

Xavier football prides itself on family links

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Xavier High School football program likes to consider itself one big family.

There are fathers and sons, uncles and nephews, younger brothers and brothers-in-law, former Xavier players, long-time assistants and devoted, supportive wives.

Don't forget the wives.

Xavier Coach Duane Schulte filled an entire page with family connections, then sent an addendum with two more names.

The Saints have a successful program and produce winning teams on a regular basis, and Schulte feels the family connections have a lot to do with it. The tradition gets passed along from member to member.

"I think a lot of it boils down to familiarity," he said Tuesday. "Everybody knows everybody. They know what to expect and there are no big surprises.

"They just kind of know the way we do things around here, and they step right in and just keep doing it."

The family connection starts at the top. Duane Schulte is the head coach and his son, Reggie, is the starting quarterback. But it hardly ends there.

Schulte's two younger sons - Bryce, a 7th grader, and Quinn, a 5th grader - are waterboys for the varsity on game nights, and they both play in the Junior Saints program.

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Jim O'Connell, Xavier's defensive coordinator, feels strongly that the family connections have contributed greatly to the team's success over the years.

"I think it's a huge impact," said O'Connell, whose son Colin is a receiver on the sophomore team. "It brings a certain closeness to everybody.

"Everybody wants to work hard for their brother. It could be an uncle. They don't want to let them down, so they work extra hard."

Reggie Schulte has been a quarterback in the Xavier program since the sixth grade. He cracked the starting lineup for his father's team this season as a junior and passed for three touchdowns and 178 yards in a 28-0 victory over Kennedy last Friday.

Reggie was a waterboy for the varsity when he was in the fifth grade and did it for four years. He said he learned a lot being with the team as a youngster.

"I think it's definitely a neat experience, the atmosphere of Friday night lights and being on the sideline," he said. "It doesn't hurt, being on the sidelines and seeing how intense it is."

He said there's a tight bond on this year's club, thanks to years of being together. "We've all come to practices and games since we were younger," he said. "We've all gotten to know each other really well and grew up getting to know each other."

Duane Schulte is proud of the family connections at Xavier. He's also proud of the former Saints who have joined the coaching staff and made their contributions as well.

It's quite a family tree, with roots all over.

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"We had no idea we'd be coaching as long as we have, quite frankly," Schulte said. "And then you start having families. It just kind of happened, I guess."

Schulte has compiled a 107-65 record in 18 years as a head football coach. That includes a 25-14 mark in four years at LaSalle, followed by an 82-51 record in 14 years at Xavier as the only head coach in school history.

He said the family atmosphere makes the job more fun and more rewarding.

"It's kind of stressful in its own way," he said, "but the fact that you can enjoy the success and get over the lows with family members makes it a little easier."

O'Connell has worked with Schulte for all 18 years and has enjoyed seeing little boys turn into successful young men.

"It is fun to watch them develop and see your own kids grow up and get here," he said. "It's a little more nerve-wracking, but it's also fun to see them develop, especially since you've seen them when they were just walking."

"They feel like they're part of a family, and that's how we treat it," he said. "It's always the way we've treated it, ever since they walked in the front door."

Here's the list Duane Schulte put together of all the family connections:

1) Head coach Duane Schulte - Son Reggie is quarterback and two other sons are waterboys and play for Junior Saints.

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- 2) Defensive coordinator Jim O'Connell - Son Colin is receiver on sophomore team.

- 3) Assistant coach David Sullivan - Nephew Miles Sullivan is cornerback on sophomore team.

- 4) Assistant coach John Tursi - Son Sam is freshman quarterback.

- 5) Strength coach Tom Ekland - Son Nic is freshman running back and linebacker, son Tommy Jr. played on first two Xavier teams, son Ryan was on 2006 state champions.

- 6) Assistant coach Nick Garland - Player on 2009 state semifinal team at Xavier.

- 7) Sophomore assistant Craig Kadlec - Son Joe was center on 2003 playoff team, son Corey was center on 2008 state quarterfinal team.

- 8) Sophomore assistant Brad Stovie - Son Cal is safety on varsity, son Camden is cornerback on freshman team.

- 9) Sophomore assistant Eric Gilmour - Played on state championship team in 2006 and playoff team in 2007.

- 10) Freshman coach Kevin Malloy - Son Taylor plays for sophomore team.

- 11) Assistant freshman coach Tom Lilly - Has two sons at Xavier.

- 12) Assistant freshman coach Blake Reed - Played on first Xavier team in 1998, has been member of coaching staff since he got out of college.

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13) Assistant freshman coach Ryan Chambers - Son Patrick plays for Saints youth football program; is new head wrestling coach.

14) Head trainer Kevin Lux - son Nate plays on freshman football team.

15) Darrel & Connie Schulte - Duane Schulte's brother and sister-in-law; help with field equipment on game nights. Their son Zach was first team all-state safety on 2006 state title team. Darrel has coached Saints youth teams for 15 years.

16) Jason Klein - Duane Schulte's brother-in-law; has filmed varsity games for 18 years (4 years at LaSalle, 14 years at Xavier); son Christian plays in Saints youth program.

17) Dave Gearhart - Has kept stats at LaSalle and Xavier for 39 years.

18) Jeff Spicer - Has kept defensive stats for 12 years.

19) Stu Ballinger - Coached at LaSalle, Regis and Xavier for 30 years.

20) Pat Milke - Keeps stats for program. Had three sons play for Xavier - David on 2006 title team, Jason on 2009 semifinal team and Ryan on this year's team.