

FRIENDLY FOES

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Reporter

While the beginning of the season is still months away, a recent development in the KCI Conference should give football fans something to look forward to — at least for those who support the East Buchanan and West Platte football teams.

Long-time Platte City resident and Platte County R-3 graduate (1975) Kevin Bryan has been named as the successor for the East Buchanan head football coaching job, vacated by former coach Ron Musser after 27 years. Musser's last game in 2006 was a 31-7 loss to West Platte which gave the district championship to the Jays.

Bryan said he knows he has his work cut out for him in replacing a coach who had seen so much success at East Buchanan, including a second place finish in Missouri in 2004.

"Every job's a challenge and it will be a challenge to replace someone who has been there so long and developed such a winning system," Bryan said. "I was lucky to follow someone who had so much success. We'll keep some things and change some to match my personality and philosophy. My philosophy is probably more old school than anything, with a hard-nosed physical style. I believe football games are won up front on the line and if you don't run the ball successfully, then you're not going to be a successful football team."

Besides having grown up in Platte City, Bryan also has several connections with West Platte, having served as the offensive and defensive line coach for the Bluejays for four years, beginning with the state championship team in 2001. He was also the head baseball coach until after the 2005 season, when he left West Platte and went to East Buchanan as the defensive coordinator for the football team and the head baseball coach. With Musser's retirement, Bryan was able to step up and get a long-desired head football coaching position.

While coaching in Weston, Bryan worked with West Platte head coach Danny Brown, who began his coaching career at East Buchanan in 1972 and eventually led the Bulldogs to their first-ever state playoff game in 1975. Brown was the head coach at East Buchanan for four years, compiling a 27-10 record, and has been the head coach at West Platte since 1988.

"Gower was a football community when I got there and that hasn't changed since then," Brown said. "I think Kevin's smart not to go in there and try to rearrange everything, but he'll put his own stamp on the program and I know he'll do a good job.

"But he still doesn't know our offense and I imagine we'll see a few more options from them," Brown said with a chuckle.

Bryan said he didn't really believe he would have much of an advantage from previously being a coach at West Platte when the two teams went head to head.

"I think the only ones who really know their system are Coach Brown and his quarterback," Bryan said with a smile. "They have always been diverse and can take what is dictated to them by the players they have. We're not like colleges, we have to take what we can get."

Bryan will get a chance to face Brown for the first time as an opposing head coach when the Bulldogs and the Jays play each other in the last regular season game of the 2007 season. The game will be played in Gower Nov. 1, and as is generally the case, there is a very good chance that a district championship will hang in the balance. West Platte finished last season after winning their second consecutive district championship with a 28-25 loss to Braymer and a 4-7 overall record, while East Buchanan finished 4-6. Bryan also has another West Platte connection — he and West Platte defensive coordinator Dave Bridger both grew up together in Platte City and graduated just a few years apart. Bridger graduated in 1977 and has been coaching football, basketball and baseball for several years at West Platte.

"Coaching against Kevin means a lot of things," Bridger said. "Obviously, it will be a lot of fun because we've been competing against each other in driveways and back yards forever. The only downside is that one of us has to lose.

"As far as a coach, he believes in fundamentals and his kids will be well prepared. I think he's walked into a good situation up there in Gower and he'll do well."

In another interesting twist, Brown also coached the first-ever baseball team at East Buchanan in 1976, with his team finishing 8-2 with a loss in districts. The only two games the Bulldogs lost that year were to Platte County in the first and last games of the season — a team on which Bridger played.

State's Free Fishing Days are June 9-10

JEFFERSON CITY — If spring weather and the prospect of a fresh-fish dinner are not enough to convince you to go fishing, the Missouri Department of Conservation has an added incentive — Free Fishing Days June 9 and 10.

The weekend after the first Monday in June is always Free Fishing Days. It is the Missouri Department of Conservation's way of thanking citizens for their support and encouraging people to get out and enjoy some of the nation's best and most abundant fishing opportunities.

Through the purchase of hunting and fishing permits and the one-eighth of one percent conservation sales tax, Missourians support a network of lake and stream fishing access areas and community lakes statewide. On Free Fishing Days, all one needs to enjoy fishing on state waters is a fishing pole and bait. Do remember, however, that requirements for special permits still apply at some county, city or private fishing areas.

Areas open to free fishing June 9 and 10 include Missouri's four trout parks, Conservation Department-managed community lakes, Lake of the Ozarks, Thomas Hill Reservoir and reservoirs operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Don't forget Missouri's superb trout streams, including the Current, Eleven Point and North Fork rivers. If the possibility of landing an enormous catfish appeals to you, consider the Missouri, Mississippi and Osage rivers.

Missouri residents and nonresidents alike can fish without state permits on Free Fishing Days. However, normal regulations, such as limits on the size and number of fish that can be kept, remain in effect and Free Fishing Days is no excuse for unauthorized trespassing.

Regulations are outlined in the 2007 Summary of Missouri Fishing Regulations. The free booklets are available at bait shops and other places where fishing equipment is sold. Some private fishing areas still require permits on Free Fishing Days.

Many state-owned fishing areas have special facilities for anglers with handicaps. For information about handicap-accessible fishing spots, visit missouriconservation.org/accessibility/. To discover fishing spots near you, visit missouriconservation.org/fish/prospects/ or consult the online Conservation Atlas, mdc.mo.gov/atlas/. Those interested can also call the nearest Conservation Department office for help finding fishing spots close to home.