

Harding excited for opportunity as Wildcat head football coach



Drew Harding was hired to be the next Louisburg High School head football coach last week after the district decided not to renew the contract of former coach Robert Ebenstein.

The Louisburg football program will have a different leader on the sidelines starting next season.

The USD 416 Board of Education approved the hire of LHS assistant coach Drew Harding to be the team's new head coach last Monday after the district decided not to renew the contract of former coach Robert Ebenstein.

Harding has spent the last five seasons as a Wildcat assistant coach, including time as a defensive coordinator. He is a 2010 Louisburg graduate and was a big part of the Wildcat program during his time as a student-athlete at Louisburg High School.

However, Harding didn't see himself be a head coach of any sport coming out of college.

"It means a lot," Harding said. "When I got out of school, I didn't get into education right away and started somewhere else. I decided to get into education because of the impact my former coaches at Louisburg had on me. To come full circle and to be in the position that I am in now, is pretty surreal. I am really excited for the opportunity and hopefully I can have

the same type of impact on student athletes as they come through the program.”

Ebenstein has the been the head coach the last five seasons and helped the Wildcats to a 30-18 record during that time, including a Frontier League and regional title in 2018. He had a winning record three of those five seasons.

He was also named the KFCA Coach of the Year during that season and was selected to be an assistant coach for the Kansas Shrine Bowl. He was an assistant coach for the Wildcat program for five years before earning the head coaching job.

“I appreciate the time and dedication coach Ebenstein put into the football program and summer weights and conditioning,” Louisburg activities director Michael Pickman said. “In his time as head coach of Louisburg, he had successful seasons and accolades as well. I wish him the best moving forward.”

Ebenstein was hoping to continue on as the Wildcat head coach, but he wanted to thank all of those that have helped him along the way.

“I would just like to take a moment to thank every player who I had the opportunity to coach for all of their effort and time,” Ebenstein said. “All of the managers, parents, announcers, and kitchen support for all of the countless hours they put into Louisburg Football. Also, a huge thank you to all of the amazing guys that I had the honor to coach with, I know they will continue to lead as they always have.



Kicker Drake Varns leaps into the arms of Louisburg coach Robert Ebenstein after making a field goal during a previous season.

"I know Coach Harding is a great coach, mentor, and friend and will do an amazing job as head football coach. I wish him and the football family nothing but the very best. With the talent that will be returning next year, with a season's worth of experience, the sky's the limit. When learning has to take place, I hope that Coach Harding gets the support that he and all coaches deserve."

When the district decided to move in a different direction at head coach, Louisburg interviewed a handful of candidates, but

Harding stood out among the rest.

"I am excited for Drew Harding to have the opportunity to lead the football program," Pickman said. "He will bring an energy and passion that will provide a culture of hard work, accountability and family on and off the field. He is well respected by the staff and students and knows the current players and the league and the community, which gives him the ability to relate to all patrons and players of the program being familiar with the tradition and expectations Louisburg has of its football program and all the benefits a Louisburg educational and athletic opportunity has to offer.

"He started as a dedicated player and graduate at Louisburg, has been a dedicated assistant coach and teacher, and now enters the next chapter as head coach of Louisburg football. This Louisburg foundation and experiences in his time will allow him to build upon strong relationships he already has and instill those high expectations to which he holds himself to the athletes he coaches so they can rise to those same expectations and levels of success."

Harding was a starting quarterback for the Wildcats during his time in high school and helped Louisburg to a playoff run before falling to Bishop Miega in 2009.

Since coming back to Louisburg as a teacher, Harding began his coaching career as an assistant basketball before joining the assistant ranks for the football team. He hopes that his coaching experience, and being an LHS graduate, can be a positive in his transition.

"It does help," Harding said. "I am really lucky that when I came through high school that we had some really good teams and really good athletes at that time. I think it helps me to have seen that and experience that. All the coaches that have come before me have set the foundation for what this program is and have set me up for success.

"It is not like I need to reinvent the wheel or anything, I just need to carry on the tradition that was already there. For me being an assistant was huge to see how things work and how to approach things and learn from all the other coaches."

Harding has had many positive experiences in being an assistant for Ebenstein and Ty Pfannenstiel on the basketball side.

"I just pick things up from other coaches," Harding said. "Coach Pfannenstiel is big in developing the athlete overall. He is big on preaching character and commitment and stands by his word and holds kids accountable on the court and outside."

"Coach E (Ebenstein) always had a great way that he could relate and interact with kids. I think that they respected him and he was a guy that was always there for his assistant coaches. He always stood up for his assistants, delegated tasks and let his assistants run with it. Those are really some of the biggest takeaways that I have working under those two guys."

According to Harding, all of the assistants will return for next season and will have one open position to hire later in the year.

He is looking forward to putting his own stamp on the program and doing so with several returning varsity players.

"I have to be me," Harding said. "There are certain things that will change, but I am not going to reinvent the wheel and do things 100 percent different. There will be some changes that I'll do because I have to be me. There have been a lot of really good coaches that have come before me that have set the stage, and my job is to keep that going and put my stamp and flair to the program."

"It is exciting to be a head coach and already having a relationship with the kids. It gives us an ability to go on a

nice little run right out of the gate. We have a solid junior class, a solid sophomore class and a good freshman class. I'm looking forward to combining all their talents and be competitive."