

## H-F coach Van Slyke steps away after 30 years courtside

BY MARILYN THOMAS  
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Duane Van Slyke admits the past 30 years has meant a lot of basketball for him.

Van Slyke, a social worker at Homewood-Flossmoor High School, was honored in March for his three decades of dedicated service to the Vikings basketball program. This is his last year at H-F where after his regular school duties he's been serving as first assistant varsity coach working alongside head coach Marc Condoti.

In addition to his dedication to his students and the basketball program, Van Slyke has had perfect attendance over the past 30 years.

It's difficult for Van Slyke to give an accurate number of how many young men he's worked with over the years. He starts with the 15 players on a team multiplied by 30 years, but notes that there also have been the summer teams, tryouts and open gym time that he's either coached or observed.

"Coaching (basketball) is something I



Provided photo  
Duane Van Slyke was honored for his 30 years as a coach at Homewood-Flossmoor High School.

have always desired and wanted to do," Van Slyke said. His first year at H-F in 1991 he was asked to coach football, but

he's quick to point out that was a short-lived stint.

Van Slyke has stressed defense and self-discipline to his players. The varsity players he works with are more mature and skilled than freshmen and sophomores, but Van Slyke says they still need to be reminded that self-discipline is important.

"It's all momentum," he said, and lacking self-discipline, especially in big games, can turn the game against you in a minute.

The Vikings basketball team "accomplished a lot this year," Van Slyke said. The team won the regional title but lost in sectionals play.

He considers Julian Wright, "the most talented basketball player I've ever coached." Wright was a junior when the Vikings were the runner-up team at the state basketball championship in 2004. "To me that was clearly hands down the best team I've coached."

Van Slyke says he's lucky his wife, Suzanne, enjoys sports and has been understanding about how important coaching is to him, knowing that his after-school

hours and weekends were taken up with his coaching duties. Although the basketball season officially starts in November, Van Slyke is coaching almost year-round.

"At the varsity level, it's very demanding," he said, and has meant "a dedicated commitment" to the program on his part.

When Van Slyke was in high school, he would enroll in summer school at H-F. Even then he says, "I always knew I wanted to work at Homewood-Flossmoor."

He graduated from Illinois State University and received a master's degree from Loyola University in social work. He did his internship at H-F and said although he had other job offers he only applied to work at H-F.

Social work is "very demanding and student need has increased over the years," Van Slyke said. He is primarily assisting special education students.

"It's been a long journey," but he retires "where I feel I could work another 20 years. I never wanted to leave here feeling burned out. I'm feeling very energetic" and will be waiting to see "what the next chapter brings me."

## Baseball season returns April 23 with community parades

BY NICK ULANOWSKI  
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The 2022 baseball season for Homewood Baseball & Softball and Flossmoor Baseball & Softball opens on Saturday, April 23, with the return of the traditional opening day parades.

Homewood's parade kicks off at 11 a.m. at the Irwin Center with 600 players on dozens of teams marching down Ridge Road to the Izaak Walton Preserve's baseball fields. Flossmoor's baseball teams meet up at Parker Junior High for the start of the parade at 9:30 a.m. The route down Flossmoor Road includes the traditional "team

shout" under the Metra viaduct as teams march to Bronco Field at Flossmoor Park.

The ceremonial first pitch for Homewood will be thrown by retiring District 233 Superintendent Von Mansfield. Tabitha Stine, outgoing president of Homewood Baseball, will be throwing the ceremonial first pitch for the softball games, according to Homewood Baseball Communications Director Nick Quirke.

Flossmoor Baseball President Carlo Gozzi said this year's parade will have military veterans serving as grand marshals. They'll be traveling the parade route in trucks on loan from

Sutton Ford. The veterans will bring attention to the Flossmoor Veterans' Memorial charity.

"We are very excited to kick off what feels like our first real year since 2019. We are really pumped up for opening day because for the first time since 2019 ... we are able to have our opening day parade," Quirke said.

This season players with Homewood Baseball & Softball will be playing with Flossmoor Baseball players. It's the first time in about a decade the two programs have teamed up, Gozzi said.

"We're going to be having 'cross play' with Homewood in certain divi-

sions, not all divisions, and we're calling it the Cross Town Classic League" named for the games between Chicago's Cubs and White Sox baseball teams, Gozzi said.

"They (Homewood) have some shortages in numbers in certain age groups and so do we," Gozzi said. "So, we're going to have a league between both communities for specific age groups." It does not mean a merger of the two organizations, he stressed.

For information on Homewood Baseball & Softball visit homewood-playball.com. Information on Flossmoor Baseball is at flossmoorbbsb.com.

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