

October 12, 2007

## End of an era at East Bank

### • Hughes, Christy stepping down as middle school football coaches

By **Matt McCartney**

For The Charleston Gazette

Butch Hughes and Ron Christy will not be appearing on ESPN's Sportscenter, and they won't be seen on NFL highlights.

But to two-dozen youngsters who play football for East Bank Middle School, they're quite important.

Thursday was the last home game for Hughes and Christy, the Pioneer coaches who will retire after this year. Between them, they have 66 years of coaching experience in Kanawha County.

Hughes has been on the coaching staff at East Bank middle school and junior high for 33 years, serving as head coach for the past 27. Christy worked as head coach at Spring Hill for 18 years before moving to join Hughes with the Pioneers. He has been at East Bank for the past 15 years.

"This has been a really tough week for me," Hughes said after Thursday's 50-12 win over Horace Mann at East Bank. "I've always liked to think that I touched the lives of the boys I have coached, but everything they've done this week has really touched me inside.

"God has really blessed me by showing me that coaching was where I was supposed to be. I'm a man of faith, and there's a right way to do things and a wrong way, and we have always tried to instill that in the kids here and teach them how to win with class, win with character and lose with dignity."

Christy, who grew up in Cabin Creek, said being there to teach kids through football is more important than the average person thinks.

"Football is just like the game of life," he said. "This game teaches you how to depend on others, teaches you the strength in groups and that hard work and discipline pay off.

"In an area like this, these kids don't have much. In part of the county, there are malls, skating rinks and a lot of other things. For some of these kids, football is it, and it's a tremendous sacrifice for a lot of our parents to allow their sons to play. This game keeps them out of trouble and teaches them discipline, and for us to be able to do that is as important as anything else we do — including in the classroom."

Jordan Smith, one of the East Bank captains, compared the two coaches to his grandfather. "They'd do anything to help us and are always here for us," said Smith.

Matt Messinger, another captain, referred to Hughes and Christy as "father figures."

Both coaches said they take pride in seeing former players return for a visit. Several were in attendance Thursday.

"It's great to see these boys grow up to be men and see them come back years later," Hughes said. "That's one of the most rewarding parts of the job. We care about the kids when they play for us and that doesn't change when they move on to the next level."

Christy added: "It's good to see former players here and there with their families," he said. "This program keeps a lot of kids out of trouble and gives them a focus and a chance to make it in life that they might not have had otherwise."

The Pioneers are 5-1 and will close out their season next week at DuPont.

---

*[Click to Search for Related Stories in our Library](#)*

---

**TALK BACK:** [\[WRITE TO THE EDITOR\]](#)