

Wright Steps Down

Written by Mike Kelly

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The Watauga High football program will be looking at its ninth football coach since 1994. Tom Wright, who took over on an interim basis last June, officially stepped down Wednesday afternoon. Wright

who replaced Tim Pruitt (who resigned to take an assistant coaching position at Cherryville), led the Pioneers to a 5-7 record and the state playoffs in his only season at the helm.

His decision was a tough one to make, but one that had to be made, according to Wright.

"It certainly wasn't easy, that's for sure," Wright said. "I really want to thank Mr. (principal Marshall) Gasperson and (Watauga County Superintendent) Dr. (David) Kafitz for giving me this opportunity. They really wanted me to stay on as coach and athletic director.

"And I really enjoyed it, but it's just time for me to move on, and to hand the program over to someone that has a vision on where they want this program to go. It was time for a change.

Now, I can concentrate more on my athletic director duties."

The school will begin searching for a new coach effective immediately.

"And there will be a teaching position available in our (physical education) department,"

Gasperson said. "We won't have to create a teaching position. But what we will be looking for is someone that will be committed to the program for at least seven or eight years (the average life span of a football coach at WHS has been two years).

"Dr. Kafitz and I were disappointed Tom decided to step down. I really felt he could handle both jobs (football coach and AD). Cindy Lentz has been an assistant AD, and she was a huge help to Tom as well. The pieces were in place, and Tom was our choice, hands down. He did a great job last season. Tom really stepped up, and he stepped in and led our program to success."

And being successful is nothing new for Wright. He led the WHS girls basketball program for six years. And during his tenure, Wright won 89 games, and he is still the only coach in school history to beat McDowell (1996-97) and to beat Freedom twice (1996-97 and 1998-99) in girls basketball.

The Pioneers rallied from 25-points down to beat Freedom on the road in 1998-99. It was WHS' first and only win on the road against the Patriots.

"In a short amount of time, Tom did a great job to get our players ready for the season,"

Gasperson said. "He was my choice from the start. And we spoke about this position on and off during the season, but once the state championships in football were over, we decided to sit down and discuss the situation. But I made it clear, it was his job, if he wanted it."

"We're looking for someone in our next coach, who will be a teacher as well as a coach that can work well with the kids," Wright said. "It was an honor to coach this team. But I feel we're leaving the program in a great spot, and I think the program is in a good position for someone to step in and take it forward."

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WATAUGA COACHES SINCE 1989

JACK ROTEN 1989-1995

RANDY BALDWELL 1996 (3-8)

CRAIG STYRON 1997 (3-8)

MIKE PROPST 1998-2000 (11-22)

MIKE HUDSON 2001-03 (16-18)

ADRIAN SNOW 2004-07 (29-22)

TIM PRUITT 2008-2011 (21-27)

TOM WRIGHT 2012 (5-7)