

Fontana takes job at Ankeny Centennial

Written by Jim Ecker

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Bob Fontana had several chances to leave Kennedy High School and take another job during his 16 years with the Cougars, but he always turned them down.

Until now.

The lure of coaching in Ankeny, where he grew up and has numerous relatives, was too attractive to pass up.

Fontana, 54, has agreed to become the first boys basketball coach at the new Ankeny Centennial High School, which will open for business for the 2013-14 school year.

Fontana graduated from Ankeny High School in 1977. Both of his parents and all four of his brothers and sisters live in Ankeny. His mother still lives in the house where he grew up, which is only about two miles from Centennial.

"The thought of helping to open a new school in your home town, that's pretty special to be part of," he said.

"I've had five or six opportunities down the years to leave and take other jobs, either at the 4A level or small college level. I was flattered that I was called and asked about it, but I have not applied for a job since I've been here except for recently at Centennial."

Fontana compiled a 228-136 record in 16 years at Kennedy, making him the winningest boys basketball coach in school history. He won his 300th game as a high school coach in 22 years this season and will take a 301-200 career mark to his new job.

Fontana will be honored at the boys state basketball tournament next Saturday night for reaching the 300-win milestone. His father, Ron Fontana, who was an outstanding athlete at

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Ankeny High School more than 60 years ago and played in the state tournament, will accompany his son onto the court at Wells Fargo Arena when the award is made.

One of Fontana's brothers, Mike, will be one of the football coaches at Ankeny Centennial High School.

Fontana arrived at Kennedy for the 1997-98 season and did not make a big splash as the Cougars went 2-18 that campaign. Three years later, they finished third in the state tournament.

"That was pretty special," he said.

Fontana made three trips to the state tournament at Kennedy, finishing third again in 2007 and fourth in 2008. His teams won four Mississippi Valley Conference division titles and were ranked in the top-10 in Class 4A during eight of his 16 years.

Fontana was named the Metro Coach of the Year seven times, including this season, and the MVC Coach of the Year four times. The Cougars finished 11-10 this season after a 9-3 start.

Fontana saluted the administrators at Kennedy, his assistant coaches and his players for an enjoyable and successful 16 years.

"It wasn't an easy decision, because this place has been pretty special to me," he said. "My kids went to high school here. And being somewhere for 16 years, you develop a lot of relationships and memories. It's been a pretty good ride."

Fontana considered many factors before accepting the job, but the prospect of coaching at a new school in his home town was too strong to ignore.

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"It was something I decided I wanted to do, because I didn't want to look back on it and have any regrets and be second-guessing myself or anything like that," he said.

Ankeny High School has a rich tradition of success in many sports. Fontana hopes to help build a rich tradition at Centennial as well.

"The big challenge is starting a basketball program from scratch," he said. "We don't have a gym yet, we don't have any basketballs.

"I was joking around with someone: I said, 'Hey kids, we're going to have a basketball camp. By the way, bring your own basketballs.'"

Ankeny High School is being split in half, with half of the students staying at Ankeny and the other half going to Centennial on a north-side divide. Fontana said he's not sure who will have on his team at this point.

Fontana said he was offered the job earlier this week. His acceptance became official on Thursday.

"While the loss of Coach Bob Fontana is a huge blow to the Kennedy staff and community, we wish him nothing but the best of luck and success in his next endeavor," said Aaron Stecker, Kennedy's athletic director.

"He has been an invaluable member of the Kennedy faculty and coaching staff who has had a remarkable influence on hundreds of Kennedy basketball players and students over the past 16 years."