to his

a course or two to complete his education degree, and with one year of eligibility left, he could be the player to push the team to the top. His coach would like that.

"Mike is a real spark plug - he makes things happen. He gener-

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