

Gavin seeks A.D. job at Mount Mercy

Written by Jim Ecker

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Paul Gavin has spent most of his adult life at Mount Mercy University as a successful student, athlete and coach. Now he's interested in becoming the school's new athletic director.

Gavin, 49, confirmed this week that he's one of four finalists to succeed Scot Reisinger as the athletic director at the NAIA school in northeast Cedar Rapids.

Gavin has been Mount Mercy's head basketball coach since 1992 and has compiled a 387-329 record, including three trips to the NAIA national tournament. The Mustangs finished 27-5 last year and reached the second round of the national tournament.

Gavin is also the head coach of the Mount Mercy men's golf team. He graduated from Mount Mercy in 1988.

Gavin declined comment about his reasons for seeking the athletic director's job, out of respect for the search process, but he's said in previous interviews that he loves Mount Mercy University and has greatly enjoyed his three decades at the school.

The timing of hiring a new athletic director could be a little awkward for Gavin and the Mustangs. Basketball practice began Thursday and the first game is scheduled for Nov. 3, but the school does not plan to announce the new athletic director until approximately Dec. 1, according to Dr. Rob Callahan, the Mount Mercy vice president who is in charge of the search process.

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If Gavin is offered the job, he may have to step aside as the men's basketball coach at some point.

"We're seeking a candidate who will be a full-time athletic director," Dr. Callahan said. "With the new athletic complex coming on-line and all of the challenges facing athletic departments moving forward, I'm not sure an A.D. at an institution like ours could be successful and coach a sport at the same time."

Gavin has never been a full-time athletic administrator, but he has helped with administrative duties at Mount Mercy and has run a successful basketball program for 23 years. Dr. Callahan declined comment on Gavin's qualifications for the job, but it's apparent the search committee would not have selected anyone as a finalist if committee members did not think he or she was qualified for the position.

Mount Mercy softball coach Larry Yoder has been serving as the interim athletic director, but will step aside when the new A.D. is named. All of Mount Mercy's coaches have been helping Yoder with administrative duties.

Mount Mercy plans to build the new Robert W. Plaster Athletic Complex on 22 acres of land near campus for soccer, track, baseball and softball.

Mount Mercy is also thinking seriously about adding a varsity football program in the next few years, which would be a requirement for continued membership in the Heart of America Conference.

Dr. Callahan said the search for a new athletic director and the possible addition of football are not connected. He said a final decision about football could be made by February, 2016.

Dr. Callahan declined to identify the three other finalists for the job. All four candidates will be

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involved with on-campus interviews in mid-October.

"We're looking for someone with athletic administrative experience," he said. "We would prefer that to be at the highest level. We want someone that understands what it's like. Most importantly, we're looking for someone who can lead a team and really take Mount Mercy athletics to the next level."

Dr. Callahan said there were approximately 150 student-athletes on campus when Reisinger became the athletic director in 2006. Now there are approximately 400 athletes at Mount Mercy and the number could rise to approximately 500 if they add a football program. The new men's volleyball program will begin with the 2016-17 school year.

Reisinger resigned as athletic director in August to become Mount Mercy's dean of adult programs.

Dr. Callahan said Mount Mercy conducted a national search for its new athletic director and said there were "well over" 100 applicants for the job. The search committee narrowed the applicants to a sub-group for phone interviews and invited four of them for on-campus interviews.

"I expected we would have a large pool," he said. "I think Mount Mercy's reputation is on the rise. I think people have certainly noticed the great work that Scot did as the previous athletic director and the great work our coaches do and our student-athletes do.

"We plan to continue that growth," he said. "I think that's going to take a dynamic leader who can really set a vision for our athletic department. That's probably the most critical thing."

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Dr. Callahan said Reisinger did a "fantastic job" of running the athletic department and promoting Mount Mercy with the NAIA national governing body (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics).

The 10-member search committee includes faculty, staff, student-athletes and athletic department members. Mount Mercy president Laurie Hamen will make the final decision about the new athletic director.