

Opinion: Griffin left his legacy on Louisburg



Louisburg football and track coach Gary Griffin said goodbye to Louisburg High School last week as he retired from the school after 32 years. Griffin won two state titles during that time and coached hundreds of athletes.

Gary Griffin is a man of few words. This is not a heavily-guarded secret. Anyone who has been in Louisburg for any amount of time knows this is the case.

So, here I am, trying to figure out what to say about a man who has sculpted and guided high schoolers for more than three decades – a man who doesn't like to talk much.

It is not an easy task, but Griff, as he is admirably known, doesn't have to say anything. His actions speak for themselves. I was able to get dozens of responses from people who wanted to say 'Thank you' to Griff for all he has done and it was fantastic. It truly shows what impact he had on the community.

To be honest, this is a column I have been dreading on writing for several years now. I respect that heck out of Griff and have since I arrived here almost 10 years ago. In the last few years, I have come to realize that his time at Louisburg High School was coming to a close.

There was a part of me where I hoped he would hold out a little longer and my kids would either have the chance to have him as a science teacher or a coach. There is no one I would trust more with my children than him.

For the last decade, I have had the chance to watch Griff reach young athletes and get the best he could out of them. If the kids wanted to put in the work, Griff would take care of the rest.

Coaches and teachers like Gary Griffin are a dying breed. You don't see them stick around for 30-plus years at the same place anymore, and ones that like to coach multiple sports. He could do it all and he did it well.

During his time as a head football coach, Griff's success was obvious. He led the Wildcats to two state championship games in his 14 years, including the school's first state title in 2010.

About seven months after that, he coached the Louisburg boys track team to another state title in 2011. Personally, it was one of the more fun times for me covering Wildcat athletics.

For years, the only state title the school had won was in golf back in 1977, but it had been close in several instances. Then in less than a year, Louisburg wins two.

As much talent as those teams had, none of those titles happen without Griff and the group of coaches he assembled around him. They all worked so well together for several years and it was impressive to watch.

To me, what was more impressive was the fact he looked at this Paola High School graduate (yes, I grew up in Paola) and trusted me to cover Wildcat athletics the right way. Louisburg and Paola has been a great rivalry for several years and I am sure the last person Griff wanted to confide in after a game was this guy from Paola.

Instead, he looked past all that, and over the years I think I earned his trust. He trusted me to censor him during interviews and make him sound good in all the articles. Not sure I succeeded every time, but I did what I could.

I've teased him that I will release all the uncensored comments he made over the years. It would be great reading for sure.

He was there for me, like so many others, two years ago when I found out I was let go from my position with the newspaper. Griff was a sounding board when I was trying to figure out what I was going to do with my life.

He gave me some great advice and the confidence to go ahead and start Louisburg Sports Zone. I may have never been a student of his, or an athlete, but he helped me like he did so many others over the years.

Griff commanded respect from his players and he got it. He was often gruff, liked to yell at times and held his players accountable. He had the incredible balance of being tough on athletes and caring about them at the same time.

A lot of them didn't run off and pout when he got on to them, but instead they rose to the challenge and did things they didn't think they were capable of because they didn't want to disappoint him. I watched him get after players, and when the season was over, I saw him try to hold back tears as he had to say goodbye to his senior class. He loved his players and the feeling was mutual.

There was no doubt he had chances to go off to bigger schools, but he and his family loved this town and decided to make this their home. He and his wife Lori raised two wonderful kids here and have been a big part of the community.

Behind every great coach is dedicated and loyal coach's wife. Lori has stood by him through the good and bad times and put

up with him being gone half of the year and leaving her to raise their two kids.

He would miss his kids' events because he was busy coaching someone else's children. It is a sacrifice not a lot of people are willing to make.

Griff didn't want to take the credit when things went well – he shifted that to his assistants and players. At the same time, he was the first person to stand there and take the complaints.

A coach's life is not an easy one, but Griff made it look a breeze for 32 years.

Now after years of hard work, he gets a chance to watch his own kids thrive in their lives. He will get the opportunity to watch his son Garrett find his way in the National Football League with the New Orleans Saints.

A little closer to home, he gets to see his daughter Gentry thrive in the nursing field and create a life for herself and her husband Drew Harding – who ironically will be teaching science and coaching at LHS next season.

Selfishly, it is sad Griff won't be roaming the sidelines or halls at LHS any longer. At the same time, I couldn't be happier for a man who put his heart and soul into a place and made better than when he arrived.

He put his stamp on Louisburg High School athletics and he will not be forgotten. A job well done Griff! Thanks for everything!