

Hawk Talk

'I love football because of the lessons it teaches'

In early December Dan Hawkins was selected to lead Boise State's program following Dirk Koetter's departure to Arizona State. Hawkins was the assistant head coach and recruiting coordinator on Koetter's staff. Prior to that, he was the head coach at Willamette University in Salem, Ore., where his teams won 77 percent of their games during his five-year tenure. The Bearcats won three conference titles and were runners-up in the 1997 NAIA Division II national championship playoffs. Hawkins, 40, is a graduate of the University of California-Davis and received a master's degree at St. Mary's College in California.

Hawkins and his wife, Misti, are the parents of four children: Ashley, Brittany, Cody and Drew.

What do you think the fans expect from you?

First and foremost, I think they want an exciting football team that wins. Outside of that, I think they want somebody who is accessible as part of the community, someone who supports community values.

What do you expect from the fans?

I want to continue the kind of support we have had over the past years. In order for a program to truly develop there are a lot of things we can do. But in the end it takes resources. Our move into the WAC is an exciting proposition, but you want to be able to compete with the same tools that everybody else has.

There are some infrastructure things — practice facility, turf, weight room, training room — that take money and resources. Hopefully the fans will dive in and provide those things, because ultimately you are

going to win with the guys you have in the uniforms. When they are recruited, those 18-year-old kids go around the country taking visual pictures, judging the quality of a program by the things they see. I want them to come here and know that we've got the facilities and the kind of quality they are looking for.

A coach has to have a mix of skills— counselor, motivational speaker, psychologist, businessman, teacher, promoter — as well as football knowledge. Which is the most important?

A practical knowledge of leadership and what that entails. A coach needs to truly understand leadership and really study it, examine it. There is no one thing that is more important.

The things that any great football coach does are the same things that any leader of a corporation does, like providing a vision

and instilling in people the ability to understand and achieve that vision. You have to keep your feet on the ground; you have to be extremely organized, extremely focused. Coaching is something that is on your mind 24 hours a day and you have to learn to deal with it.

How do you address the stress of coaching?

No. 1 is your priorities ... what you value in life. You care what people think in this business, but if you try to please everybody, you will struggle. I think it's important to get enough sleep, to eat right. I have a wife and a family and I think it is important that they see their father every once in a while. My spiritual values ... all those things carry above and beyond everything else.

You can't get caught up in the glitz and the glamour. You just have to keep your feet on the ground, stay true to yourself and whatever happens, happens.

What lessons do you think your players need to be successful?

One of the reasons I love football is because of the lessons it teaches us. A gentleman once asked me about the brutality of football. Well, life is brutal and you have to understand how to deal with it. It is important for players to overcome adversity, to turn that around and use it as a springboard. That takes a little bit of training, a little bit of psychology.

It is extremely important to have goals, get players to write them down, to think about them and to say, "Here's what I want to be as a person, as a student-athlete and here's how I go about making that happen."

Taking responsibility is important. These days everybody wants to blame somebody else. The analogy I always use is when a guy's late and says his alarm clock didn't go off. I ask: "Should we cut the alarm clock from the team? Should we make it run? Should we suspend it? Who owns the alarm clock? Did you buy it? Do you operate it? It's your responsibility."

I'm really big on that. You better stand up regardless of your circumstances and you better take responsibility.



How constant a battle is it to get players to understand that?

It's every day. One of the reasons I coach football is to make a difference in those guys' lives. If you can teach a guy how to be successful, he can take that to chemistry, he can use that in the weight room, he can use it anywhere.

A lot of these guys aren't around successful people. Deep down inside, kids want to win games, but they want to know that you care about them as people — that once they take the uniform off, you still care about them. Once you get that internal motivation going, that is powerful stuff.

What do you think motivates players these days?

I am a big believer in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Down at the base level, there are basic needs that we are trying to take care of in terms of food, shelter and safety. But when you get down to it, every kid wants to be needed. He wants to feel like he has got a spot on this earth and if he is not there, he is missed. They want to feel like they are good at something. Everyone wants a sense of power, to have a say, to have input, to have a sense of belonging. Those are huge things.

If you've got those things going, you can turn corporations around, you can turn football teams around. That's the heart of it. So I am always trying to work at those basic levels and let the guys work their way up — to become self-actualized people. It's not about winning, trophies, rings, the crowds. If a guy can feel needed, powerful and belong, that's an awesome thing. And to me, that is motivation right there.

We have heard a lot about football coaches' salaries. What do you think about so much emphasis on football?

I am awfully amazed. Dirk [Koetter] and I often would talk about this. He started off making \$12,000; I made \$14,000 teaching five periods of biology and coaching football. It just staggers the mind thinking about what kind of money is out there. I don't know if it's overemphasized. Do I think a football coach deserves a million dollars? It is unbelievable to me.

But in some of these programs, that drives the whole athletic department and is a focal point for the university. There is a lot of tension. I don't want to say these coaches aren't worth it, because I don't know them, and obviously to their departments they are.

There's a Catch-22, you know. In the old days, if a guy was going to make \$100,000 a year coaching football and he was going to get a 20-year contract, he was good with that. But now, it's such a high-risk profession. Most coaches are thinking, "Hey, I'm

going to take what I can get because I don't know how long it'll last."

You will soon lead the Broncos into a new league. How will membership in the Western Athletic Conference change the level of competition?

It definitely puts us a notch up in terms of recruiting. I think most kids want to go to good programs. Back in the Big Sky, BSU clearly had better facilities than anybody else. We move into the Big West and there are some similarities, but in reality, in the Big West a lot of our facilities don't match up when you look at weight rooms, practice facilities and those kinds of things. And now we're taking another jump, so

we've got to play catch-up in a hurry. And again, because that weighs so predominantly in your recruiting, it's a great challenge.

We may face some challenges here, but there are a lot of guys who are in places where they don't have much chance. They could have Vince Lombardi, Bill Walsh and Bill Parcells all working there and they're still going to struggle.

With the climate and the clientele here, we have a tremendous amount of potential to fill the stadium and bring in the kind of revenue it takes to be successful in the WAC. There is no question we have avid fans here and that this place is booming.

There's a great football tradition here. We want to do the right things and win in the classroom, in the community and on the football field, like we've been doing. □

PROFILE: KEVIN WOOD

INFLUENCES KIDS AT EAGLE

By Sherry Squires

Kevin Wood was a young man when he decided to follow in the footsteps of his wrestling coach at Meridian High School.

"Bruce Burnett had a dramatic effect on my life," he says. "I wanted to have that same effect on young people, to help them mature and be happy in their lives."

Wood, a member of the Boise State Athletic Hall of Fame and the head wrestling coach at Eagle High School, believes he's doing something right. When Wood's father died of a heart attack in November, 30 of his wrestlers showed up at his parents' house to rake

leaves and show support for their coach.

"There's just a very special bond that exists between coaches and athletes," he says. "It means a lot to me. It's why I went into coaching."

Wood was a standout Bronco wrestler from 1979 to 1982, earning all-Big Sky honors three times. Even before earning his physical education bachelor's degree, he was coaching at Meridian High School.

The most difficult part for Wood was the transition from competing himself to finding ways to motivate young athletes.

"I was super disciplined at the college level," he says. "I had to be to get there. You do things — six- or eight-hour workouts — that the normal high school athlete won't do. It's hard enough just to get a high school athlete into the wrestling room."

There are a few young athletes who excel on their own. Wood points to Charles Burton, the Centennial High wrestler whom he coached and then watched compete in the Olympics last September in Australia.

"Charles had it all," he says. "He was extremely intelligent, a fantastic athlete and a fantastic person."

But for most high school athletes, coaches have to do a lot of coaxing and directing.

Wood says he encourages his wrestlers to set goals, but the most important lesson he can teach them is to wrestle for the right reasons.

"I wrestled a lot of years for the wrong reason," he says. "I did it to make others proud of me. I want them to do it because they love the sport, for themselves, not for others."

As Wood went through the difficult loss of his father, it was partly on his fellow coaches and students that he leaned.

"There's a real allegiance with wrestlers," he says. "It's an individual sport, but we have a lot of respect for one another." □



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