

January 9, 2020

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SportsTone.net

RANDLEMAN - At Randleman High School, there's a saying that goes, "It's a great day to be a Tiger." It's still a great day to be a Tiger, but it's also a sad one as well.



*Former Tigers football coach Shane Handy. Photo by PJ Ward-Brown/PJ Ward-Brown Photography.*

Veteran football coach and former athletic director Shane Handy has turned in his resignation after accepting a head varsity football position with Clayton High School. Handy spent the past 12 years at RHS, revitalizing not only a football program but the entire athletic department.

"It's real emotional, leaving such a wonderful place like Randleman," Handy said on his ride home from Clayton Tuesday night, where a press conference was held to introduce him as the new head football coach. "I love Randleman. I love my principal and love my coaches. I enjoy every day of work and I'm excited to go to work. At the same time, it's an opportunity for a new challenge. That's the way I'm

wired. It's hard to leave Randleman. They are great young men and fun to coach and there is an unbelievable group of men on our staff, men who coach multiple sports and who care about the right way to do things. This is another challenge and it was one of the toughest decisions I ever had to make."

Handy said he talked to his former players Monday morning.

"I told them I appreciated everything they have done and some were shocked to some extent," Handy said. "I just told them how important they were and how much the coaching staff loved them and I told them I prayed about this decision and that's what I felt I needed to do and they would have to make choices in their life that weren't easy. You have to do what your heart tells you. I will always love them. I will always be there for them."

Handy, who had a number of ties with coaches and players from the Clayton community, relationships built while he was an assistant coach at Catawba, will take over a Clayton

program that experienced a good deal of adversity in 2019.

Clayton was penalized by the NCHSAA for an illegal practice held last fall and in June, the Johnston County Public Schools opened an eligibility investigation into the team, which included possible violations in other sports.

During the investigation, head football coach Hunter Jenks resigned his position, that coming during the week of the first regular season game. Assistant coach Robert Senseney was named the interim head coach before the Comets' season opener at Richmond High School. Eventually, the school system cleared the Clayton football team and coaches of any wrongdoing in the eligibility investigation.

Clayton posted a 6-6 overall record this past season, including a 4-1 mark in the Greater Neuse River 3-A Conference. The Comets advanced to the state playoffs, where they lost to Mid-Piedmont Conference member Southeast Guilford in the first round.

Meanwhile, Randleman was having one of its greatest seasons in school history, finishing undefeated in the Piedmont Athletic Conference and advancing to the regional finals, where it fell to Salisbury, 14-7. Handy was 95-53 in his 12 seasons with the Tigers.

"You'd have to be living in a bomb shelter to not know what Shane Handy has meant to this school and this community," RHS Athletic Director Ryan Dobias said. "What Shane has done for Randleman High School and the Randleman community over the last decade ... Things weren't in a good place when he took over and what he has done is hard to put into words."

Dobias said he was a bit surprised by Handy's resignation, but knew other schools were always interested.

"When you have the coach the caliber of Shane Handy, there are people who come calling every year," Dobias said. "You know he is doing something right when you constantly have people calling trying to get him. Coaches like him don't come around all the time."

Handy said he received a lot of help while at RHS.

"I have been there 12 years and my coaching staff and I have put a lot of time in developing the program and developing the facilities," Handy said. "There were a lot of things that went on in 12 years and it's hard to walk away from that. There is a great following at Randleman.



*Coach Shane Handy surrounded by the football Tigers prior to taking the field. Photo by PJ Ward-Brown/PJ Ward-Brown Photography.*

There's an unbelievable administration."

Clayton is expected to have one more year in the 3-A ranks before moving to the 4-A classification. Clayton plays Richmond County, Wake Forest, Herritage and several other 4-A teams in nonleague action before beginning conference play.

"Now it's all about building a staff," Handy said. "A staff of men who have the same vision and have the same goals, like at Randleman. We all had the same desire for our kids to get better and to coach them up."

In introducing Handy Tuesday, Clayton Principal Dr. Bennett Jones said Handy, who is just the fifth head coach at CHS since 1959, exudes what it means to be a Comet.

"My family and I prayed about this and it just seems to be the right time," Handy said. "The Randleman kids are so resilient and I expect them to continue to work hard and continue that success."

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