

## Cataldo takes reins of Xavier baseball team

Written by Jim Ecker

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New coach. New uniforms. New dugout.

There's definitely something new in the air at Xavier High School, where Bob Cataldo has succeeded Dave Schemmel as the head baseball coach heading into the 2016 campaign.

Schemmel had been the only head coach in school history, starting when Xavier opened its doors in 1998, but he retired after the 2015 season with a record of 431-234 in 17 years, including a state title in 2006 and two other trips to the state finals.

Cataldo, 46, served as a volunteer assistant with the Xavier varsity the last three years and is the president of the Xavier booster club. Now he's the main man in the dugout and is excited about working with a bunch of "blue collar, lunch box" players who he said are dedicated to the game and have a high baseball IQ.

"I think the attitude, first and foremost, is tremendous," he said Tuesday. "The kids are buying into the program.

"These kids have been taught well coming through the Saints program. They're sponges. They want to learn new things, they want to learn new ways of drilling."

Cataldo said he valued his time in the dugout with Schemmel the last three years.

"Coach Schemmel was tremendous," he remarked. "Having the opportunity to work with him was great."

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Cataldo said he is not making major changes in the program - "We're not re-inventing baseball" - but said he's changed some of the practice routines and training regimen.

Cataldo has never been a head coach before, but he's got a wealth of experience to offer the Saints. He was a star athlete at Dowling Catholic High School and was a member of the football and baseball teams at Notre Dame, where he was a member of the football squad that won the national title in 1988 under Coach Lou Holtz.

"It was a great time to be at Notre Dame, no doubt about it," he said. "A national championship my freshman year and we contended for it sophomore and junior year."

Cataldo was mostly a scout-team quarterback and free safety for the Irish, although he got some "wrap-up" duties during games and performed on the kickoff team. "I got to learn the offenses of some great teams: Miami, USC and ours of course," he said.

Cataldo described himself as a "utility" player for the Notre Dame baseball squad, working as a catcher, infielder and outfielder during his career. "Everything but pitcher," he said.

He served as an assistant baseball coach at Dowling during his years in college and also worked as a baseball, football and basketball coach at Dowling after graduating from Notre Dame.

Cataldo has been married to the former Stacy Schimberg, a Cedar Rapids native, for 20 years and they have lived in Cedar Rapids since 2000 with their three children, including two daughters who are currently students at Xavier.

He was excited when the chance to join the baseball program came along in 2013 and now he's the man in charge.

"I love it. I'm learning a lot," he said. "We've got a great group of kids, a great group of coaches."

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Everybody is excited about baseball, and that's a good thing.

"I love baseball, I love Catholic schools. This is a good mesh for me."

In addition to a new head coach, the Saints will be wearing new uniforms this season. And in a departure from previous years, the Saints will occupy the first-base dugout for home games at Ken Charipar Field instead of the third-base dugout.

Xavier finished with a 16-22 record last season, so there's work to do this year. Cataldo plans to have 25 players in uniform Monday at 5 p.m. when the Saints face Washington in the opening round of the Metro tournament at the Jefferson High School field.

Xavier has nine returning players from last season, including eight seniors and junior Bryce Schulte. Bryce Charipar and Schulte were members of the starting rotation last season, while Adam Tvedt and Ben Kamin also gained valuable experience on the mound.

Nick Stark, Charipar, Schulte and Sean Murphy are back to lead the offense. Cataldo thinks some of the younger players in the program also will help the varsity.

Cataldo does not teach at Xavier High School. He is the senior portfolio manager at United Fire Group in Cedar Rapids. He earned an MBA from Drake University in 1998 and received a degree in economics from Notre Dame in 1992.