After 15 amazing years running the Ventura County Heat, I have decided to retire today August 10th 2019. I have always told myself that I would know when it is the right time to step away and after thinking a lot over the past few weeks, I have decided now is the time. The VC Heat Program has always been one of the most respected programs around and I pride myself in keeping that standard for the past 15 years. I am also proud of numbers like these… 15 Year Run from July 2004 to July 2019… 4299 Career Wins… 607 Championships Won… 517 Players to wear a Heat Uniform.

I also wanted to take time to let everyone know the history behind the Heat. The Heat started back in July 2004 when myself and Richard Thomas got together with an idea. Both of us have two Sons, Richard Jr. (a 5th Grader at the time) and Ryan (a 4th grader at the time) and we both also had younger sons as well: one grade apart Taylor & Evan. Richard and I had played men’s league ball together for years and had both been coaching our boys in VYBA. We also had both made these All-Star type teams of players we had coached for a couple of years and were playing in this All-Star league in Ojai. We sat down and talked about what we would both want if we started a club ball team together. Some things I remember are: I wanted to keep cost as low as possible, try to always have the best-looking uniforms, and make sure it was just us two as coaches. I do remember Richard wanting the team name to be the Heat. I was not a fan at first, mainly because Heat teams are most times Red and I hate the color red lol. I told him we could be called the Heat as long as we were not red. So that is why, until this day, the Heat is Orange & Yellow. The program was never supposed to be this big or last this long. The plan the whole time was to start with 1 team made up of the top 4 to 5 players from each one of our then All-Star teams which we did. Then make that into two teams: one for his son Richard Jr. and one for my son Ryan. After both of them headed off to high school, we would do the same things for our younger two sons. Things started out just as planned with the Heat in July 2004 having one team of 8 players. That split into two teams a few months later. Here’s how things got off track…when we had try-outs for our second team, some younger players came to try out. Two of them made the team. A year later we had try-outs again and a few younger players tried out. They were good too. Me and Richard looked at each other and thought man, if we made a team for those guys, they would be good. So, we thought we could handle 3 teams with no problem and that is what we did. The next try-out comes around and same thing happened. More younger guys come out. We decided to just make the teams for the older two and the younger two and then be done. Since that was the plan the whole time. When Taylor and Even were close to going to High School, we had a meeting and planned to end the Heat. After the plan was in place, I was sad that it was going to be ending but I wanted to stick with the plan we had decided on way back in 2004. After Richard goes to a BBQ one day, where a bunch of kids all the same grade said that they are all coming to try-out for The Heat, we decided to just keep going. Which is what we did. After 10 years, Richard decided to step away from the program and, for the first time, I was on my own. There were thoughts of ending the Heat then. It had been 10 years and my kids were not in program anymore but my heart was not ready to step away. I told myself to go for three more years and then walk away. After three years came and went, my heart still was not ready to walk away so I just kept going. But after this year, for the first time in the past 15 years, something was telling me that now is the right time. The Heat has been my whole life for the past 15 years. But the time has come to do something different. For that reason, I have decided to retire from the Heat.

To answer the question I know everyone will want to know, “what will you be doing now?” I will be staying at Oxnard High School and coaching there. I will be doing more tournament scheduling and will still be helping run some tournaments. You may even see me officiating some games. I will always love the game of basketball and want to be a part of the game for sure. But I also told myself that I would know when it was time to retire from the Heat and when that day came, I would walk away.

I would like to thank some people that made all of this possible:

First and foremost, to Richard Thomas. The Heat would have not been The Heat if it was not for both of us. I thank you for all you did for the program. The program would not have made it in those early years if it was not for you and I will always be thankful for everything.

Both my sons Ryan & Taylor. When their father needed them to help, they were there for me. As a father that means more than anything in the world. I thank you both so much.

Frank Rojas, what a friend you were to step in and help me out when I needed it. Means so much and Thank You.

Jordan Turner, Daniel Crocker, Moises Barrera, Thank you to you three. With many other things going on in your lives, you where there for the Heat when you could be and that means a lot.

Mason Johnson, to have a player that played through the program and then come back to coach is always something I hoped for and you were the one that did it. You will always have a special place in my heart.

Raymond Edwards, Thank you for everything you did for the program. You will always be a part of the Heat history.

Also need to Thank my daughter Anela, for working the snack bar since the age of 8. I don’t know any other 8-year-old that could run a snack bar by themselves. Thank you so much.

To my Mother, AKA Mommers, Nancy. You are the greatest Door Person anyone could ask for. It was not easy being your own mother’s boss, trust me, but it has been amazing to know over all the years that you can trust someone to do the best they can and I always know you did your best. Thank you so much.

To Christian & Shawn for all the scorekeeping you did. Thank You. The 3 Official Assigners I had over the years Bryan Wilson, Mike Miller, Steve Peters, all three of you have a very special place in my heart. Also, to all other Family members and non-family that helped over the years thank you.

Last but not least, they say the hardest person to be is a coach’s wife. I would have to agree with them. I want to thank my wife, Denise Kirkham, for not only putting up with me but for always being there for me. Scorekeeping for me after you worked all week. Also, supporting me with my decision to retire from the Heat.

In closing, I know that there is a bad side to me announcing this…the KIDS that are still planning on playing in the program. I knew all along that when the time came to step away that there would be kids who would not know what is going to happen next. For that, I am sorry. Even though I feel everyone will find themselves a new team to play on, I am sorry that you even have to look for a new place to play. Please always feel proud to call yourselves a VC Heat alumnus. You were part of a great program and for that I am proud. I love each and every one of the 517 players that I have had the pleasure of coaching. You have all made a huge impact on my life and I will remember you always.

Coach Gabe