



URL: <http://www.wvgazette.com/article/20150414/GZ02/150419637>

Dolan named new head of SSAC

By Dave Hickman



Bernie Dolan

ROANOKE — Professionally speaking, Bernie Dolan has spent every bit of the past three decades dealing with exactly the types of issues his new job entails.

The 54-year-old lifelong Wheeling resident has been a teacher, coach, athletic director, principal and for the past three years an assistant superintendent of Ohio County's school system. Prior to all of that, he was a football player and a state track champion as a high school student-athlete. And with three grown children, he's also been involved with athletics as a parent.

In a nutshell, Dolan has dealt with high school athletics from virtually every conceivable angle. He just hasn't dealt with them all at once.

He'll get the chance now that he's been named the next executive director of the West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission. That organization's Board of Directors appointed Dolan to the position Tuesday morning during a meeting at Stonewall Resort State Park.

While he's fully aware of what the job entails, even Dolan knows it's no walk in the park.

"Anybody who says they know what's going to happen in a job like that is probably fooling themselves," Dolan said. "As a teacher and a coach you're in the athletic director's office every day and you think you know, but until you sit in that chair you don't. As an athletic director you're in the principal's office and you think you know what that's all about, but until you sit in that chair you don't.

"I'm sure there are going to be things I have to learn."

Fortunately for Dolan and the SSAC, he'll have at least a bit of time to get acclimated. His duties as the organization's executive director don't begin until January, when Gary Ray is scheduled to retire. But Dolan will join the SSAC staff July 1, essentially taking the spot that will be vacated by Butch Powell, one of the group's three assistant executive directors, who is retiring as of June 30.

So Dolan effectively will have six months of on-the-job training. He will take over at the beginning of January and Ray will stay on until the end of that month during a transition period.

The job of executive director is to administer the day-to-day operations of the SSAC, which regulates high school and middle school athletics in West Virginia. The SSAC's rules are made by the organization's Board of Control, which is made up of principals of every member high school and middle school. The 10-member Board of Directors, which appointed Dolan, has direct supervision over the executive director.

The executive director, though, is not without influence. Dolan has some specific ideas about how to improve the operations of the commission and some points of emphasis.

“Communication is one area we need to advance,” said Dolan, who in addition to all of his other experiences in athletics has also served on the Board of Directors and has seen first-hand how cumbersome it sometimes is conveying information about the organization. “We need to get our website in order and we need to get into the age of social media and use it in order to get our word out.”

Dolan also points to the hot-button topic of sports medicine, which includes concussions.

“It’s certainly something we have to get a handle on and be in the forefront on,” he said.

As far as adjusting to the role, Dolan also knows that he will now be dealing with the judicial system and the myriad legal challenges to the organization’s rules, as well as more hands-on dealings with the state’s legislature as a whole and not just Ohio County delegates.

But the board that hired Dolan certainly seems to have confidence in his ability to do those things. At Tuesday’s meeting, the vote for Dolan was unanimous and the group didn’t even go into executive session to discuss the hiring. Dolan had appeared before the board a day earlier for a second interview, at which time the process of the hire was all but formalized.

“The experience that he’s had makes him incredibly qualified for the job,” said David Cottrell, the principal at Clay-Battelle High School and the current Board of Directors president. “The applicants we had were all very qualified, but Bernie has been involved at every level and succeeded at every level. I’m confident we’ve made a terrific choice.”

Cottrell said that only five candidates submitted formal applications for the position, which pays \$112,000 annually and was advertised nationally on the National Federation of State High School Associations website. The others, all of whom were interviewed, were Kent Yoho, principal at Tyler Consolidated; Rick Leach, assistant principal and athletic director at Parkersburg South; Jim Mahan, an administrator with Jackson County schools; and Melissa Case, the former swim coach at George Washington.

Dolan has been an assistant superintendent of schools in Ohio County since 2012, where he has spent his entire educational career. A 1979 graduate of Wheeling Park High School and then West Virginia University, Dolan served as a teacher, coach, athletic director, assistant principal and principal at Wheeling Park. As a student at Wheeling Park he played football and was a state champion in the discus throw as a senior.

A former track coach and assistant football coach at Wheeling Park, Dolan served as the school’s principal from 2008 through 2012, when he was appointed to his position as an assistant superintendent.

Dolan will be just the ninth person to serve as the SSAC’s executive director since the position — originally referred to as the executive secretary — was created in 1946. He follows William Fugitt, Gordon Eison, Sam Williams, Bill Hanlin, Jim Hamrick, Warren Carter, Mike Hayden and Ray.

Ray has served in the position since 2007.

Reach Dave Hickman at 304-348-1734 or dphickman1@aol.com or follow him at [Twitter.com/dphickman1](https://twitter.com/dphickman1).