

# Coach, mentor on same path

■ Frank Martin, Bob Huggins remain close after Huggins' departure and Martin's promotion at Kansas State.

BY JEFFREY LUTZ  
The Wichita Eagle

Kansas State basketball coach Frank Martin seems to keep his cell phone close by whenever he's not on the sideline.

He had it with him for the news conference after the Wildcats beat Brigham Young to earn a spot in the Sweet 16 and Martin said he had close to 400 text messages.

He was certain one of them was from mentor Bob Huggins, which would stand to reason because Martin rarely answers Huggins' calls.

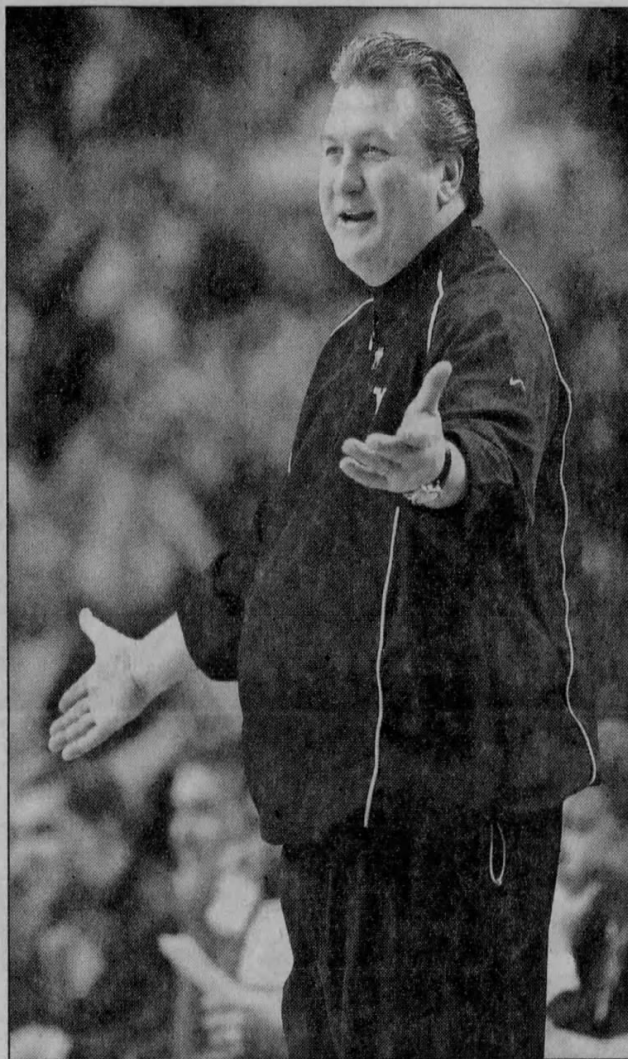
That's not a case of Martin big-timing Huggins now that Martin is a well-known figure in college basketball. That's just Frank being Frank.

"His voicemail was always full when he was my assistant and it's still full," said Huggins, now the coach at West Virginia. "You can't leave him a message. So Frank hasn't changed. He still doesn't answer the phone."

Martin maintains his relationship with Huggins as closely as ever, even if the third-year KSU coach doesn't wear out his phone's "talk" button.

Martin served as Huggins' assistant coach for two seasons at Cincinnati and in Huggins' only season at K-State, 2006-07.

When Huggins left Manhattan to coach at West Virginia, his alma mater,



Associated Press

Bob Huggins' West Virginia team is in the Sweet 16 for the second time in his three seasons.

K-State athletic director Tim Weiser and president John Wefald hired Martin, who had never been a collegiate head coach.

"He could have done what 99 percent of the other coaches do, which is take the players," Martin said of Huggins. "He told everybody to stay put.

He convinced administration to hire me and told everybody to stay put. 'It's Frank's turn now. It's time to be loyal to him. I'll be OK. I'll hire guys and get players. We need to take care of Frank because it's his turn.'

"For a human being to do that for me, there can't be a

better man in this business than him."

Martin said Huggins earned his trust when he was coaching at Miami Senior High in the 1990s.

Several Division I coaches offered Martin a job as an assistant hoping Martin would bring players with him. After Martin's four-season stint as an assistant at Northeastern, he joined Huggins at Cincinnati because he liked Huggins' intentions.

"The guy that gave me the break in the business to move forward, to go from Northeastern to the high-level situation, was the guy that never signed my players," Martin said. "That shows the human being that he is — his belief in me as a person, not trying to utilize me as a pawn to benefit his career."

Martin is outspoken with his opinion of Huggins because of the negative reputation Huggins has been saddled with, thanks to a DUI in 2004 and the legal issues of his players at Cincinnati.

Despite his on-court demeanor, Martin is a fiercely loyal coach and person. He values that trait in others, too, which explains his closeness with Huggins. Both teams won their first two NCAA Tournament games and are trendy picks to reach the Final Four.

"I told (K-State officials) what was best for them and what I thought was best for the program," Huggins said. "And they did the right thing. If they hadn't done the right thing, Frank would be here (at West Virginia) now."