

Wagemester steps aside as KCC coach

Written by Jim Ecker

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Doug Wagemester, one of the most intense and most successful junior college men's basketball coaches in the country, has decided to step aside as the head coach at Kirkwood Community College for the 2013-14 campaign.

Wagemester, 45, wants to concentrate on his job as Kirkwood's athletic director and also spend more time with his wife and three children.

Bryan Petersen, 25, a former Kirkwood player and one of Wagemester's assistant coaches this past season, has been named interim head coach for the 2013-14 season.

Wagemester plans to re-evaluate his situation a year from now and might return as Kirkwood's head coach for the 2014-15 campaign.

"It's going to be something we take a look at a year from now," he said Monday afternoon. "Everybody is on board with that. I feel fortunate to be in that position."

Wagemester has compiled a 409-107 record in 15 years as Kirkwood's head coach. He's won 12 conference titles and made the NJCAA Division II national tournament nine times, finishing second on three occasions.

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The Eagles struggled at times this season and finished 19-13. Wagemester dismissed three players from the team during the season and was ejected from one ballgame, but said the rough season had nothing to do with his decision to step aside.

"I really believe the way it went had nothing to do with it. Truly," he said. "Sure, we would have liked to have had a better year. It didn't happen the way we wanted, but no, I feel comfortable saying that had nothing to do with it."

The Kirkwood basketball team was summoned to a meeting at Johnson Hall at 8:30 Monday morning. Taylor Olson, a freshman from Cedar Rapids Jefferson, said the players were not told in advance about Wagemester's decision.



"A total shock," said Olson. "Nobody really said anything. Everybody was so shocked."

Petersen, from Clinton, played for Wagemester for two years at Kirkwood, then played for two years at Iowa State for former ISU coach Greg McDermott.

Petersen worked as a graduate assistant for one year at Iowa State with McDermott, then stayed at Iowa State for two more years and worked with current ISU Coach Fred Hoiberg.

Petersen returned to Kirkwood this season.

"I love this place," said Petersen. "It's done a lot for me as a student and as a player. That's why I came back here, to be involved with Coach Wags."

Petersen said he's comfortable with his assignment as the interim head coach, knowing

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Wagemester might return a year from now.

"My mindset going into it is, this is going to be my team and my program," he said. "When the season is over next year, Wags will have a decision to make about what he wants to do regarding the team."



Petersen said Quincy Young, who just finished his fourth year as a Kirkwood assistant, will remain with the program.

Wagemester said he began thinking about a change this past fall.

"It's something that crept into my thought process," he said. "I couldn't tell you when, why, how. But it did. I started considering it, and then it kind of manifested itself.

"The possibility of stepping away from it became almost a distraction that I had to fight," he said. "It's hard to put your finger on, it's hard to explain to people.

"For as long as I've been coaching, I've done it one way, and that way requires 'X' amount of time and 'X' amount of energy, and I was having a hard time finding that.

"And so I stopped and pulled back and looked at my life from a family/athletic director/coach angle. I felt like at this point in time, one of those has to give a little bit.

"Obviously, family is not an option. And the athletic director is not an option, because of how my job is built. For right now it had to be the basketball."

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Wagemester plans to concentrate on being Kirkwood's athletic director, looking for ways to improve the department, but said the school has no plans to add more sports or climb from Division II to Division I athletics.

"No, nothing is on the table," he said about the possibility of adding football, wrestling or any other sport.

Kirkwood currently has men's basketball, women's basketball, baseball, softball, women's volleyball and men's golf. All of the programs have been nationally ranked, either this year or in recent years.

Wagemester wants to make a successful overall program even better by stepping aside as a full-time coach.

"It's going to give me a chance to get my hands on more things as an athletic director," he said. "It has to do with trying to do things better, and doing what we currently do better.

"I look forward to being more accessible and having more time for our athletic department as a whole for our coaches, who are already spread thin. I look forward to being more of a resource for them than I've been."

Wagemester is glad Petersen will be running the program for the next year. "I feel excited about that transition and what he brings to the table," he said.

Petersen was a point guard at Kirkwood and Iowa State and has studied under Wagemester, McDermott and Hoiberg at the collegiate level.

"My philosophy and how I feel about the game and the student-athletes is very similar to Coach

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Wags," he said. "I might do a few things differently, just because we're different people, but I'm just excited about the possibility.

"I'll probably go to Wags for a lot of advice regarding the program, and obviously I'll pick his brain all the time about basketball. It's big shoes to fill, because Coach Wags has built this program into one of the best in the country and one of the best in the midwest. It's a good spot to be."

Olson has another year of eligibility at Kirkwood, but he's considering the possibility of transferring to an NCAA Division I school for the 2013-14 season if he gets an attractive offer. He said he'd have no problem staying at Kirkwood and playing for Petersen.

"I love having Wags as a coach and everything, so I'm going to miss him," said Olson. "But I trust Coach Petersen 100 percent."