



January 9, 2014

Poca football coach Lemley steps down Won 4 state championships with Dots

by **Rick Ryan**
Assistant Sports Editor

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Bob Lemley likens his tenure as football coach at Poca to a famous quote by Mae West.

"Like she said," Lemley said, "I've been rich and I've been poor, but rich is better."

Lemley, if nothing else, has been able to keep his sense of humor as he steps down after 24 seasons of coaching the Dots.

That stretch includes four Class AA state championships, with three in a row from 2001-03. However, it also includes just two playoff berths in 10 years since that final title, with a 1-9 record this past season.

His career record at Poca stands at 141-128, with the victory total representing a school record. Lemley was also 23-7 in playoff games, with the four titles and a runner-up finish in 1996 to East Bank.

On Thursday, Lemley sent his letter of resignation to Poca principal Vic Donalson and the county superintendent's office.

"I've been thinking about it a long time," Lemley said. "I just decided it might be time to do it. I enjoy coaching. The losses wear on you a little bit more, and that's been the case the last few years. Friday nights have been kind of tough. I just felt it was time after 24 years.

"When you think about it, it's like a roller coaster. I've been at the bottom of the barrel and the top of the barrel."

Lemley, 67, came to Poca High School in 1990 after spending 20 years at Poca Middle School as a football, basketball and track coach. Prior to that, he served as an assistant baseball coach at Logan for one season.

By his reckoning, Lemley has spent 59 straight years on athletic fields somewhere, starting as a Little League, high school, then college athlete, followed by 21/2 seasons of minor league baseball as an infielder in the Cincinnati Reds organization, then his lengthy coaching career in Putnam County.

He first reached the pinnacle in 1994 with a state football championship in the inaugural Super Six game held in Wheeling, beating Cardinal Conference rival Sissonville in the title game.

During the Dots' three-peat stretch to start the millennium, they beat Bridgeport 21-7 for the 2001 crown, then followed it with back-to-back wins over Bluefield in the title game, including an OT victory in the snow and mud.

A key moment in the 2001 title game came courtesy of a trademark Lemley trick play, as backup quarterback Brent Roberts took a cross-field lateral from QB Alan Barie, then heaved a 53-yard touchdown pass to Darrell Thomas in the fourth quarter to break a 7-all tie.

Lemley was selected as the state high school coach of the year by the West Virginia Sports Writers Association for the 2003-04 school year.

Part of his reasoning in stepping down now, he said, is to spend more time with his grandson Samuel, age 1 year, 7 months.

"I'm already babysitting him twice a week or more," Lemley said with a chuckle.

He also expects to fish and golf more than in recent years, but doesn't see himself getting back into coaching again, at least for the time being.

Poca only made the playoffs twice in the past 10 years, 2006 and 2010, losing in the first round of the former and reaching the quarterfinals in the latter.

Lemley said it was difficult for everyone to deal with the lack of success after such a glorious run to start the 2000s.

"You want your guys to experience what we've done in the past," he said, "and when that doesn't happen . . . Our kids tried, but it didn't seem like it was happening.

"I've got mixed feelings about that. Kids are a little bit different now, especially in football, trying to specialize a little bit more. When you've got a small school, a small double-A school, you need all the athletes out there if you can get them. It's a challenge.

"You like to be competitive. You like the guys to give it a shot. We were competitive a few times this year. The kids were great, at least the ones who showed up were great."

Reach Rick Ryan at 304-348-5175 or rickr...@wvgazette.com.