

Stecker hired the right guy in White

Written by Jim Ecker

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Aaron Stecker could have scoured the entire state for a bright, successful football coach with a sparkling record to become the new coach at Kennedy High School two years ago when Tim Lewis decided to step away from the job.

Instead, Stecker elected to promote Kennedy defensive coordinator Brian White to the top spot, declaring that Kennedy football was not broken and there was no reason to seek an outside cure.

There might have been a few second-guessers last year when White lost his first six games as head coach, but that's a distant memory now with the third-ranked Cougars playing for the Class 4A state title Friday night.

Kennedy (13-0) meets top-ranked Dowling (12-0) in the championship game Friday at 7:06 p.m. at the UNI-Dome in Cedar Falls.

Stecker jokingly admits he might have gotten lucky when he picked White for the job, but he knew White and was confident he had the right guy.

"After you've known Brian for awhile, you understand how passionate he is about everything he does," said Stecker, who also hired him as the boys track coach a few years ago and was familiar with his work as a teacher in the classroom.

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White had been an assistant coach for 20 years, first at Cedar Rapids Washington under Paul James and then at Kennedy under Lewis. He played high school football at Linn-Mar for Greg Purnell and Stecker liked the man's pedigree and mentors.

Stecker also likes what White stands for in athletics, in terms of building young men through football.

"Once the kids find out there's an adult out there who wants to build them up and make them better, they'll run through a brick wall for him," Stecker remarked. "He starts with, 'I want you to be the best young man you can be, and I'm going to get that out of you.'"

White is a confident football coach, but admitted to having self-doubts last season when the Cougars began with an 0-6 record.

"Last year was humbling for Brian," Stecker said. "He gets that first head coaching job - it's his dream job - and he didn't get off to the start he wanted to last year.

"I think it was a humbling process: 'OK, I've learned all these things, but I don't quite understand how to put it all together yet.'"

Not many coaches go from 0-and-6 to 13-and-0 in one year, but White has pulled it off.

"I think his blood pressure has gone down a little bit," joked Jackson Coker, one of Kennedy's top linemen. "He's a little more agreeable in person. I think what's made him successful is that now he's got a year of football under his belt.

"It's been good. It's been good for him and good for us. We're going to start a new tradition at Kennedy."

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White has fostered a "family" atmosphere at Kennedy, symbolized by a wooden sign that captain Dalles Jacobus carries onto the field before games with the word "FAMILY" emblazoned on it. Coker said all of the Cougars have gotten onto the same page this season, unlike a year ago, which has helped White field the team he wanted all along.

"I think the biggest thing wasn't actually his coaching, it was the senior leadership we had last year," said Coker. "There were a lot of people that really weren't all that into the game."

Now all the Cougars are performing as one unit.

"I think he's helped us all buy into the idea that we're just as good as anybody else," said linebacker Garrett Kubovec. "And when we play our best football that nobody can beat us."

Stecker has been impressed with the team's chemistry and determination to succeed. He credits White for fostering the proper environment for success.

"He has guys on the football team who are playing for the guys on their right and for the guys on their left more than themselves," said Stecker. "That's the piece that's hardest to build, but when you get there it's special."

"Brian has a group that's gotten there. He's done a fantastic job building that."