

Thach earns 200th victory as volleyball coach

BY DAVID GOUGH
The Daily Advance

It may have just seemed like another ho-hum match for Perquimans volleyball as it made quick work of Washington County at home on Tuesday, but you couldn't tell that by the players' reactions after it ended.

Loud cheers in the post-game huddle were followed with a couple players leaving momentarily and coming back in the huddle with two items to give to coach Kristie Thach: Cake and a gift bag.

The Lady Pirates' 25-11, 25-5, 25-8 rout of the Lady Panthers gave Thach her 200th win in 10 seasons as the Perquimans head volleyball coach.

"It means a lot," Thach said. "To share it with this group of girls is equally special. They know what it means to be a Perquimans Pirate. They play with heart and I hope that they get some of that from me because I feel like I try to coach with heart and fire."

Perquimans (16-2, 11-0 Albemarle Athletic Con-



THACH

ference) definitely played with fire on Tuesday. Several serves and spikes were just too hard to handle for Washington County (3-7, 2-7 AAC) all game, most notably in the second set.

The Lady Pirates trailed 5-4 early before they ran off 21 consecutive points for a commanding 2-0 lead in sets. Back to serve for the final 20 points was Samantha Midgett.

Most of the time, the senior's serves just came in too hot for the Lady Panthers to be able to have a successful return. Midgett finished with more than a dozen aces in that span.

Meanwhile, senior Megan Denson contributed with eight aces and a team-high seven kills, while Erin Thomas had a team-high seven assists.

"We played well and we served well," Thach said. "We were able to mix some stuff



DAILY ADVANCE PHOTO

Perquimans volleyball players celebrate with head coach Kristie Thach (center) after the team's three-set win against Washington County last week at Perquimans County High School.

up. We have three matches this week and just want to continue what we've been working hard to do."

As evident by a record of 200-43 over 10 years, Thach has experience many dominant performances like this one in the midst of dominate seasons as a coach.

Perquimans might be a small school, but the volleyball program has been able to maintain consistent success. Thach was even part

of it as a player before she graduated from the school in 1996.

Then, she played under the coaching of Carolyn Rodgers, who led the Lady Pirates for 20 years and was the first coach in program history until Thach took over for her when she retired.

Thach credits the winning tradition of the program for her success as coach over the last 10 years.

"I think Perquimans vol-

leyball is something that a lot of people want to be a part of because they know that you're going to work hard, have fun and hopefully win some games along the way," she said.

Senior Cayce Copley can attest to that. The outside hitter has been on the varsity team for all four years of her high school experience.

Copley, who now has more than a 1,000 kills as a Lady Pirate, loves the high standard that Thach has continued the tradition of year in and year out.

"It's awesome to be a Lady Pirate in general because it's just something our community holds to a high standard," Copley said, citing the community's high attendance for rival matches against Camden and Currituck.

With the four years on varsity also comes the building of the relationship with her coach. Thach, Copley said, continues to make a big impact on her on and off the court.

"I was small and didn't really know the girls as a freshman, but I feel like ever since then she took me under her

wing and really helped me," Copley said. "For me, she's not just a coach. She's more like a mentor. Whenever I have trouble with something, I feel like I can count on her and text her."

"She means a lot to me and it's honestly going to suck graduating this year because I'm going to miss her."

Thach has no plans on ending her time as a coach or teacher any time soon, so more milestones may be on the way. She's been teaching for 17 years and says that she'll keep coaching "as long as my health allows me to."

Down the road whenever that time may come, Thach hopes her replacement has experience in the Perquimans volleyball program just like she already had when she took over for Rodgers in 2009.

"I would love that," Thach said. "If one day whenever I decide to retire and one of my former players wants to take over, that would be a dream come true to have somebody step in who knows the tradition, knows the pride."

SHERIFF

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areas and takes the fight to the drug dealers.

"The opioid crisis is a drug problem that needs to incorporate rehabilitation along with enforcement," Bray said. "My goal is not to lock up everyone who has a drug addiction but to work with families to help restore lives. The ones selling opioids and taking advantage of vulnerable people are the ones I want to send away."

White said in the year and a half he's been sheriff, he has taken steps, including getting a K-9 and assigning a deputy specifically for drug enforcement.

"My intentions are to get another agent to be able to have a drug unit. We are targeting the dealers to get the drugs off the street and also working with the federal system so the dealers can get more time in prison."

But he too said arrests alone won't be enough.

"Awareness to the public

and providing services for help are a way to combat the opioid crisis," White said. "In working with the Albemarle Overdose Prevention Coalition we try to get the information out to the public to make them aware of the dangers and how they can receive help. The Perquimans Sheriff's Office is currently working with some surrounding agencies to implement the ANGEL program where if a user comes in to the sheriff's office, we work with them to find help for them in trying to get them clean."

White, 40, has served more than 18 years with the Perquimans County Sheriff's office. He was an investigator when former Sheriff Eric Tilley retired, and was to be appointed to the job. He is running as a Democrat.

Bray, 51, retired earlier this year as a sergeant with the North Carolina Highway patrol. He has 26-plus years of law enforcement experience and four years with the U.S. Marine Corps. Bray is running as a Republican.

Perquimans is in an en-

viable place in that it has a full-time armed School Resource Officer at each of the four schools. But both White and Bray said there are other things that can be done to make schools even safer.

Bray wants to have road patrol deputies visit schools randomly during their shifts.

"I also want to make sure there is a limited number of entries and exits being used during the school day. There should only be one way in and one way out when school is in session. Students like to get other students to open other doors to let them in the school. Metal detectors at the high school and middle school would be a great asset for school safety and deter the possession of weapons in school."

White said earlier this year he held a large drill to train for what happens in a mass shooting. He said they plan to hold it every other year.

SROs are also undergoing more training and he developed a H.O.P.E.S. program at the grammar school where law enforcement interacts

one-on-one.

"This forms the trust with law enforcement so the students feel comfortable to provide information when they know of something happening. It also provides a positive role model for encouragement. We are currently in the process of being able to live stream the schools cameras to the lap tops in the patrol vehicles and also have access to the student roster in case of an emergency situation."

Bray said he'll keep deputies so long as they support his goals.

"I plan to retain deputies that support my goals and objectives and have a strong work ethic," Bray said. "I will conduct thorough background checks for new deputies before they are hired."

Both men also said they will support immigration officials if asked to do so.

"When it comes to immigration enforcement, I will assist federal authorities if requested to do so especially if it involves a violent, dangerous criminal," Bray said. "I do not support the 'Sanctuary City' philosophy. I believe all law enforcement should work together to enforce the laws of our nation and state."

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"I would continue to follow the plans already in place and if assistance is needed then we would assist as well," White said. "I believe in working together with all agencies that need our help."

Neither man believes their political party will play a big issue in the race.

"I don't feel the sheriff's position should be based on political party in an election," White said. "If I go to a house to answer a call I don't ask their affiliation, we serve all citizens of Perquimans County no matter their political party. Each person is treated fairly and equally and each situation is handled in the best possible way."

"I do not believe politics play a crucial part in local races," Bray said. "The citizens are familiar with both candidates and know what each one brings to the table."

White believes his time in the sheriff's office makes him a good choice.

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"I am knowledgeable in every aspect of the Sheriff's Office and how to handle situations that may arise. I have formed connections with local, state, and federal agencies to have many resources available that we use often. Another strength would be that I was born and raised in Perquimans County where I lived my entire life. I have formed a bond with the community and know many people through the community. This helps in building the trust of the citizens where they can reach out to me anytime for help."

Bray cites his leadership skills.

"I am a strong, proven leader that possesses a relentless work ethic that incorporates integrity, compassion and impartiality. I will also raise the level of professionalism within the department and hold all members to a high standard. Law enforcement officers must lead by example and I take that responsibility to heart."

FOOTBALL

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population of football playing students hasn't changed in Perquimans County. Normally we'd get 40 to 50 kids come out."

But creating the jayvee program for ninth and 10th graders meant there were fewer students on the varsity team.

Cheeseman said the Pirates were prepared to travel to Washington County Friday night with 26 players. Of that 13 will be freshmen "but skilled at football."

The Pirates lost 39-10.

The Panthers (2-3, 1-0 AAC) travel to Edenton this

Friday to face John A. Holmes.

Cheeseman said the situation blew up on social media when people started saying the school system was considering shutting down the varsity program this year when in fact "that was the last thing on my mind. That's how the rumor got started."

Athletic Director Justin Roberson was at a meeting of other athletic directors the week before and simply asked a question, Cheeseman said.

"Our athletic director, who I have great admiration for, asked what happens if you fold a program or shut it down," Cheeseman said. "He was just curious. He just

asked a question."

That fueled more speculation and Cheeseman said he felt it was only right to meet with school officials to talk about it.

He said jayvee players who don't want to play varsity wouldn't have to.

Cheeseman said he hopes to continue the jayvee season as best as he can, but players can't play on both jayvee and varsity in the same week.

Cheeseman said some upperclassmen that were injured are expected to come back for the game this week.

In the long term, Cheeseman said he hopes to sustain a feeder program that starts at the recreation department and continues on to middle

school, a jayvee program and then varsity.

James Alverson said forfeiting games because of a shortage of players is not unheard of in North Carolina. He is assistant commissioner for media relations, special events and publications for the N.C. High School Athletic Association.

Last year Central Academy of Technology in Monroe forfeited the final game of the year citing a limited numbers of players.

"The nature of football is that being there are collisions players can get hurt," Alverson said. "Couple that with low turnout and it (ending a season) can happen."

He said it's not just small

schools that are having a problem.

Central Academy has struggled for years because of low numbers.

"Carrboro had the same issue two years. Carrboro was only five or six years removed from winning a state championship."

Alverson said he's been involved with athletics for 10 years and has worked at the NCHSAA for three, and forfeiting because of a lack of players happens.

"It's not uncommon," he said.

In Orange County, both Cedar Ridge and Chapel Hill high schools did not field a varsity teams this year, but did have a junior varsity.

Chapel Hill is 3-A school with 1,600 students, but failed to get enough players sign up.

Cedar Ridge had five seniors, nine juniors, 15 sophomores and 22 freshmen that said they would play. But it was the lack of upperclassmen that concerned the school and forced the decision not to field a varsity team.

"In many areas, it's not surprising to see rosters with 25 players and below," Alverson said.

"In Orange County there isn't a strong (football) tradition. It doesn't have a pop Warner league. And at the high school level students have lots of options, like club lacrosse, and club soccer and travel teams."

MILLER

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something too.

"If you move me we will have horses," she said.

And they did.

"I grew up in Raleigh, but Belvidere is my home."

What could have been a traumatic move from a metro area to a rural area turned out to be anything but, Miller said. She had recently completed her master's degree to teach nursing and it just so happened there was an opening at College of The Albemarle for a person just like her.

She also found Wesley.

The pony was 2-years-old when she bought him.

"He had pretty much been untouched and unhandled." She credits coach Kathy Rowse with a lot.

"Dressage has been new to me, but I love it. Riding is truly my passion. We have done things that I would

have never have thought about. I am humbled by it all."

This July they drove the 18-hours to the Chicago area for a freestyle competition. She and Wesley had a score of 75.

"If you have a score in the 60s you are doing great and 70 is really high.

In her modest way, Miller defers to Wesley.

"He really had been bred extremely well."

But for a dressage horse, Wesley is — well — small.

"He's only 12 hands, one inch."

A hand equals four inches. That means Wesley is about four-foot one inch to the top of the shoulders. The difference between a pony and a has to do with height, not with age.

Miller said Patti Farless got her started in Dressage.

"We go to all the shows together and she is one of my biggest supporters, and has traveled with me

to Chicago this summer for National Dressage Pony Cup and Lexington, Ky last fall for National Dressage Finals."

She trains with Kathy Rowse.

She said most dressage horses are 15 to 17 hands tall. A pony is 14.2 hands or less and a horse is taller than 14.2

"He's a little 12-hand pony, and he is by far one of the smallest ones, but he doesn't act like it."

"But he's perfect for me," she said. "I'm only 4-

foot-10 myself." "It's like having a dance partner. It's a musical freestyle and you have to communicate with each other. It requires a tremendous amount of natural talent and concentration to perform at a certain level."

Her position as Department Chair for the Associate Degree in Nursing program at COA is a blessing.

"When I worked as a nurse, I always wanted to be an educator. This is the best of both worlds."

Their children, Ava (third

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grade) and Noah (first grade), attend Perquimans schools.

Last weekend, you could have caught Miller and Wes-

ley doing "do you love me" or "had the time of my life" in Williamston at the Sen. Bob Martin Eastern Agricultural Center.

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