

FOOTBALL

Wicked schedule awaits Bedesem at Neshaminy

He was smiling and shaking hands and moving about the banquet room at the Philadelphia Sports Writers dinner like a guy running for president.

But Dick Bedesem didn't need to get elected for the Neshaminy football coaching job.

He was chosen. Outright.

"He's such an incredible guy," athletic director Ray Kelly said. "The kids all talk about him. One brother tells another. They love him."

So, Bedesem is back at Heartbreak Ridge in Langhorne. Back where he carved out a 23-9 record in three years and won a Patriot Division title in 1986. Back with a vengeance.

"I feel great. I'm so excited," said Bedesem, 61, who underwent quintuple-bypass heart surgery last year. "Honestly, I'm in better shape now than I was 20 years ago."

Health has been the only question mark after his name during his most recent job search.

Decades of smoking packs of cigarettes, eating high-cholesterol foods and snacking on gingersnaps when he was a diabetic made Bedesem a prime candidate for a heart attack.

He suffered one on Jan. 17, 1991. He was sweating profusely during a checkup in the locker room at Delaware Valley College, where he coached at the time.

"The team doctor told me I was having a heart attack right there," Bedesem recalled.

A couple of hours later, he was in Doylestown Hospital. Days later, he was at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania undergoing multiple-bypass surgery.

"God gave me a second chance," Bedesem said. "You know, to this day, I never felt a bit of pain after the surgery."

By TIM PANACCIO



He quit his job at Del Val last November after his third consecutive 3-7 season.

At Neshaminy, his teams went 7-3, 8-3, 8-3. Threes and sevens tend to come up in records when Bedesem is coaching.

"Something to those numbers," he mused.

At Del Val, he struggled to make the Aggies a winner on a small budget. The budget was smaller than the budget he had at Villanova in the late 1970s.

During the last two seasons, he lost both of his full-time assistant coaches because of financial cutbacks. He even lost his weight room, which became part weight room, part locker room.

His five-year record at Del Val was unimpressive (17-32-1). When Bedesem quit in November, he cited stress.

"I knew I'd get back into coaching," he said. "But it had to be a job here. I got children and grandchildren. I can't be leaving the area."

Bedesem interviewed for the job at William Tennent. He loved the people, the kids, and athletic director Pete Righi, a guy who once played for him when Bedesem was an assistant coach at Temple.

Then Kelly called about the Neshaminy job. Neshaminy had always



Dick Bedesem
A winner at Neshaminy before

held a special place in Bedesem's heart.

"The timing was perfect," Bedesem said. "They were really bad when I first came there in 1984. We turned the program around right away."

Bedesem recalls a bus ride home from a game his first season. Neshaminy had just won its third game.

"I had a senior sitting behind me and he was crying," Bedesem said. "I said, 'Brian' — I can't remember his last name — 'what's wrong? We won.'"

"He said, 'Coach, I'm crying because we never won three games until now.'"

That's the thing about Dick Bedesem. He got the kids believing in themselves. He sold them on the program.

It won't be as easy a sell this time around.

The Redskins have been kicked around the last few years. Former coach John Chaump had trouble keeping his staff together. Most of Bedesem's new staff (like Chaump's) won't be teaching inside the building.

Bedesem doesn't teach, either, but he plans to work in the athletic department to make sure he's available to the kids.

Bedesem's biggest challenge isn't the kids; it's the schedule.

The realigned Suburban One is recognized as the toughest AAAA football conference in Pennsylvania. It's the home of state champion Central Bucks West.

Bedesem has never beaten Mike Pettine and West. He lost in 1985 and 1986.

"Oh, I know it's going to be a lot harder with West," Bedesem said. "That Pettine has done a great job developing a tradition up there. The kids, they come and they want to play for him."

Difference now is, Bedesem has to play West every fall. And play Council Rock, Pennsbury, C.B. East, too. Everybody.

The ante's been raised in Bucks County since Bedesem's been gone.

You don't think pressure had anything to do with Al Matuza leaving Pennsbury? Think again.

If Bedesem fails to post more of those gaudy 8-3 records at Neshaminy, he'll be pounding the pavement, just like Chaump.

But hey, that's life in the big-time world of Bucks County high school football, right?

"I'm ready to go right now," Bedesem said.

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