

Neil Coyle resigns, Tomlinson hired to lead girls

Written by George Browning

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Change was in the air earlier in the week at West Washington when boys' basketball Head Coach Neil Coyle announced to his team that he was stepping down from his position.

Coyle's announcement wasn't the only coaching news coming out of the school, however, as the board of school trustees also approved the hiring of former Salem High School girls' basketball Head Coach Wade Tomlinson to lead the Lady Senator basketball program.

Tomlinson said he needed to step away from the game for a while following the 2008-09 season and said in a phone interview that it was time to get back on the sidelines.

"I got out because of family reasons and it proved to be a good thing," he said. "I did miss it. I missed being around the kids and I missed competing and I missed being in the gym."

Being in the gym will be job one for taking over a West Washington program that has just managed eight wins in its last 80 contests.

That losing record is part of the reason Tomlinson was drawn to the Lady Senators.

"I think it's a great opportunity," he said. "Some people took the time to show me some things and I really like the facilities and the potential they have coming up."

Tomlinson said job one will be to get the girls playing basketball.

"In the past they haven't done a lot in the summer and we're going to get everybody together and tell them what we are going to do," he said. "You really don't do things in summer to get better, you do stuff in the summer to keep up. If everyone is doing a summer program and you're not, you will never catch up. The second thing we have to do is set some attainable goals."

Tomlinson will take over for former Head Coach Bob Potter, who spent the last four years as both girls' basketball and softball.

Both jobs were too demanding and that's why he decided to give up basketball.

Tomlinson said while Potter's record doesn't sparkle, there might not be a program if he hadn't taken the job when he did.

"A lot of people don't understand what he did over there," he said. "When he took the job nobody else wanted it and the rumors were that they were going to shutdown the program. Bob took it for all the right reasons. His record doesn't show it, but he has done a lot of positives because there is still a program and the numbers are decent."

Numbers were one of the things that led to a stressful season for Coyle. He said trying to manage 13 players on both varsity and junior varsity squads was too much to handle.

In addition to that, trying to overcome the fact that the school doesn't pay more than one coach to do summer activities with the high school program.

"I'm a little tired," Coyle said. "In the situation and the way things are here, there is a lot to be done and with no other coaches on staff there is a lot of work for one person to do while at the same time trying to juggle a family."

It has also led to a revolving door of assistant coaches.

"In the past five years I've had 20 coaches under me in grades 5-12 and I've had four JV coaches in five years, so if that gives you a perspective of what it's been like," he said.

Even with those things being said, Coyle said he is thankful to have had the opportunity.

"I appreciate the board for giving me the opportunity to coach here again," he said. "When I got the job my goal was to try to win, it wasn't to make people happy and I think, for the most part, we've done that."

In five seasons, Coyle has compiled a 51-57 record, but three of those five seasons the

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Senators have a winning record. Accomplishing those things still seems to drive Coyle. That's why he wouldn't go as far to admit that he is hanging up the whistle for good.

"As a coach, you never say your done for good," he said. "We've had 10 winning seasons at this school and I've been lucky to be part of six of those, four as a coach and two as a player. It's been fun and I am sure in some way and some form I will continue to coach, whether it's with my kids or whatever. Now, I have more time to spend with my family and that's what I am looking forward to right now."

The hardest part of stepping away was telling the returning players. Coyle said he made the announcement during the boys' basketball team's post-season awards banquet.

"I think it's the right decision, but it's never easy when you have to tell boys that you've worked with for four or five years that you are stepping down," he said. "There will always be kids that you feel like you are letting down and that's always there.

"I will miss being competitive and trying to get kids to develop that competitive spirit and that work ethic and to see them grow. I've coached good kids here and many have gone on and I still keep in touch with them. That's what's important, realizing you've had an impact on young men."