

The next time a pessimist starts knocking sports, in particular high school athletics, tell him about **Rev. Donald Tracey**.

He's a 56-year-old superintendent of schools in the Lafayette Diocese who stepped down this season as cross country and track coach at Central Catholic High School.

After teaching 17 years and coaching 13, **Rev. Tracey** decided to devote more time to administrative duties in the diocese with its 4,000 students.

It makes a guy wonder why the priest stayed so long. After all, coaching is tough enough, but coaching at most parochial schools also is a constant battle for financial survival.

Dedication to the athletes, and the kinship involved, were probably **Rev. Tracey's** primary motivations.

"I put a lot of my own money into the program for uniforms, ribbons and trophies. You really get to know the kids well in a small school. I could scan the hallways for a prospect, you know, look for a boy with a long rib cage. Some of them turned out to be lemons. But it got to be hard for an old man to attract talent," says the 1953 Notre Dame grad.

Dave Worland is the new CC cross country coach. He's got some big, big shoes to fill.

In 13 years, **Rev. Tracey's** harriers were 179-29. Think about it. That's a 86 percent winning record! **Rev. Tracey's** only coaching rival in Tippecanoe County with those kind of numbers is probably Jeff's baseball legend, Paul "Spider" Fields.

Bob Scott

Staff sports writer



Rev. Tracey's boys won the cross country sectional in 1967, 1970 and 1975. They were Hoosier Conference champs in 1970, 1973 and 1975. That's not too bad for a small school.

The Knights also cranked out sev-



REV. DONALD TRACEY
Long coaching career ends

eral individual champs under **Rev. Tracey's** steady hand.

Mark and Dan Bir probably top the list of CC running champs.

Mark won the state 2-mile track championship in 1968 and 1969. His 9:09.3 stood up until the fabulous Rudy Chapa came along. Chapa owns the state mark with an 8:58.8 time set in 1975.

Brother Dan was the 2-mile champ in 1970 with a 9:20 time.

"Success breeds success" is one of **Rev. Tracey's** favorite expressions because outstanding runners seem to come in familiar bunches.

The Eddington boys are a good example of CC's spirit. Mark, Dave, Pete and John Eddington all blazed their names across CC record books.

John is a sophomore this year at Indianapolis Ritter. In fact, he's the No. 1 cross country runner down there. His family has to relocate in Indianapolis.

"There are three younger brothers than John, too, who would have been in the program. Losing guys like that is tough," said **Rev. Tracey**.

Chris Ambrose is another runner who had to move from CC. He would have been the Knights' top runner this season, but now he's No. 1 at a San Bernardino, Calif. high school.

Rev. Tracey is acutely aware of the difference between today's athletes and those in the "old days."

He thinks kids today just aren't tough enough. Jobs and girls, he complains, are the biggest competitors for a boy's time.

He told a little story to illustrate a point.

When **Rev. Tracey** taught at Cathedral High in the late Forties, football was a brutal game on the prep level. Helmets were used, but without face masks.

"Those boys came from tough, hard-working ethnic families. They probably had to be tough to survive their neighborhood."

"All the linemen chewed tobacco. Right before the ball was snapped, the defensive linemen would spit a mouthful of tobacco into the opponents' eyes. Now, that's tough," he said with a laugh.

Recently, **Rev. Tracey** was invited to a cookout sponsored by the Bir family near Elston. Little did he realize the purpose of the affair.

"I received the biggest plaque I ever saw. Boy, was I surprised. I got so choked up I couldn't talk. Many of my former runners were there, and . . ."

Rev. Tracey had to catch his breath a moment. His eyes were misty.

This is the kind of guy who has a "club house" of sorts for his runners. They still visit him on Kossuth St. The camaraderie is there. The love is obvious in his voice.

"I will miss it terribly," he says.