

Bennett sets plans for coach search

Written by Jim Ecker

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Craig Jelinek retired as the head football coach at Prairie High School at the end of the 2010 season, more than six weeks ago, and people keep asking Rocky Bennett if he's hired a new coach yet.

Bennett, the activities director at Prairie, smiles and shakes his head, especially if the question comes from a colleague at the school. As it turns out, hiring a new coach is not simple. There are strict rules and procedures.

For one thing, the College Community school board has not officially acted on Jelinek's resignation, and Bennett cannot advertise for the job until it does. That action is expected to come at the school board meeting Dec. 20.

For another thing, Bennett doesn't know what teaching or administrative duties might be available for the new coach. It will be difficult to offer the job to someone until he does.

Because of that, Bennett is not ready to put a time-frame on when he'll have a new coach. However, he does not plan to sit back and see who applies. He'll also seek candidates on his own.

"I am, and will, do my work behind the scenes," he remarked.

Bennett has met with Jelinek's assistant coaches to see if anyone plans to apply. He said several assistants plan to retire, but that several others want to remain with the program.

Prairie is planning major improvements to its football stadium with a new artificial surface, expanded bleachers, improved restrooms, new fences and additional storage space, all scheduled to be ready for the 2011 campaign.

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"I would hope the anticipated stadium and field renovations would make this job a premier job in the state of Iowa," said Bennett.

Bennett said he wants a new coach with a proven record of success, an outstanding role model, and someone who supports the educational mission of the school. He said he's "very confident" he'll have an attractive pool of candidates.

He prefers to have a head football coach who teaches or works at Prairie, but it's not a rule. James Moses, the new boys' basketball coach at Prairie, does not work at Prairie, other than coaching the team.

"It's very important, in my eyes, that we have head coaches who are in the building. That's important," said Bennett. "Does it always happen that way? No."

Bennett declined to discuss possible candidates by name. He also declined to reveal a possible salary, saying it depends on many factors, such as longevity.

Marv Cook, the head coach at Iowa City Regina, told the Metro Sports Report he is happy at Regina and not seeking a new job. Don Knock, the former head coach at Kennedy and currently the activities director at Gilbert High School, said he could be interested.

Jelinek retired after compiling a 106-96 record in 21 years. Bennett said he anticipates Jelinek retiring as a social studies teacher, which could open a teaching spot for the new coach.

Bennett is confident he'll find a good coach for Prairie, someone who can build on Jelinek's success.

"It will be a big, exciting hire for the district," he said. "We want to get to that state level. We want to get to that state-championship level."

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“I think this school system, in my eyes, is one of the best — if not the best — in the state of Iowa,” he said. “It’s all here. It’s just a matter of putting the right people in the right places.”

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