

Bovaird excited to take over Wildcat boys soccer program



Bobby Bovaird was hired as the Louisburg High School head boys soccer coach last month after resignation of former coach Kyle Conley, who left after seven seasons. Bovaird spent the last two season as the Wildcat assistant coach.

When Bobby Bovaird signed on as the Louisburg High School assistant boys soccer coach a couple years ago, it was a reunion of sorts.

Bovaird, who is currently the school's wrestling coach, had just been focusing on that sport and had gotten away from a sport he loved growing up.

"Soccer has been a part of my life since I was in elementary school," Bovaird said. "I'd gotten away from it when I started teaching and taking on head wrestling duties, but I loving being a part of the sport again.

"My son has been getting more and more into soccer the last few years, and I was his rec coach for a long time. When he transitioned to competitive soccer a few years ago, I found myself watching his club coaches quite a bit and looking at how the game has changed, as well as what drills they use."

He had the opportunity to get back into the soccer world and has enjoyed it ever since. With a chance to work under former coach Kyle Conley for the last two years, now he is looking forward to the next step.

Bovaird was hired as the school's new head coach after Conley resigned his position back in May. It is a challenge he is looking forward to taking on as he is just the third head coach in program history.

"I'm really excited," Bovaird said. "The last two years, I got a chance to closely observe one of the best coaches in the state first-hand, and I've become really familiar with how Coach Conley approached his vision for the program. I've also gotten to know the players pretty well.

"We're going to be using quite a few of the familiar drills that we've done in the past, and as we begin the season with those drills, we'll also be implementing new drills to help the team along the way."

Spending time as the team's assistant coach allowed Bovaird to get know the players as the Wildcats try for their second state final four in three years.

Conley spent seven years as the Wildcat head coach and took Louisburg to two state final fours and recorded the program's best finish in 2020. He also guided the Wildcats to the No. 1 seed in the state playoffs last season, before falling to defending state champion Bishop Miege in the regional championship.

Although there won't be wholesale changes to how the program is run, Bovaird said the players will see a few subtle changes along the way.

"Coach Conley left some big shoes to fill, and one of the major changes the team can expect is that I will be bringing a different approach to the game. I love the standard drill series that Coach Conley used, and I firmly believe that repetition of some of these basics is the key to making LHS soccer competitive, not only in the Frontier League, but also in Kansas 4A.

"We're looking at adjusting our formation this season as well. I grew up playing a 4-3-3 formation, and while the 4-3-3 is still in use, it's evolved from what I played back in the day. But I view myself as a student with a focus on continuous learning and improvement, so I have been studying up on the modern game."

Although wrestling and soccer are completely different sports, Bovaird does see a common theme he can use to help his team improve and that is all about having the right mindset.

"For the longest time, there wasn't a lot of overlap between soccer players and wrestlers, but in the last two years we've seen more and more athletes doing both sports," Bovaird said. "I take a holistic approach to coaching – the total person – so that athletes who graduate from programs I coach are better prepared for life beyond the wrestling mat or the soccer field. I've come to highly value the mindset training that has enabled quite a bit of our wrestling success, and I hope to bring that mindset focus to the soccer team as well."

"This summer during our practices, the guys might have noticed that I like to talk through the drills – explaining some fundamentals, explaining why I coach the way I coach, etc. I'm setting the stage for the upcoming season so that the learning curve is over and we can get right to work. As a wrestling coach over the years, I've often found that some of my best teaching moments have been on the mat during practice while I'm working one-on-one with the athletes. Now that I'm taking on the head soccer coach position, I'm finding that I can bring about some more teaching moments while playing in a scrimmage situation with the team."

As for the Louisburg team, the Wildcats are hoping for a big 2022 season. The Wildcats return several starters from a season ago and could feature a senior class that reaches close to 15 by the time tryouts start next month.

"This senior class especially has a ton of talent," Bovaird said. "The week after our season ended last year, they were already organizing kick-around sessions. I think they're focused on trying to win state, and they're putting in the work on their own."

"We've had our official summer practices, but they are putting in more time on the field than that. They're in the weight room, they're running on their own, and their getting together to play. This season, we're expecting to compete for another league title, a regional title, and a shot at the Kansas 4A crown."