



Gridiron Club

Focus

By VERN CAHAK

When the Antigo High School Red Robins open their 2010 season at Wausau West Aug. 27, a valuable member of the football coaching staff will be missing.

Steve Kohler, who has coached Antigo football in various degrees for the last 31 years, is leaving the ranks, ending one of the longest athletic coaching careers in AHS history.

He actually has been involved in coaching football for 37 years. While attending the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Kohler coached at Pacelli High School and later was a gridiron mentor at Beaver Dam for three years.

A 1971 graduate of Merrill High School, where he was an offensive and defensive line standout, Kohler was hired as an Antigo varsity assistant coach in 1979. At the time he joined the Red Robin staff, AHS was about to experience two consecutive losing seasons, something that seldom happened in Red Robin country.

But surrounded by a group of outstanding coaches, he helped mold Antigo into a state football power throughout the 1980s.

He took over for Gerald Schunke as head sophomore coach in 1981 and remained in that position for seven years. His most satisfying experience as a soph mentor was a battle of undefeated teams at Stevens Point in 1985, when his squad knocked off the Panthers, 6-0, snapping an 18-game point winning streak. He recalls Andy Krueger, Barry Fermanich and Bob LeVeque playing on that team.

Following Gordy Schofield's retirement in 1987, Kohler moved on to a varsity assistant and remained in that capacity even though he was offered the head coaching job on a couple of occasions but declined. He has served as offensive coordinator since John Lund was hired as head coach in 2006.

"It was a dream of mine to coach with Gordy," Kohler said. Working with the great coaching staff at Antigo was pleasurable for Kohler, who remains good friends with Schofield. "We still talk a lot of football," he said.

In addition to the coaches, some of the former Antigo players still communicate with Kohler. He treasures the association with them. "These are all tremendous guys," he said.

Among Kohler's fondest memories on the varsity level were Antigo's 22-19 upset win over D. C. Everest in 1989 when Serge Koenig kicked a game winning field goal to hand the top ranked Evergreens their only defeat of the season, and the dramatic 29-28 victory over Stevens Point in 2008.

"Being tough and inspiring the players to reach their highest potential were the attributes that produced outstanding teams and individuals. There was always mutual respect between the coaches and players. So many guys working together had a true impact on the program and inspired the will to win," Kohler stated.

Since Kohler became an Antigonian over three decades ago, he married the former Delores Stefanski of Aniwa and their two sons, Alex and Teddy, played football at AHS. His in-laws, Mr. and Mrs. Wally Stefanski, have been very supportive of Steve, win or lose, and his father-in-law hasn't missed a game he coached in 30 years.

Although he has retired from coaching, Kohler will remain a World History teacher at Antigo High. "I'll miss the excitement of coaching," he said.

Over the years, Kohler worked with five head coaches, including Schofield, Ron Dillahunt, Scot Peterson, Kevin Grundy and John Lund.

We are happy to report that the Gridiron Club is alive and well.

An excellent turnout at the Aug. 10 meeting, the filling of a couple of vacant officer positions and a great response to fundraising plans by supportive members should put the club back on solid ground.

While the president vacancy has not been filled, Holly Anderson is the new vice president and Nick Sanchez has taken over the secretary duties. Joanie Bauknecht remains the treasurer. A new president will likely be elected at the Sept. 14 meeting at the Hudson Street Shelter.

Volunteers will be back in force to prepare and serve food and soda, and conduct the annual Meet the Robins program at Schofield Stadium Thursday evening, starting at 5 p.m.