It's bound to happen sometime. No matter how much one might dread it, change is evident. It's called, "the new normal." A rearraging of one's lifestyle. And for Marc Payne, that new lifestyle

began Wednesday morning when he announced his retirement as men's basketball coach at Ashe County High School.

Payne, who will stay on as the school's athletics director, is stepping down after 37 years, three coaching stops, and five decades on the job. Payne, who spent 13 years as head basketball coach and athletic director at Watauga High (1989-2002), finally decided it was time to step aside.

“I have come to the incredibly tough decision to retire from my position as head basketball coach at Ashe County High School,” Payne said in a statement released to the media. “I have a coaching standard that I have followed throughout my coaching career. I will not enter this season, or any season, without the confidence I can uphold that standard.”

A star athlete in football, basketball and baseball at Beaver Creek High, Payne transferred those talents into a successful coaching career. He won 574 games during an illustrious career that includes being named Coach of the Year 17 times. He also served as head coach of the Region 7 team in the 1988 and 1990 State games of North Carolina; he was the head coach of the West team in the 1989 North Carolina Coaches Association McDonald’s 40th Annual East-West All-Star game; and he was head coach of the NC All-Stars in the 2002 Carolinas All-Star Classic.

Payne stated that his decision to retire was because of personal health concerns. Payne suffered a heart attack on May 2. Scott Grubb will be taking over the position as varsity head coach, having spent several seasons as the junior varsity head coach and an assistant under Payne on the varsity staff.

“Scott is prepared and ready for this opportunity. He is an outstanding coach and he will do a wonderful job as our head basketball coach,” said Payne.

Payne began his head-coaching career at Beaver Creek High School and led that program for 14 years before he came to WHS in the fall of 1989. Payne, who is the second on the all-time win list at WHS with 182 victories, led the Pioneers to a Northwestern 4A Conference championship in 1998-99 (WHS' last conference title in men's basketball).

He returned to his roots in Ashe County, when he was named men's basketball coach and AD at Ashe County High in May of 2002. He has mentored that program the last ten years.

Payne, who won 161 games with the Huskies, and he led them to three regional appearances, the last one coming in 2009. And he led his teams to 13 regular season conference championships, including six straight from 1982-87 at Beaver Creek. Payne also saw his teams win seven conference tournaments, five sectional tournament championships, make four regional tournament appearances, and a third place finish in the 2A State Tournament in 1978. Overall, Payne had 11 teams ranked in the Northwest NC final poll at the end of the season, and six teams in the NC top ten.

Photo Courtesy: Marc Payne, PHOTO SUBMITTED