

A Legend Moves On

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Thursday, 25 October 2012 08:44

It's hard to believe how fast the high school sports season is moving along. Here we are in late October, and we're in the final week of the regular season in high school football. Heck, the

high school basketball season is just a few short weeks away. Practice officially begins next Wednesday, October 31, and the first game of the season will be played Monday, November 19, when the Watauga High men's and women's basketball teams take on Avery at Lentz-Eggers Gym.

But there will be something missing when the basketball season perks up. A familiar face won't be among those competing this season. Well, if you haven't heard, long-time coach Marc Payne officially retired as men's basketball coach at Ashe County High on Wednesday morning.

His retirement from coaching (he will stay on as the school's athletic director) became official at 10:15 a.m., and in the mere moments that followed, a long and successful coaching career came to an end as well. Five-hundred and 74 wins at three different schools (Beaver Creek, Watauga and Ashe County) in a 37-year period. Not to mention all the awards, the players, and young coaches he influenced along the way. Klay Anderson, an assistant football coach and the women's basketball coach at WHS, was one of those blessed to work with Payne.

"He gave me a chance, and I'm thankful for it," Anderson said. "He was the (Watauga) county athletic director when he hired me at Valle Crucis, and then he brought me up to the high school. I had a chance to work with Ryan Armstrong as a JV assistant. I was named the freshman coach shortly after that.

"But it won't be the same not seeing him out there this season. He's a familiar face, not only here in the High Country, but around the state. Marc is an influential guy. He's well known and well respected. He will definitely be missed."

A true statement, if there ever was one. As for me, I'm glad that I had the opportunity to share in some of those moments---his 300th and 400th career wins (ironically, his 400th win came against Ashe County in West Jefferson in 2001), and a (Northwestern 4A) conference championship in 1999, which also earned him Coach of the Year honors that season. Those moments, among countless others, will always stay with me.

Thank you coach Payne for a job well done.