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## Powell Valley's Robbins announces retirement plans

by COY BAYS • Sports Editor  
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**BIG STONE GAP** — Powell Valley head coach Phil Robbins made the announcement Saturday that followers of Lonesome Pine District football have been expecting for several months since his retirement from his teaching duties.

The Virginia High School League Hall of Fame coach announced that he is stepping aside as the leader of the Powell Valley football program at the end of the 2010 season.

"I think I made the right decision to leave at the right time," the 66-year-old Robbins told members of the news media attending Powell Valley's annual press day. "I'm not leaving the cupboard bare in terms of experience, or lack of experience, at a key position. It's going to be there.

"It's only fair that I get out of the picture so that somebody with long-term goals has a chance to be named the coach."

Robbins is the fifth coach in the 51-year history of Powell Valley High School and has posted a 255-80 record in 27 seasons since coming to the Lonesome Pine District school in 1983. Including coaching stints at John Battle and Christiansburg before coming to Powell Valley in 1983, Robbins has 302 career wins going into his 28th and final campaign at the Wise County school.

At different stages of his three-decade tenure at Powell Valley, Robbins matched wits with fellow VHSL Hall of Fame members such as Clintwood coaching legend Ralph Cummins, Appalachia's Tom Turner and Gate City's Nick Colobro in Lonesome Pine District battles that usually determined the league title.

The rivalry between the late Appalachia coaching legend Turner's Bulldogs and Robbins' Vikings was particularly intense, heated and entertaining during the 1989, '94 and '97 seasons when the two towns separated by only two miles produced Division 1 and Division 2 state titles in the same years.

Today, Turner's son Travis is a top aide on Robbins' staff at Powell Valley. Danny Dorton, a fullback on the '94 state title team at Powell Valley, is an assistant on Appalachia coach Roger Austin's staff.

With the Wise County School Board's plan to consolidate the county's existing six high schools into three, including the union of Appalachia and Powell Valley into one of the three, Robbins said that his retirement might help the merger go smoother.

"With the transition that's got to occur, and is occurring in the Wise County schools, I think it's only fair that I get out of the picture so that somebody with long-term goals can be named the coach," said Robbins.

Robbins' program at Powell Valley has produced two of the five players from Lonesome Pine District schools to have played in the National Football League.

Kansas City Chiefs running back Thomas Jones led Robbins' Vikings to Division 2 state crowns in 1994 and '95, and his younger brother, Seattle Seahawks running back Julius Jones, was a key figure on Powell Valley's last two state title squads in 1997 and '98.

Robbins came to Powell Valley following James "Poss" Bolling's resignation as head coach after leading the Vikings to the school's first of eight football state titles in 1982.

The new Viking coach's first team reached the Group A semifinals before losing to eventual state champion Parry McCluer at Bullitt Park.

Two seasons later, the Vikings won the first of seven state crowns under Robbins' command of the Powell Valley gridiron program over three decades. Robbins' teams added state titles in 1989, '90, '94, '95, '97, '98.

Robbins points to an abundance of talented athletes and stability in the leadership of the program as keys to being successful on the high school level.

"I personally believe longevity in the high school coaching position is what provides success. People that change coaches all the time can never have a successful program," Robbins said.

"If my retiring out of this position enables the school system to hire somebody with longevity as a goal, then I'm doing something that will help the school and the program in the long run."

Robbins' final season on the home sideline at Bullitt Park begins Aug. 27 against Lee High in the annual Battle of the Boot.