

Gahanna Lincoln Lions baseball coach Mike Shade earns 500th career win

With runners on first and second base and two outs in the bottom of the seventh inning April 29 at Pickerington North, Gahanna Lincoln baseball coach Mike Shade walked to the mound to calm his pitcher. It's something he's done hundreds of times in pressure situations over the past three decades.

He gave the simple reminder to "concentrate on the target like you've been doing all game" and then handed the ball back to sophomore Landon Ringhiser.

It was enough to soothe any possible nerves that were being experienced by Ringhiser, who said he was "happy" to have been called on to start and finish what became the 500th victory of Shade's 30-year tenure.

"We had a well-pitched ballgame tonight, and everybody in the program played well," Shade said. "It's about them and how they come out and work. It's not about me. I'm just the lucky one that gets to make out the lineup card."

Gahanna, which beat the Panthers 7-1 to improve to 6-6 overall and 4-4 in the OCC-Ohio Division, scored three runs in the fifth to pull away for its second win in three days over its league rival.

Ringhiser walked four but struck out six and gave up no earned runs.

Sophomore third baseman Logan Brockman and junior shortstop Adam Buerger provided support at the plate with three hits apiece.

"It's a great moment," Buerger said. "(To get) 500 (wins) is huge for a high school baseball coach. Seeing coach Shade smile, that was great."

After receiving a surprise ice bath, Shade celebrated by being greeted by his wife, Cathi Shade, and his dog, Sam.

The Lions have won eight Division I district championships under Shade, most recently in 2017 when they were a regional runner-up for the second consecutive season.

Gahanna went 2-22 in Shade's first season in 1992 but captured a district title in 1994. Its next district title came in 2008 when it was a regional runner-up, beginning a 12-year run in which it won seven district titles and lost in three district finals.

The Lions made state semifinals in 2013 and '14.

Players such as 2014 graduate Evan White, who is now in the Seattle Mariners organization, and 2017 state Player of the Year Cael Baker were among those Shade helped produce.

A retired teacher from Gahanna schools, Shade was inducted into the Lions' athletics hall of fame in 2021. He also was inducted into the Capital University athletics hall of fame in 1999 and the Central District Baseball Coaches Association Hall of Fame in 2013.

The 1975 Whitehall graduate was named to his alma mater's hall of fame in 2016.

"I'm very, very proud of being associated with Gahanna Lincoln High School and that I've been able to be the varsity baseball coach here," Shade said. "They took a chance on me in 1992 and we didn't start off too well. The first season we were 2-22 and I knew at that point we had them right where we wanted them.

"It's just a testament to the guys. We've had some great athletes over the years and they don't quit."

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Football:

Mark Philmore named Reynoldsburg Raiders football coach, succeeding Buddy White

Settling into new situations is something Mark Philmore gained practice at well before he became a college football player and coach.

Philmore, who was named Reynoldsburg football coach Jan. 20, believes he developed lifelong habits while attending the Fork Union Military Academy boarding school in Virginia in 1999 and 2000 for his first two years of high school.

That's the same school that produced Eddie George, who won the 1995 Heisman Trophy for Ohio State before playing in the NFL.

"I grew up watching Eddie George, and after losing my father at a young age, I was able to grow in the classroom and athletically (at Fork Union)," Philmore said. "It was a great journey."

Philmore earned first-team all-state honors in Virginia as a sophomore wide receiver before returning to central Ohio and playing for the Raiders during his final two prep seasons.

As a senior in 2001, he helped Reynoldsburg make the Division I playoffs for the first time and finished with 81 receptions for 1,000 yards and 11 touchdowns.

That connection to his hometown, combined with a playing and coaching career that includes college, professional and international experience, helped set him up to take over the Raiders after Buddy White led them to a 67-46 record with five playoff appearances and seven winning seasons in 11 years.

White stepped down in December.

"It's hard to really put into words in all honesty," Philmore said. "I'm just truly humbled to come back home and make a true impact each and every day at the high school and in the community.

"From my years coaching at the collegiate level, culture is everything. Talent comes and goes but culture is set in place."

Philmore earned a scholarship to play for Northwestern and ended his career with the Wildcats ranked fourth in program history in receptions and fifth in receiving yards.

He then spent time in training camp with both the Columbus Destroyers of the Arena Football League as well as the Chicago Bears and gained coaching experience at the prep level in Chicago.

Philmore would then go on to coach for five years in Poland and helped a college program while spending a year in India before serving as an assistant at West Virginia Wesleyan in 2016 and at Dayton in 2017 and 2018.

For the last three seasons, Philmore has served as wide receivers coach, worked with special teams and was the recruiting coordinator at Eastern Illinois.

"When you think about Buddy, I thought he did a phenomenal job, leaving Reynoldsburg with the most wins in school history," Philmore said. "There's tremendous talent in the building. How you do everything is that you do it first in the classroom and hold each other accountable.

"(At Eastern Illinois) I was able to produce a special teams all-conference player and a second-team all-conference receiver, and at the University of Dayton, I was able to truly push my coaching abilities to the next level. What you're going to see is that we're going to be fundamentally sound, and offensively you'll see us be personnel-driven with an understanding in how to use our athletes in open space."

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Reynoldsburg made it back to the postseason in 2015 and put together the best season in program history in 2018, going 10-2 and securing at least a share of its first league championship since 1993. That season also marked the only time in program history that the Raiders beat both Pickerington Central and Pickerington North in the same year.

After going 7-4 in 2019 and 4-4 in 2020, Reynoldsburg lost its first four games of 2021 before bouncing back to finish 5-6 while reaching a regional quarterfinal.

Philmore, who has a 2-year-old son and has been in the process of moving back to central Ohio, is working on putting together a coaching staff.

“We cannot wait to watch Mark develop the talent of our players and help them realize their potential on the field, in the classroom and in our community,” athletics director Jack Purtell said.

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Football:

Jay Sharrett leaves lasting legacy with Pickerington Central football

One of the mantras Jay Sharrett preached to his players throughout his 20-year tenure as Pickerington Central's football coach centered around unselfishness.

Specifically, it had to do with sending out the senior class on as high of a note as possible.

That focus proved to be the backbone for central Ohio's premier program the last two decades.

"Anyone who's ever played for him knows when you leave this program that you'll know two things: How important it is to play for your teammates, especially the seniors, and what it takes to win no matter how you have to get it done," 2020 graduate Demeatric Crenshaw said.

Crenshaw saw that philosophy from both sides, starting at quarterback as a sophomore in 2017 when Central captured its first Division I state championship and also as a senior in 2019 when the Tigers won their second state title.

As news of Sharrett's retirement announcement Dec. 8 began to spread, online messages of recognition ranged from former players to parents of former and current players to those who have watched as fans from a community that has become absorbed in the program's success.

"Coach Sharrett will forever be one of the best to ever do it," 2009 Central graduate Jamie Wood, who went on to play for Ohio State, posted on Twitter. "The numbers don't lie. He helped create a culture of success that afforded many young men like myself the opportunity to continue chasing our dreams at the next level."

DeWayne Carter, a starting defensive lineman for Duke who graduated in 2019, tweeted: "Well-deserved coach! Forever grateful for you and all your wisdom over the years. I wouldn't be where I am today without you!"

Jack Johnson led Pickerington to a 196-112-3 record that included four playoff appearances during the final 30 years that the district had one high school.

After the split into Central and North in 2003, Sharrett became Central's first coach and upped the ante of the program's success.

The Tigers went 211-42 with 17 league championships, eight regional titles, three state runner-up finishes and two state championships under Sharrett.

"Just like anything that keeps you somewhere, (you remember) the relationships that you make and the friends you keep," Sharrett said after announcing his retirement.

The Tigers were a state runner-up for the first time under Sharrett in 2006 when Chazz Anderson threw for more than 2,000 yards and Jordan Jarrell rushed for 2,185 yards and 28 touchdowns during a 13-2 season that culminated with a 26-7 loss to Piqua in Division II.

Then in 2011 while competing in Division I, a Central team led by right guard Jacoby Boren and defensive end/linebacker Taco Charlton lost to Cleveland St. Ignatius 34-13 in the state final to finish 11-3. Boren went on to play for Ohio State and Charlton went on to play for Michigan and is in his sixth season in the NFL.

Central put together a perfect regular season while going 11-1 in 2014 and then enjoyed one of the greatest five-season runs in central Ohio high school football history from 2016-20.

The Tigers were state semifinalists in 2016 and 2018.

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During the 2017 championship run, they were led by Crenshaw, Carter, Xavier Henderson, current Ohio State starting defensive lineman Ty Hamilton and current Notre Dame starting wide receiver Lorenzo Styles Jr.

In a 56-28 victory over Mentor in the 2017 state title game, which gave Central a 14-1 final record, Henderson rushed for 153 yards and one touchdown and Crenshaw threw for a state-record six touchdowns. Henderson is a fifth-year senior for Michigan State who has started 40 college games at defensive back.

In 2019, Crenshaw threw for 14 touchdowns and rushed for 17 scores while being named the Central District's Offensive Player of the Year. He now plays quarterback for Youngstown State. Carter, Hamilton, linebacker Dom Marasco, running back Nick Mosley and Styles Jr. were among the key players as Central beat Cincinnati Elder 21-14 in the state final to again finish 14-1.

"Playing for coach Sharrett was different," said Mosley, who rushed for 1,427 yards and 23 touchdowns in 2019. "He coached very efficiently and he was always about business. Everything he did as a coach was to win. He had everyone's respect and if he told you something, you just know to take him seriously."

Central was a state runner-up in 2020, going 11-1 as Mosley, Styles Jr. and quarterback Garner Wallace led the way as seniors.

The Tigers were regional runners-up in 2021, finishing 12-2, and reached a regional semifinal this fall while going 9-4.

Senior Kobi Gorman started on both the offensive and defensive lines throughout his four seasons and was a key leader the last two seasons along with senior and Pittsburgh commit Rasheem Biles.

"He is a tough coach that pulled the best out of you," said Gorman, who has committed to Miami University. "He pushed us hard every day and knew how to build a true tradition of winning. I'm forever grateful for the lessons he's taught me and the impact he's had in my life. He wanted the best for his players and it's always been that way."

The only time Central didn't make the playoffs under Sharrett was in 2005.

Sharrett is a 1984 Circleville graduate who went on to play for Capital, from which he graduated in 1988 with a degree in secondary education.

After spending two years as an assistant at Whitehall, he joined Johnson's coaching staff in 1990.

Among those on the Tigers' staff are a pair of former head coaches in Brian Haffele (Marion-Franklin from 2005-18) and Byron Mattox (Walnut Ridge from 2006-20) as well as longtime assistants such as Jeff Lomonico, Dave Bristle, Ryan Daugherty and Andy Takos.

Gorman was part of a 35-player senior class this fall for the Tigers, whose top returnee likely will be junior Terrance Alexander. He was the team's leading rusher and also spent time at wide receiver and wildcat quarterback.

"Playing for him was a great experience and he made me sound, disciplined and humble," Alexander said. "He will be missed. I (learned how) to become a great leader, go 110 percent, be determined and help the team win from him."

Doug Ute helps OHSAA through most trying time, navigating HS sports through the pandemic

Ohio High School Athletic Association Executive Director Doug Ute has helped shepherd school-based sports through its most trying times since taking over in August of 2020.

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MARION — When Doug Ute took over as the executive director of the Ohio High School Athletic Association, it was a bleak time.

The coronavirus pandemic forced the OHSAA to cancel its highly profitable winter sports state tournaments for wrestling, girls basketball and ice hockey, plus regionals and state games for boys basketball.

The shutdown extended into spring and wiped out baseball, softball, track, boys tennis and lacrosse.

For an organization that depends on ticket sales to buoy the budget, it was catastrophic.

In the wake of this came Ute, taking over the association that administers high school and middle school sports for roughly 1,600 schools between the two.

In August of 2020 when he came aboard, there were no vaccines to help mitigate COVID-19, and there was a lot of uncertainty that sports could resume.

When athletics began again, there were strict protocols in place, the most important, challenging and controversial being attendance limitations. So even with games being played, only a chosen few could buy tickets to watch.

Eighty percent of the OHSAA's revenue — which reaches eight figures each fiscal year — is based on ticket sales to regional and state tournaments and playoffs, so after losing winter and spring events the previous school year, 2020-21 was lining up to be equally devastating financially for the non-profit.

Tasked with shepherding the association and Ohio's school-based sports through its most demanding time ever was Ute.

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"The biggest piece was trying to work with our member schools to provide that safe environment and work with the department of health and obviously the lieutenant governor and governor because everybody realized how important that piece to the puzzle was during that," Ute said Tuesday afternoon following a Rotary Club luncheon in Marion where he was the guest speaker honoring high school athletes.

Getting kids back on the fields and courts was the priority. Ute said they needed that structure, purpose and outlet. Without it, he worried about the mental health of the state's teens who participate.

So they moved forward with getting sports started and running.

"For me, our job was to continue our conversations and communication with the state leaders and get information out to our schools. It was really the schools that had to implement all these things," he added.

However, making it more difficult to manage was the fact that each county's health department had final say on how that would look. With 88 counties in Ohio, there were differing interpretations.

Further muddling it was not all gyms and stadiums are equal, so larger venues could allow more folks to watch their kids. In some places, only a couple tickets could be issued per athlete, while at others several tickets were possible.

That was a challenge for all school districts, Ute acknowledged.

"It was a lot of education out to our folks and a lot of understanding of what they were going through in their backyard because folks wanted in. Every school was doing it differently. It was helping them walk through a process for that," Ute said.

Because of COVID-19 outbreaks and strict quarantining practices a year ago, it was sometimes a struggle for athletic programs to field teams for games.

It forced the OHSAA to get creative.

Several rules in a variety of sports were altered to cutdown on contact between athletes. The organization changed high school football by cutting the regular season from 10 to six weeks and by allowing everyone into the playoffs for the first time in an effort for fairness. After being eliminated from the playoffs, schools had the opportunity to schedule regular season games through Week 11.

All fall tournaments were held in front of limited capacity crowds, and when coronavirus rates reared up again in the winter, forcing some school districts to return to remote models, there were concerns about the future of high school sports.

The OHSAA pressed forward.

"We had to show we have safe environments, and our events weren't spreading the virus," Ute said.

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Again, in front of limited crowds, the winter sports seasons saw conclusions. With the development of vaccines and a better understanding of the virus and its disease, spring sports returned from their 2020 sabbatical, and athletes enjoyed full seasons albeit with continued restrictions and protocols like fall and winter.

Now 2021-22 marks the second full school year in which the coronavirus is a part of life, and the OHSAA and its member schools have largely resumed business as it was pre-pandemic.

"I don't know if it's been easier because I'm sympathetic to the schools," Ute said of the second year of playing in a pandemic. "It's been harder for them simply because a year ago when you're going through this the first year, communities weren't really educated and there was a little more fear of it. Now there's a little more personal feelings about things — a been-there, done-that type of thing from communities that say we're coming in and we're going to support our kids.

"People have learned to deal with it a bit differently this year, but I'm hearing from our schools that it's been as difficult, if not more difficult, the second time around."

But that's not stopping Ute or the OHSAA. It's about perseverance and hoping the worst has passed.

Financially, that appears to be the case.

"I think it's important to note that COVID didn't cause our financial issues," Ute said.

It only exacerbated it. From the fiscal year 2019 to 2020, tournament revenue dropped nearly \$5 million to a \$10.7 million total. In 2017, tourney revenue topped \$16 million to show just how much was lost by the shutdowns and limited ticket policies.

As a school superintendent for 20 years at Elgin and Newark and as a former businessman, Ute is familiar with budgets and spreadsheets. He leaned on those skills when it came time to get the OHSAA's financial house in order.

While the 2021 numbers have yet to be released, Ute is encouraged by what he knows.

"We had four straight years of deficit spending before last year," he said. "Last year we were in the black, and this year we actually haven't had a better year in the fall since 2009 because people are coming back out."

Ute worked to reduce expenses by making OHSAA staff leaner and by moving tournament venues to less costly places. To help with revenue, the high school playoffs were expanded, doubling the number of teams who qualify and adding more ticket receipts. For decades, the OHSAA waived tournament fees, but those were enacted a year ago to help fill the gap of lost tourney revenue due to the prior 18 months.

"We've cut our expenses and renegotiated some state contracts that have been beneficial to us. We've turned a corner. We're not out of the woods yet, but we've turned the corner," he said.

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There's still a lot of work to do and much more to accomplish, but the future isn't as bleak as it was in August of 2020.

"I think you can't go back to doing things the way we did before the virus that put us in negative spending," Ute said.

To assure that doesn't happen, the OHSAA will look to a new five-year plan.

"I think the one thing that has been the hardest to get through is we want to help our member schools with their expenses at tournament time," he said. "You can't help them with that if you don't have the money to do it."

Now in his second year as the leader of the association, Ute is more comfortable about where school-based sports are heading in the 2020s.

"I do feel we're ahead of schedule from where we thought we would be this year," he said.

And the OHSAA is in a far better place than it was in the late summer of 2020.

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FOOTBALL

Marion-area playoff football berths can birth team cultures, too

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For the six area football teams still playing, this is a big week for the obvious reasons.

It's the playoffs. It's the second season. It's a chance to make a long postseason run and enjoy the spoils of good years.

But more can be gained from participating in Week 11 and beyond.

"A lot can be made of teams that continually make two- or three-round runs in the playoffs and the extra weeks that gives you over a three- or four-year period," Elgin football coach Zack Winslow said.

Extra practice and extra reps don't hurt, but for teams that will be one-and-done, that extra few days on the practice field probably won't be a difference maker as far as skill development and technique go.

Instead, something else is in play this week.

"What I'm hoping is that it builds that culture stuff," Winslow said.

He's not alone.

"It's a big week. It's a step forward for the program and that's how we approached it today," Highland coach Ty Stover said Monday night.

Because it's a new season so to speak, Stover used a different approach to they typical Mondays, taking advantage of the bonus week.

"We went out and split the groups up by grade level and competed against each other, doing some things like tug-o-war and push weighted sleds and some agility stuff to create more energy," he said of the changeup. "It's season No. 2. We're back at it again."

It's a special practice because this is a special week. He wants to gets his team excited about playing football in Week 11.

At Mount Gilead, where this is its first-time in school history participating in the postseason, coach Mike Reid didn't have to say much or do much to get his kids fired up about opening up in the playoffs

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Friday night.

"It's really like a second season as so many coaches say," Reid said. "For my kids, it certainly is. It's almost like the season has started over again. It's that whole second season mentality. I didn't teach that. I just said, 'Welcome to Week 11! Doesn't this feel good.'"

Normally at Mount Gilead, Week 11 is reserved for equipment returns. The Indians are glad they still need to use it.

"It seems like we're back at square one, meaning they're as excited as we were when we entered Week 1 getting ready to play Ridgedale all over again. There is certainly a new energy," he said.

Like Winslow at Elgin, Reid is hoping this week is the start of bigger things to come for the program. In fact, he sees this week as an opportunity to showcase the football team in the school and get prospective athletes excited about 2023 and beyond.

He's seen it first-hand.

"It's huge. It's bigger than I can explain," he said of the potential impact a playoff appearance can have. "At Highland for instance, we made the playoffs in '06, and we went up and upset Huron in the first round. Huron was really good, and we went up there and shut them out 20-0. We lost the very next week to Milton Union, but the next year we had 68 guys come to camp."

After losing seasons, there is often attrition within the ranks as some underclassmen drop out of the program.

"They've definitely bought in for next year," Reid said. "It's an easy buy-in and hope for next year. I've already had kids come up to me in the hallway and say it was a big mistake for not playing and I want to play next year."

Reid and his staff are welcoming all newcomers. He's also seen it trickle down to his junior high teams. He said the eighth grade class numbers 24 players, and the expectation is that most, if not all, will play football as freshmen.

"That's the growth of the program that we're looking for," he said.

That's the impact an extra week of practice and a playoff game can make on a football team going forward.

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FOOTBALL

Marion Harding's head football coach Demetrius Ross resigns a week before season begins

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MARION — A little over a week before the high school football regular season starts, Marion Harding is without its head coach.

Demetrius Ross, in only his second season with the Presidents, resigned on Wednesday, according to Marion Harding Athletic Director Sean Kearns.

"He let the team know (Wednesday) that he wasn't going to be able to continue. Obviously we're going to do what's in the best interest of the kids and take a solid step forward," Kearns said.

Into the void, defensive coordinator Dan Arndt has taken the lead along with offensive coordinator Eric Zagrans and the rest of the staff, all of whom are staying on. No official decision has been made in regards the future of the head coaching position.

"They are in good hands," Kearns said of the team that is set to play a final scrimmage Thursday night at Whitehall-Yearling before opening the season at home against Mount Vernon on Aug. 19. "It's a tough deal, but we have a capable staff."

Because Ross was not the primary signal caller — leaving those duties to his coordinators — the transition won't be as drastic, Kearns said.

"Obviously we're well down the road of installing offense and defense and that kind of thing. We're not going to start over, that's for sure," the AD said.

It is out of the ordinary for a head coach to resign this close to the start of the season.

"The reality is it's not in the manual. There's no playbook when you're in a situation like this," Kearns said.

The athletic director said Ross was not forced to resign, and he said Ross had support from the administration.

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"It was completely and 100 percent his decision. I've seen some things out there that say he was forced to resign, and that definitely is not the case. It was 100 percent his decision," Kearns said.

Ross acknowledged it was his decision and lamented the timing, calling it "horrific."

"There's a lot to it and multiple layers," Ross said. "More importantly it needs to be noted that I acted in obedience to what I truly believe God has been trying to show me for some time in regards to His assignment for me.

"I love the platform of coaching football. I love the mentoring. I love every aspect of it. There's a bigger picture, a bigger message and a bigger calling that has always be on my life. I've used football as an opportunity to run from the responsibility of total submission when it comes to the work required. That means mentoring, ministering, giving back and doing the things I was called to do."

He cited work-life balance as one concern as he commuted daily from his home in Pickerington where he and his wife are raising a family. That's sometimes more than three hours a day in the car. He felt his life "was out of alignment."

But there was more to his decision.

He said he was originally hired by Marion City Schools to be the attendance advocate as well as head football coach, but that his duties changed during the 2021-22 school year. He said he held ongoing talks with former district officials about his position, but more pressing needs in the district took precedent like administration resignations, a change in the school board and other issues MCS is grappling with.

He said he was excited by the new opportunity given to him as a college career advisor under the umbrella of Marion Technical College, but financially it didn't meet expectations and he had to do what was best for his family and take another job.

"Football was the collateral damage for us contractually not being able to get on the same page," Ross said.

What Demetrius Ross will do next

'He will now use his criminal justice degree as he goes to work for Franklin County Juvenile Domestic Court where he will help kids and teens get their lives on track by making new connections and using new resources.

"God has called me to use my talents and the gifts that He has given me to reach a group of different young men, simply put," Ross said. "It's time for me to be obedient and walk in a different direction according to the calling."

As for the football team, he admitted the decision was a shock to his staff and players.

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"There wasn't a dry eye in the locker room," he said. "We got very emotional. We became very transparent and became very protective of each other. We made sure our goals we set out to achieve were still going to be at the forefront of our minds and help prepare us for the work that we needed to do."

Ross said they did some Harding jacks together, dried their eyes and went back to practice.

"I'd like to think the foundation my staff and I embedded into these young athletes (is helping), and they are fighting now with an extra chip on their shoulder. I have no doubt they will continue to find success because we've worked too dog gone hard not to," Ross said.

In his only season as head coach, the Presidents went 7-4 overall and 4-2 to finish as Mid Ohio Athletic Conference runner-up. Harding earned its way into the playoffs for the first time since 2003. It was the program's first winning season since 2017 and just its second since 2004. Ross was named All-Star Marion County Football Coach of the Year and MOAC Coach of the Year.

"He did a lot of great things for us," Kearns said.

Ross is a Marion native, but he attended high school in the Pacific Northwest when his father was transferred there while in the military. He played college football at Boise State and also played and coached professional indoor football while also serving as an assistant high school football coach in Ohio and other parts of the country. His younger brothers Derick and Dominic are Marion Harding Athletic Hall of Famers.

"The kids love him and they're going to miss him," Kearns said. "He created a great bond with them and great relationships. The kids are going to miss him, no question.

"He's a tremendous presence and a tremendous influence on the kids besides being a really good football coach. That's the part you miss."

Matt Horn Division II News

DZ N07

Clyde's Gurney has new determination after losing his mother
[REDACTED]

Athletes of all ages at every level often look to the stands where family is seated.

Someone is missing for Clyde's Mason Gurney. His mother, Chelsey Carter, died from colon cancer last December.

Carter is on Gurney's mind more often than not. The senior spends several minutes before games sitting where his mom used to sit.

She loved to watch him play baseball and golf. He plays football now as well.

He earned player of the year status for golf, carding a 78 and overcoming a playoff for a win at the Sandusky Bay Conference tourney. He's the place kicker and punter for the football team.

"That's one thing I pushed for all four years," he said. "Last year, I came pretty close. I do everything for her and push myself to be great for her. After not being very good freshman year, to win player of the year is an extraordinary feeling."

His mom was with him as he hit his first playoff shot into the rough, surrounded by trees. He punched an iron to within 12 feet for par, compared to a double-bogey for his counterpart.

He brings his mom with him everywhere.

"I have a special routine, especially for baseball," he said. "I sit where she sat and think about her and keep her on my mind. I think about her and what she's done for me."

Gurney averaged fewer than 16 putts per nine holes in events to finish the season, although he carded an 85 at sectional and didn't move on.

He shot 77 to win the Hohenstein Invitational. He shot 74 to finish second at Glenmoor Country Club in Canton to finish second.

"Winning tournaments is the biggest thing," he said. "Me and Josh Swartz push each other."

He averaged 77 for 18 holes and shot 38.5 per nine in the regular season.

Gurney typically heads from a short golf practice to the football field. He'll miss football practice for golf tournaments.

"It's worked out pretty well," he said. "I don't see a challenge. The golf pressure atmosphere helps with Friday night lights. Golf helps with football and football helps with golf. It's calm both ways. Mentally, it helps a lot."

He booted a 42-yard field goal late in the second quarter in a win over Toledo Start.

"It gave us a running clock," he said.

Football provides Gurney another opportunity to escape a little bit.

"I got the friendships back for football, going from middle school football to playing golf," he said. "Those friends were playing football. I have those friendships back."

He tries to set an example for 13-year-old brother, Blake Gurney.

"Help him push through school and make sure he's doing the right things and nothing he shouldn't be doing," he said. "The right things in the classroom and to help him succeed in life. He can come to me first with anything because I understand more than anybody else does."

Clyde coach Rob Jennings helped Gurney develop his game. Gurney didn't simply try to stack rounds on different courses.

"Practice," he said. "In the summer, I spent 10 hours on the course practicing something different every day. Not playing holes, but putts and on the range. That really helped."

Gurney carded 2-under at Eagle Creek as a junior to broaden his horizons. He finished the season first-team all-conference.

"Junior year is when everything started to kick off and improve," he said.

Gurney plans to continue his golf career at Heidelberg University.

"It's close to home," he said. "It was a great atmosphere on my visit. Everything feels like it fits perfect. Great coach, great kids, great campus — you couldn't ask for better."

He dreams of playing the PGA Tour after college.

He wanted to play football as a sophomore two years ago. His parents weren't sure it wouldn't be too much balancing two sports with school.

"The encouragement and discipline and focus to do both at one time," he said. "It takes a lot out of you doing both, with school."

He didn't want to graduate with regrets. Carter's death instilled a new determination in everything Gurney does.

"I know she'd want the best for me and want me to push harder. I try to improve everything for her. Keep my mental game strong. I've worked harder at everything I've done. In the weight room doing more, get that little bit of sadness off me.

"She doesn't leave my mind for a second of any day. She helps me a lot from up above. She's my savior and guardian angel. She passed away when I was 16, but knowing she'll be part of my life for the rest of my life helps."

She's always seated in his heart.

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Credit: Ohio

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Right choice difficult for Carmon to make
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Is there a sculptor in the house? Go ahead and get a mold ready for a statue.

If Port Clinton's Beau Carmon could at least wait until quarterback Cam Gillum graduated, he would.

If he was up to finishing the development of lineman Samari Smith, he'd like nothing better.

He can't do it. After an historic season, it will resonate without Carmon at the helm. He resigned Wednesday as varsity football coach, telling the players in the afternoon.

Everybody wants to win. Carmon managed to make winning feel like losing, or at least not better.

"It comes down to wins and losses, always," he said. "I've always been happy for the kids, always. The best part of the job is seeing the kids' smiles and celebration after wins. For me, instead of excitement, it was relief I didn't lose.

"It comes down to that. I know that sounds selfish, but it's about the kids and coaches, and not letting them down. That overwhelmed me."

He still loves coaching. The extra stress of being the varsity's head coach is the problem.

"I put too much pressure on myself," he said. "It changes you. I always prided myself on not taking work home. My wife and my kids see it and that's not fair to them. I was focused on wins and losses, more than game plans or offseason stuff.

"The players deserve more. The kids need 365 days of leadership and guidance, and that's impossible for me at this point. I can't give the kids what they deserve past this year. It's what's best for the program."

Carmon has no doubt it's also what's best for him.

"Most important, it's what's best for my family that this happen," he said. "I need to refocus on my family and my health. It's been building for some time and I'm at peace and my family is supportive."

He has no rival among Port Clinton peers. He put Port Clinton football on the postseason map, and later extended the voyage further than reasonably imagined.

Port Clinton won 11 games for the first time in program history, finishing with 13 wins. It lost only once during the regular season, finishing with a third Sandusky Bay Conference crown.

This one was outright in the Bay Division, after a shared crown for Carmon in 2016.

It won a regional semifinal and final for the first time to advance to state last year. It won four games in the postseason to double its previous program total, all six under Carmon.

He understands the juxtaposition navigating the ship to uncharted territory in the fall, while only a few people know it's the last voyage, is awkward. He's so much at peace that he didn't have trouble living in the moment.

"When our young men grow up to be great fathers and husbands, they'll understand you have to make tough decisions for yourself and your family," he said. "It's not always easy, but sometimes it's necessary."

Players are disappointed. They'll also move forward, the way Carmon taught them.

The community will be heart broken, even confused. It will come around when it realizes it wants the best for the commander of its one-of-a-kind journey.

He knows. That's how he was able to exhale during the postseason, rather than when the run was complete.

There was no uncertainty. Not after he went to the hospital the night after beating Oak Harbor, missing practice Monday but mostly sweeping it past the kids.

"I made the decision, it's given me less stress to give everything I possibly can give," he said during the postseason. "It's allowed me to clear my mind and focus on that senior class. Resilient is the word.

"It's allowed me to just focus."

Carmon didn't have fun with the offense, even if it looked like anyone would. He called offensive plays for the first time in several years, by default.

However, he had luxury vehicles in his fleet at the skill positions, along with trusty farm plows. Port Clinton scored 49 points in a win over Bellevue to start the season, 44 against Keystone in a regional quarterfinal and 49 against Van Wert in a regional final.

Port Clinton averaged nearly 40 points.

Junior Cam Gillum stepped up to set an example on the field, after an often productive but inconsistent sophomore season. He established a single-season program record with 35 touchdown passes.

Josh Hurst can catch and run, and make plays behind the defense, enough to catch a single-season program record 21 touchdown passes.

Running back Garrett Cornell struggled with injuries early in the season and the line failed to mesh for the run game. All that changed as Cornell got healthy, until a knee injury against Perkins in the postseason, and Port Clinton shifted to lean on the run.

Tyler Webb would be the top weapon for many teams. He tends to make all his touches resemble punt returns, a possible home run if he picks the right player to elude.

He often did, with six touchdown catches and four rushing. The final three are seniors.

"They're the ones who play the football," Carmon said. "We put them in spots. We're doing our job. It's about preparation and execution. Everything they've endured, with the Braves all the way to this point.

"We have good players."

Carmon intends to spend one year away from football, before revisiting his options. He insists he'll never be a head coach, nor part of a staff that plays Port Clinton.

"We're invested in Port Clinton schools," he said. "I'm a teacher first and coach second. We want to be invested in the community. We love this school. I will coach again. Young kids become successful young adults through the game of football.

"I'll be back in some capacity. I'll still coach [youth girls] basketball. Not that varsity football leadership position. I want to be part of the program, if they'd have me. At the lower levels. Maybe varsity some day."

Carmon didn't decide after the season that the story looked even better if he went out on top. Still, it's special to cap your career John Elway style.

"I've never been a huge believer, my wife is, about things happening for a reason," he said. "A lot of life is we get what we put into things. It's about the kids. It has to do with the kids. Support from the parents. The administration.

M H

Wrestling opportunity knocked; Port Clinton girls answered



Until now, many didn't think girls could, should or wanted to wrestle.

Mya Reeves knows girls still have something to prove to some people. However, the Port Clinton sophomore wants them to know she doesn't care if they see it.

It is important to Reeves she represent what future Port Clinton girls can do. And, she's going to do that regardless.

For herself. Girls of a like mind are sanctioned by the OHSAA on the mat starting next season.

"We don't have anything to prove to you," Reeves said. "We're proving what we don't have to. We are just strong. Women are just as strong. We don't have to prove it, if you want to come see it and pay attention."

"We just are."

Girls wrestling is the fastest growing high school sport, in terms of participation. The only thing they need was a chance.

They love it, if they try it. They're good at it, too.

Wrestling is about effort and rewards. Girls had no idea what it looked like because they had few opportunities.

No longer. Coach Kevin Scarpino and junior Cadence Wallace have Port Clinton's girls wrestling program prepared.

"We knew Ohio would sanction girls wrestling, we were hoping it would be [this season]," Scarpino said. "[Adam] Hicks came aboard and wanted to start it. That was a driving force, we had someone like Cader could recruit the girls."

"If we're going to do this, do it now. Get ahead of the curve with the team sanctioned. Build a successful program around the current wrestlers and build a tradition. Put girls on the state podium as champions."

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Port Clinton had two tournaments scheduled to begin the season. Each tourney leads to more invitation full slate.

'More than just making history'

Fremont Ross is in a similar position to Port Clinton, with a fledgling girls program of its own.

"This is more about making history," Scarpino said. "With Coach Hicks' guidance, we created the first all-girls team for wrestling at Port Clinton, in the fastest growing sport. We hope it's here for years after we've got a powerhouse in tradition."

'You didn't bring Gracie, did you?,' opposing coaches already ask Scarpino when Port Clinton's bus arrives.

"It's her first year wrestling," he said. "She has three losses, and one is to Cadence."

Gracie Rohrer also is a junior. They're joined by classmates Amelia Dilg and Olivia Perry, and sophomore Reeves.

Sophomore Olivia Marez and freshman Cheyenne Whittaker are injured.

Reeves, Wallace and Rohrer were first at the inaugural tourney at Mapleton.

"Coach Hicks and I were just hoping to see the girls do the things we taught them to do and just wrestle aggressively," Scarpino said. "We ended up with three champions. We couldn't have been happier for them and their performance."

Wallace finished first as Port Clinton was third among 31 teams at Ridgedale. Perry was second, Rohrer and Dilg and Reeves fifth.

"Everyone wrestled extremely well, and the results showed," Scarpino said.

Wallace was first and Rohrer second at Tinora.

'We're strong enough.'

Of course, Wallace was one of many girls in the country to compete in boys tournaments growing up.

"Cadence wrestled boys only for years," Scarpino said. "There are biological differences. Upper body strength. When you can wrestle all girls in all-girls tournaments, it's completely different and good for the self-confidence."

Even as a youngster herself, presenting an example is already something Reeves considers. If you didn't know that was important, she's only worried about the future.

With or without you.

"I'd love to think that," she said. "Who did she see do that? That would be special. I wrestled with boys and see a girl in there doing the same things [as the boys]. We're strong enough. We are proving it wrong."

"You can see it if you want. We'll keep going."

Hicks, boys varsity coach and umbrella coordinator for wrestling, encouraged Scarpino to start the girls' program this season. Hicks knew Wallace could enlist more wrestlers and planted a seed for what the endeavor would become with her help.

Rohrer and Perry didn't look back. Rohrer continued the chain.

"I got the sales pitch from Gracie," Reeves said. "She seemed so excited. She'd been to open mats. If I wasn't having that good of a time, I had to try. That was two weeks before practice started. I was on the fence."

"She wrote my name down. 'We're going to practice.' It's so much fun. You realize how strong you are, and people and being thrown around for two hours."

She found the opportunity to...

Rohrer (135) is seventh.

"Cadence is one of those rare breeds of wrestler," Scarpino said. "She started out because her brother needed a partner, and she loved it. She's one of the hardest working people I've met. She swims before school for cardio and stays after practice constantly putting the time in to make herself better."

Port Clinton has two girls in junior high and seven at the biddy level. Only one girl so far tried wrestling and decided it wasn't for her.

"The future looks good," Scarpino said. "I have no seniors. I have everyone for at least one more year. If girls try it, wrestling is a sport that depends on you."

Reeves had no idea she liked wrestling. It's a unique situation to show yourself something.

The surprises keep on coming

"She loved it," Scarpino said. "You find someone who likes it. It teaches you a lot about yourself and what you're capable of, if you put in the work. She's one of the hardest workers in the room.

"It's a team sport, but it's mostly individual. If you work hard and dedicate yourself, you get results."

Reeves continues to surprise herself. She won seven of 18 matches.

"Almost every part," she said. "How much I lift. How much I run. I'm super hard to turn. I didn't know that. I do now. Before, it was the bar and two 25s. Now, it's the bar and two 45s. You surprise yourself how fast you progress.

"It's a progressive thing. How much you can learn and how good you can get quickly."

She tasted success immediately.

"My first meet was a highlight that also got me," she said. "I won three in a row and I was hooked. Juxtapose that with the next one, I lost four straight. It pushes me harder. Win or lose, you want to go again and again and again."

Before the season, more than one win sounded like a lot.

"My goal was to win two," she said. "My bar was on the floor. Now, when I get to a meet, I want to win at least two matches."

She plans to compete freestyle at tourneys with Wallace this summer. She'll lift with Scarpino.

"Get better to have an advantage next season," she said. "Every meet is 'first annual.' We're paving the way for next year. Everything is set up. These meets will be a thing."

Scarpino wrestled at Port Clinton, before graduating in 2001. He was the head middle school coach for a few years, until 2016.

The next step

Port Clinton's next step also is the primary objective, find the girls who enjoy the sport. It found that if you give its girls a chance to wrestle, they're likely to keep at it.

It's not alone.

"It gives girls an opportunity to showcase ability they don't know they have until they come out and try," Scarpino said. "Give it a shot."

Reeves did. There's no room on her bandwagon if you still had doubts about what girls can do.

If not for those people, Reeves might have been wrestling a long time ago. They should have known wrestling is great for girls.

"They all have potential," Scarpino said. "I don't think they knew that. They've come a long way since we started in November. Opportunity is what they need."

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419-307-4892

Twitter: ██████████

Credit: Ohio

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