

## Oakland feels at home with Kohawks

Written by Jim Ecker

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Nate Oakland never had his own office when he served as an assistant coach with the Coe women's basketball team during the 2010 and 2011 campaigns, but now he's got his own digs with his name on the door.

Oakland, 35, was named Coe's new head coach in May and arrived on the job in June. He succeeded Randi Henderson, his former boss here who left after last season to become an assistant coach at North Carolina-Charlotte.

Oakland commuted from Cedar Falls to Cedar Rapids during his two years as an assistant coach with the Kohawks and shared office space at Eby Fieldhouse. Now he's in the big chair and loving it.

"It's been good," he said Wednesday morning. "It helps knowing your way around and knowing everybody down here. And knowing the league helps a lot."

Oakland was a year behind Henderson when they both attended Cedar Falls High School, where Henderson (then Randi Petersen) was a star basketball player and swimmer. Oakland's wife, Alex, was on the Cedar Falls swim team with Henderson.

"We all ran in the same circle of friends," said Oakland. "Our family and their family kind of grew up together."

When Henderson became the head coach at Minnesota-Morris 10 years ago, she hired Oakland as one of her assistant coaches and later hired him as an assistant at Coe.

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Oakland served as an assistant coach at Wartburg the last four years before getting the job at Coe. Henderson had already finished the new recruiting class for the 2015-16 campaign when she left for North Carolina-Charlotte, and three of those recruits will be freshmen on the team this year.

A few of Henderson's recruits for this year changed their mind about playing for Coe, but Oakland views that as fairly normal following a coaching change.

Oakland is excited about the three new players, who will be joining a veteran team that finished 18-9 overall last season and 10-4 in the Iowa Conference. The three rookies are Lakyn Boltz of Keokuk, Taylor Anderson from Illinois and Janai Robinson from St. Louis.

Boltz, a 5-foot-5 guard, averaged 10.5 points and 2.5 assists at Keokuk and made 43 3-pointers last season. She's also a member of the Coe tennis team.

"She's a really good athlete, high IQ kid, high motor kid," said Oakland. "We anticipate she's definitely going to compete."

Oakland described Anderson and Robinson as "great athletes" who will help the club.

The Kohawks return two all-conference players in Mickey Hansche and Aleena Hobbs. They lost center Megan Hayes to graduation, but everyone else returns.

"I'm expecting us to win the league," said Oakland. "That's our goal."

Oakland noted that Coe tied for first in offensive efficiency last season (points per possession), but ranked last in the league with the most turnovers. He anticipates running a little more this season than they did last year, but does not plan to make any severe changes with the team.

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"I'm not going to reinvent the wheel," he said. "Randi obviously built the program to where it is today, so I just have to make sure I don't mess the thing up."

"How can we get the ball in Aleena Hobbs' hands a little bit quicker? How can we get Mickey Hansche five more 3's a game? And not turn it over."

Henderson compiled a 155-91 record in nine years, including a trip to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Division III national tournament in 2011 when Oakland was one of the assistant coaches.

Oakland said he plans to recruit the I-380 corridor with players from Waterloo, Cedar Rapids and Iowa City, along with players from the Quad Cities, Minneapolis and Illinois.

"We have to get to know every kid at every school that potentially might play here," he said. "We have to get to know every kid within an hour-and-a-half of here that could potentially help us, which is a lot."

Oakland and his wife have four children. Alex (Cook) Oakland was a star basketball player at Northern Iowa, where she finished with more than 1,000 points and 1,000 rebounds and was a three-time all-conference performer.