

Coach

From 8

so once football season was over, I would drive to Askewville for practice and games," he continued. "It was always interesting the next day at school as we discussed who won and lost."

While still coaching at the elementary schools, Whitaker received his first opportunity to coach at the varsity level at Bertie High School. In 1990, the late Ron Cooke asked him to serve as an assistant on the varsity baseball team, and Whitaker gladly accepted the opportunity.

"Every day I would conduct practice at Askewville and leave there and go to Bertie High," he said. "At least once a week, my team at Askewville would go to the high school for practice."

Whitaker said parents from Askewville Elementary would help him transport the student-athletes.

A year later, then BHS football coach Spencer White asked Whitaker to join the football staff as a scout on Friday nights.

"He asked me if I was interested, and I knew it would be a great start for me," Whitaker said.

He remembered the first year fondly.

"That year it seemed like once the conference season started, the next week's opponents were always playing Northwest Halifax," he mused. "I made several trips there that year. The people in the press box treated me like family. At halftime, they always brought me a hot dog, popcorn and a drink."

Whitaker began coaching at Bertie High School in earnest the following year, serving as an assistant varsity and junior varsity football coach. It's a role in which he would continue through 2013 when he was named Director of Athletics.

In addition to coaching football, Whitaker continued as the varsity baseball assistant until taking over as head jayvee coach in 1995 and 1996. He was then promoted to head varsity baseball coach in 1997, and remained in the role until being named AD. During the span, he spent several stints as head jayvee football coach, winning a handful of league championships.

As he looked back on those years coaching, three highlights stood out to him. Two were among the biggest accomplishments in Bertie High School history - the 1995 and 2000 state football champi-



FILE PHOTO

Randy Whitaker (center) took time recently to read to elementary school students and speak to them about Bertie High School athletics.

onships. The third was the 1999 varsity baseball team which reached the third round of the N.C. High School Athletic Association playoffs.

"We were two wins away from playing for the state championship, and lost to Wilson Fike in the bottom of the seventh inning at their place," Whitaker recalled. "They went on to win the state championship that year."

He said those accomplishments stand out, but he remembers each team differently.

"As for teams, it is hard for me to select a single team because each one of them were special," he said. "Each team brought a uniqueness to themselves. They always worked hard, and represented the school well. That is all I could ask for."

Despite his coaching success, Whitaker said he knew he wanted to lead the entire program at some point.

"I had decided years ago that I wanted to be athletic director before I retired," he said. "When Coach Marvin Rankins retired, the opportunity arose."

Whitaker said he was fortunate to be chosen by then-BHS Principal Rickey Eley, and he is grateful for the vote of confidence.

"I appreciate Coach Eley having confidence in me to select me as the new athletic director, and I also thank Coach Rankins for giving me the opportunity to prepare for the job. He let me help him with duties for several years before he retired."

The promotion to

Athletic Director meant Whitaker's retirement from coaching, but it was a sacrifice he was ready to make - and one he doesn't regret.

"It has been great," he said of the AD's role. "I have enjoyed working with the coaches, student-athletes and administrators. There has been one common goal - do your best and represent the school in a positive manner."

Whitaker said the relationship he had with athletes, coaches, athletic directors, parents, media, game officials and opposing teams helped him in the role.

He also expressed his appreciation for those who volunteered to work at home ball games, adding most people don't know how hard it would be to host games without the volunteers.

As he looks back on his four years at the helm of the athletic program, Whitaker said he is proud of what has been accomplished.

"Seeing the athletic teams progress from the beginning of the year to the end of the season is rewarding," he said. "You are not going to have a championship team every year, but teams should always grow."

Whitaker said he was also proud of seeing the school receive a Sportsmanship Award from the NCHSAA for being an ejection-free school in two of those years.

Now, he is handing off those reins to Bertie football coach Grantley Mizelle, who has agreed to accept the role on an interim basis. As Whitaker retires, he said he is

grateful for his years at BHS.

"I have always tried to be there for my coaches and athletes," he said. "I have always tried to be fair, and do what was best for the program and the school."

"As Athletic Director, I tried to attend as many away games as possible," he added. "Even when I was coaching, I tried to make as many games as I could. I think it is important for the coaches and players to see you there to support their program."

As he plans ahead, Whitaker said there is still much to do in his life.

"I plan to enjoy my life," he said. "There are some things on a list I have that I would like to do, but my commitment to my duties left me unable to in the past."

One of those is seeing his beloved Cincinnati Reds play in their home stadium.

"I have always wanted to go, but never have," he said.

Whitaker said he also looks forward to fulfill-

ing his role as a member of the Windsor Board of Commissioners. He was sworn in last month after being elected to his first term in November.

"I look forward to serving the citizens of Windsor," he said.

Looking back, Whitaker closed, "To my athletes and coaches, even though I have retired I am only a phone call away, and you will still see me at athletic events. I will be the one wearing a pair of shorts, and a Bertie jacket in 30-degree weather."

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Fourth

From 8

first-round bye. Georgia would have demolished USC and Big Ten fans could have seen how Ohio State fared against Alabama.

Since I'm suggesting a major change to college football, let me offer a radical solution to problem number two.

They could take the

revenue generated by the additional two play-off games to pay division one college football players.

ESPN pays \$80 million a year to broadcast the Rose Bowl. That game alone would ensure that all 85 players on all 129 FBS teams could receive \$7,000 and there would still be a few million dollars left over.

I told you my idea was radical. That doesn't mean it's wrong though.

David Friedman is a long time sports writer and columnist. A Bertie High School graduate, he and his family currently reside in Wilmington. David can be reached via e-mail at fourthand-longcolumn@gmail.com.

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