

Football coach making giant strides in Division III

By THAD WHITE, Staff Writer
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Dan Surface is a man of quiet resolve.

In a profession where many of his colleagues are guys who scream, yell and throw temper tantrums, Surface is a man who believes in hard work and uncompromising morals as he heads the Chowan College football team in the proper direction.

When Surface took over as head football coach at Chowan several years ago, he faced many obstacles.

Not only was he faced with the challenge of making the Braves winners at the Division III level after years of success as a junior college, but Surface was replacing legendary Jim Garrison.

The coach never shirked from the duties of a head football coach, but moved immediately to put his own stamp on a team that was desperately seeking an identity as a four-year institution.

He has worked tirelessly to make the team a winner and each of his first three seasons has been better than the one previous.

When Surface was tabbed by Garrison, the school's athletic director, to take over the football program, he inherited a club which had won two games in two years as a senior college.

Garrison, whose attention was demanded more and more by his duties as athletic director, made the decision to turn the program over to his top assistant.

For 16 years, Surface was on the sidelines with Garrison as the Braves' defensive coordinator.

Surface served as head football coach at Floyd County, Virginia, before being called back to Chowan as chairman of the department of health and physical education and defensive coordinator of the football squad.

Surface has worked, along with his staff, to make the football program a winner.

"We want to make this program a winner," said Surface. "Everyone likes to be associated with a winner."

And, while a winning season escaped the Braves (who finished 3-7) this year, the coach believes that it was finally within reach.

"We had two other games we felt we could have won in Methodist and Ferrum," Surface said. "We are pleased that we made progress, but we could have been playing for a winning season during that final game."

With eight games played, the Braves were 1-7 and facing the possibility of returning to the 1-9 mark they had escaped from with a 2-7-1 mark last year, but neither Surface nor his team was willing to go backwards.

"The last two games we wanted to win for our seniors and me and we were able to do that," Surface said. "The seniors have had a challenging four years."

"They came here at a challenging time for the program and make a significant contribution," he continued.

"We wanted to see them leave with those two wins and I was happy we were able to do that."

The team closed out the season with a 20-7 victory over Newport News Apprentice School and a sparkling 19-13 overtime victory against Guilford College.

Asked about having the program win three games for the first time as a senior college, Surface was typically pragmatic.

"They're all big at this stage," he said. "We won three games, the most so far in Division III, but there were two other games we could have won."



Chowan head football coach Dan Surface sends in a play via sophomore tight end Reggie Wilson during a recent game. Surface orchestrated a 3-7 campaign for the Braves this season, the most ever wins since the college moved up to four-year status and Division III competition. Photo by Lee Copeland

He also said he believed wins over Ferrum and Methodist could have sparked confidence which would have led to other victories.

Although his teams are continuing to improve, Surface said he doesn't have a timetable in mind, but rather is hoping to see the team become a winner.

"We take it one year at a time," he said.

"Dan Surface has dedicated himself for more than 20 years, to making the Chowan College football program the best that it can be, on and off the field."

"Our goals this season were to have a winning season and to beat all the teams in North Carolina that were on our schedule.

"Although we didn't get that done, we did improve," he said. "In previous years, Methodist and Ferrum have kind of dominated us, but we played them close this year."

"Even though we lost, we have made progress," he admitted.

But Surface isn't making excuses and freely admits he wanted to have the team break through to a winning season.

"Of course, we would like to have made the

transition much quicker," he said. "We wanted that for Chowan College football and the college as a whole."

The most gratifying part of the three-win season and the two-game winning streak to close out the season for Surface, was having the seniors leave with a pair of wins.

"These seniors have been pioneers so to speak," he said. "It's not an easy process to make the transition from junior college to Division III."

"In an era that has been a challenging time, these seniors have done a great job," he said.

And, while the seniors are leaving with a two-game win streak, Surface is already busily preparing for another season, one which he believes will be benefitted by the groundwork laid this year.

"(The wins) are going to help with the underclassmen as we prepare for next year," he said. "It makes you feel better."

Dan Surface has dedicated himself for more than 20 years to making the Chowan College football program the best that it can be, on and off the field.

He has shown himself a gentleman and has assembled a team that portrays the quiet cool that has made him the upright man he has always been.

The Chowan College football program is headed in the right direction and that success belongs in large part to the quiet calm of Dan Surface.

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