

New athletic director talks plan for school year

Owen Schoenl

Business Manager

Okemos High School named Brian Fuller as its new athletic director to replace Ira Childress. Fuller previously was the athletic director, as well as several other roles including coaching varsity soccer for both boys and girls and director of transportation at Harbor Beach High School.

Located in the thumb of Michigan, Harbor Beach is much smaller and more rural than OHS, with an enrollment of just over 200 students. OHS has 1,437 students, making it almost seven times larger in terms of enrollment compared to Harbor Beach.

"I was the director of assessments, athletics, facilities and transportation, and I coached boys and girls varsity soccer at Harbor Beach," Fuller said of his previous job.

"Here, I'm the athletic director, so I wear less hats here, but the hat is a bigger hat. There are more teams, more kids, more facilities, more programs, and more of everything."

Fuller is a graduate of OHS and has been involved with educational athletics for 30 years. In addition to his experience as an athletic director in another school district, Fuller has experience with managing sports

facilities and club sports.

"For me at least, one of the nice things about coming to Okemos is as a graduate of Okemos High School, I have an understanding of what students expect from Okemos, and what their parents would expect. I have a relationship with a number of people's parents, aunts and uncles because I'm from the community," Fuller said about his Okemos background.

Maintaining the traditions that Okemos had in athletics is one of Fuller's priorities for his first year according to him, and he wants to recognize the success that others have had before him while understanding what may need to be changed or improved.

"For my first year, it's really who are the kids, who are all the parents, who are all the coaches, who are all the teachers, what are the facilities and what are their needs and how do you prioritize those needs? Are there changes that need to be made? How do you make changes without recognizing the unperceived or unintended consequences of most decisions are what get people a little bit sideways?" Fuller said.

"I think year one is about understanding and trying to find out who all the different pieces and parts are. Year two and three and forward will become the years to try and make some impact and change."



Photo by Annabel Burba

Brian Fuller addresses Okemos athletes and parents at Meet the Chiefs.

Fuller said that he thinks that one of the most challenging parts about the transition from Harbor Beach to Okemos is the wide variety of programs offered at OHS compared to Harbor Beach and the option to play club sports rather than playing for the school, which was not as available at Harbor Beach. He thinks that his experience at Harbor Beach will be valuable in dealing with this and other challenges that will come from his new position.

"Where I came from, it was fairly rural, fairly remote. Kids did not

play one sport, most of them played two or three since there were not a lot of opportunities to go and play club sports. We have kids here that can choose not to play their sport because those opportunities are available," Fuller said.

"There is just a wide variety of things like that which will take a little bit of getting used to, but again, I'm from this community, from this area. I've been involved in different club programs so I think I understand that."

Three Chieftain alumni standing out in the NCAA

Brendon Pricco

Staff Reporter

One thing that Vail Hartman, Sophia Franklin and Conner George all have in common is they are competing at high-level Big Ten schools. Another is they are Okemos High School graduates.

Vail Hartman

Vail Hartman graduated from OHS in 2017. He was a two-sport athlete known for his talent in both basketball and track. Hartman originally was committed to play basketball at a small school before he picked up an offer from his dream school, University of Michigan, for track. Hartman received the offer after a breakout senior season. Hartman broke four school records including re-breaking his own 400-meter record over and over again until he eventually ran the huge personal record of 47.88 seconds at the state finals meet that he says got him into Michigan.

Now at Michigan, Hartman has continued to find success.

This past year at the NCAA Preliminary Round his 4x400 meter team was seeded 23 out of 24 in the region. The top 12 times got to move on and race in nationals at Austin, Texas. Everyone on the team ran their fastest races and against all odds they edged out Mississippi State by .005 seconds. When a race is that close, every step and every second count, or in this case every thousandth of a second counts.

Not much was different at nationals. Michigan's 4x400 meter relay team was seeded 23rd. Again they proved the whole country wrong and they ran a collective PR again, placing them 14th in the nation. That

placement was good enough for All American Honors for the team.

"What was crazy about those two races was that we weren't even running our A team so nobody believed in us," Hartman said. "But we believed in each other, which is why we PRed by over three seconds in the postseason."

With success and incredible moments already under his belt, Hartman isn't done at Michigan. He has aspirations to win a Big Ten title as a team and to be back at nationals each year in the 4x400m. From an individual standpoint, he wants to graduate a four-time All-American and qualify for regionals each year in the open 400-meter. Hartman is also a great student in the classroom and his goal is to receive Academic All-American honors each year. His final goal to complete at Michigan is to become a team captain.

Sophia Franklin

Now we head 65 miles up the road to East Lansing, Michigan where Sophia Franklin is also dominating on the track.

Walk into the Okemos High School gym and on the far end you will see a wall where every track and field or cross country athlete aspires to end up. The school record wall. Look up there and you will see Sophia Franklin's name there twice.

Sophia Franklin graduated from OHS in 2017, but not before leaving her mark. Franklin was a four-year letter winner and was all-conference and all-district in at least three events in all four years. She left with the school record in pole vault and in the 100-meter hurdles.

"That was special because it was one of the last times I hurdled in a race," said Franklin.

After dominating at the high school level, Franklin continued at Michigan State University. She

didn't skip a beat. Franklin has only been at MSU for two years but already holds the school record for pole vault in both indoor and outdoor. This past indoor season, Franklin won her first Big Ten Championship.

Winning a Big Ten Championship was "very special to me," said Franklin. Most recently Franklin was selected to compete in the U23 championships in Mexico with team USA.

"I'd like to finish off these next two years at state strong, then maybe see if I can continue to compete outside of college, possibly go pro if all goes well," she said.

Conner George

Next we walk from the track to the Breslin Student Events Center. Conner George has been bleeding green since he was little. It's in his family. He is the son of Cathy George, the Michigan State volleyball coach. It was only right that Conner ended up in East Lansing, but started 10 minutes down the road at OHS.

George finished his senior season averaging 23 points and 10 rebounds per game. He also had multiple big time plays like a game winning layup against Saint Johns on senior night, a game winner versus DeWitt and a 40 point performance in the Holiday Hoops Classic against Troy Athens during his senior year. "It was really no secret how important he was for our team as well as him being one of the best players in a league that had a significant amount of talent," said Matt Dickerman, assistant varsity coach and JV coach at Okemos.

George ended up with offers from multiple D2 and D3 schools but he ended up deciding to take a preferred walk-on spot at Michigan State under legendary coach Tom

Izzo.

Had George gone to one of those smaller schools, he most likely would have been a starter at some point and would have gotten a lot more playing time. However, he opted to take a backseat and accept his role to make a commitment of working hard every day to make his teammates better in practice and set aside his ego for the good of the team.

"CG [Conner George] is a great teammate and great leader and he helped me out in so many ways on and off the court," said Gabe Brown. "Some people don't take the time out to see what CG does."

While most of George's work is behind the scenes, that doesn't mean his work goes unnoticed. George was acknowledged for all of his hard work and commitment and he received a scholarship for the 2017-18 season.

In the 2017 PK80 tournament Michigan State was facing off against DePaul. Michigan State's star player, Miles Bridges, was in foul trouble early on. Izzo looked to his bench and called on the former walk-on. George played 16 minutes and was instrumental in preventing the upset. Michigan State would go onto win 73-51. George racked up seven rebounds, five of them being offensive, a steal and two points.

While the PK80 game was the most memorable moment of George's Michigan State career so far, that isn't his only bright spot. George was also selected to the National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC) Honors Court, recognizing men's basketball players who carry a grade-point average of 3.2 or higher. He was also a recipient of MSU's Tim Bograkov Walk-On Award after his redshirt freshman year.

2019-2020 NFL season and playoff predictions

Jackson Grabill

Sports Editor

Rejoice NFL fans, football is finally back. Here are my predictions for this season.

AFC East

This is definitely the easiest division to predict in all of football. No surprise here, I'm going with the New England Patriots to win the division. The defending Super Bowl champs have won their division ten years in a row, and 15 of the last 16, and they might have a better team this year than last year. The New York Jets and Buffalo Bills will make improvements from last year, but both just miss out on making the playoffs. Lastly, the Miami Dolphins, who might be the worst team in the league, will finish last.

AFC North

The AFC North is about as interesting of a division as they come. I have the Pittsburgh Steelers narrowly winning. There are a lot of questions surrounding the Steelers after losing their two best offensive players, Le'Veon Bell and Antonio Brown, this offseason, but I believe the Steelers have players to step up and fill the holes. In second I have the Browns. Cleveland has been very noisy this offseason after assembling a flashy, talented roster, led by Baker Mayfield and Odell Beckham Jr. I don't love the noise and inexperience, but this team is too talented not to make the playoffs, so I have them as one of two Wild Card teams. The Baltimore Ravens will take a step back and finish third in Lamar Jackson's second year. In last I have the Cincinnati Bengals.

AFC South

Personal moves made by the Houston Texans signal that they want to win now, and I think they will. Deshaun Watson will have a career year and leads the Texans to another division title. Finishing second, I have the Tennessee Titans. The Titans will have a good season, but I just think they are too limited, and will miss out on the playoffs. In third I have the Indianapolis Colts, who have a talented roster, but similarly to Tennessee, are too limited at quarterback. Last, I've got the Jacksonville Jaguars. Why? Because they're the Jags.

AFC West

Winning the West is the Kansas City Chiefs. The Chiefs might have the most powerful offense in the league, led by reigning league MVP Patrick Mahomes. I'm not sure who can stop them in the regular season, but the real test will be whether that defense can get stops in the playoffs. In second, and clinching the other Wild Card spot, will be the Los Angeles Chargers. LA's talented roster and veteran quarterback will lead the Chargers back to the playoffs. In a distant third and fourth, I've got the Denver Broncos and Oakland Raiders respectively.

NFC East

I see this division as a two horse race, with the Dallas Cowboys and Philadelphia Eagles clearly the best teams in the East. The Eagles still have most of the roster that won the Super Bowl just two years ago. A defense full of pro bowlers and an offense with weapons everywhere to help out quarterback Carson Wentz just gives Philly the edge over Dallas in the division. But all

is not lost for the Cowboys. I think Dallas will make the playoffs as a Wild Card. Rounding out the division are the New York Giants and the Washington Redskins, who are both rebuilding, even though both franchises probably won't admit it.

NFC North

Winning what is arguably the best division in football, I have the Green Bay Packers. I didn't love the hire of first year head coach Matt LaFleur, who doesn't have the typical resume of an NFL head coach, but I like this team. Aaron Rodgers is a top three quarterback in this league, if healthy, and he might have his best defense since his Super Bowl winning season in 2010. In second place, and taking the other Wild Card spot, will be the Chicago Bears. The Bears will take a step back after a surprise 12-4 season last year, but their smart head coach Matt Nagy and stellar defense will carry them back to the playoffs. Next will finish the Minnesota Vikings. I like Minnesota's coach and roster, but don't trust that quarterback Kirk Cousins will come up big when they need him most. In last I have the always dysfunctional Detroit Lions.

NFC South

This division is another competitive one, but this season the Atlanta Falcons will finish top. Led by veteran quarterback Matt Ryan, Atlanta will return to the playoffs this year. In second I have the New Orleans Saints. The Saints are a talented team, but I think they will take a step back from last year and miss the playoffs due to crazy, emotional losses in the playoffs in back-to-back years. Rounding out the division, I have the Carolina Panthers in third and Tampa Bay Buccaneers in fourth. The Panthers are too inconsistent to be a serious contender and I think it's time for Tampa to find a new quarterback.

NFC West

The Los Angeles Rams have won the West for the past two years, and I believe that trend will continue. The combination of head coach, quarterback and an all around talented roster will carry the Rams to another division title. However, I believe they will take a tiny step back from last season's 13-3 record. In second and third, I think will be the San Francisco 49ers and Seattle Seahawks. The Niners look like they might have the largest improvement from last season of any team in the league, but I think they will fall just short of the playoffs. Seattle has a top quarterback and coach, but I'm not sure if the weapons and team around them are good enough to make the playoffs. The Arizona Cardinals will finish last, but will be interesting with the first overall pick in the 2019 draft, Kyler Murray.

Playoffs and Super Bowl

Now for what you've all been waiting for. Coming out of the AFC, I've got the Chiefs. Patrick Mahomes will have another outstanding year, leading Kansas City to the Super Bowl after avenging last season's AFC Championship loss to the Patriots. Out of the NFC will be the Eagles. Philadelphia is the best team in the NFC, when healthy, and Carson Wentz is ready to lead this team all the way. Finally, for Super Bowl LIV in Miami, I've got the Chiefs over the Eagles in a high scoring, shoot out, all time great Super Bowl.

OHS welcomes new girls' head basketball coach

Angela Voit

Staff Reporter

The girls' basketball team has a new head coach this year. Coach Sara Holt started with the girls basketball team this summer and hopes to work to improve the girls' skills and the team as a whole in years to come.

Holt is a graduate of Belding High School and Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, where she played softball and basketball.

Holt has been coaching basketball for 21 years, starting at her former high school in Belding. After several years there she transferred about half an hour down the road to Central Montcalm High School for a brief stint. Then she moved to Grand Rapids Catholic Central High School before getting her most recent former position at Lake Superior State University as an assistant women's

basketball coach.

Now, she works here at OHS. She says her experience so far has been enjoyable.

"It's been great. I've only been here for three months, but the community, teachers, staff—everybody has just been very welcoming and it's been a wonderful place to integrate into," Holt said.

The players have enjoyed her coaching as well. While they have only done pre-season prep, her attitude has already made an impact.

"She's very active with you and she's constantly there. She's really supportive too. She's also encouraging us to talk more and be the best teammate we can be," Samy Grant (11), an Okemos girls' basketball player, said.

The team appreciates her drive and motivation.

"She's a hard worker and she pushes us to do better," Emma Cooke (11), another Okemos girls' basketball player, said. "She is more involved. We do more pre-season

stuff. It's helpful."

Some coaches put a majority of their training effects towards specific players. Others are more sport-centric and ignore the outside lives of their athletes. Holt is a self-described 'player-driven' coach.

"I love to see kids attack goals, be successful, have a great experience on and off the court with their friends, and just overall growth in the kids that I coach," Holt said.

This seems to have a positive impact on the players as well.

"She's including everyone instead of just focusing on one person -- it's everyone in the team -- which actually makes the team better," Cooke said.

Alongside a team-player mentality, Coach Holt is also promoting a new training technique called vertimax. It is a training technique where the user straps on a resisting band and then tries to run or jump. The extra resistance helps improve agility.

Vertimax training and the weight room help improve players' speed,

strength, and endurance, but not all the work Holt is doing to improve the basketball team is with the varsity or even high school players.

"We are looking to build a solid unified program at the high school, middle school and our younger levels, and just watch the program get stronger year to year," Holt said.

She is also planning on working with Okemos students outside of athletics. As well as being a basketball coach, Holt is a history and government teacher. She will be working during the day as a floating substitute around the various departments of Okemos High School this year and soon as a full-time teacher.

While most students are not basketball players, many will probably see her as a substitute teacher in one of their classes or at a girls' basketball game this winter.

After only a few months into training, the prospects for the team are looking good.

"I think we have a lot of potential this year," Grant said.

Scores

Football

- 9/6 W 42-10 vs Ann Arbor Skyline
- 9/13 L 0-50 vs DeWitt
- 9/20 L 22-40 vs Lansing Everett
- 9/27 @ Grand Ledge

Boy's Soccer

- 9/4 W 1-0 vs Holt
- 9/7 W 2-1 @ Brighton
- 9/9 W 3-2 @ DeWitt
- 9/11 W 2-0 @ Grand Ledge
- 9/16 W 8-0 vs Lansing Waverly
- 9/18 W 2-0 vs Lansing Everett
- 9/21 W 7-0 @ Mason
- 9/25 W 6-3 @ East Lansing

Volleyball

- 9/4 L 1-3 vs Mount Pleasant
- 9/10 W 3-1 @ Grand Ledge
- 9/12 W 3-1 vs Lansing Waverly

Volleyball ctd.

- 9/17 W 2-1 vs DeWitt
- 9/21 W 3-1 @ Portage Northern
- 9/24 vs Lansing Everett
- 9/26 @ East Lansing

Boy's Tennis

- 9/9 W 5-3 @ Novi
- 9/10 @ DeWitt
- 9/12 W 8-0 @ Holt
- 9/12 W 8-0 @ Lansing Waverly
- 9/14 W 6-2 @ East Grand Rapids
- 9/14 L 3-5 @ Bloomfield HillsCranbrook Kingswood
- 9/14 D 4-4 @ Detroit Country Day
- 9/17 W 8-0 vs Grand Ledge
- 9/19 W 8-0 vs East Lansing
- 9/21 D 4-4 @ Northville
- 9/26 @ Holt
- 9/27 @ Grand Blanc
- 9/27 @ Holt
- 9/27 @ Traverse City West