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By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

The last time a Liberal High School Athletic Director stepped into a coaching position, Gary Cornelsen returned for his final season at the helm of the Redskin football program after Rich Anderson abruptly resigned two weeks before the school year in 2003.

Now, Athletic Director Scott Hinkle is stepping down from his role as the chief administrator of the athletic department to become the head coach of boys basketball.



Hinkle will replace Drew Gruver who stepped down to move to Winfield.

“The current AD has lofty expectations of the new coach,” Hinkle said. “There’s pressure for sure.”

The decision to return to the sideline has been festering with Hinkle for some time.

He coached the Redskins for three seasons beginning in 1996. His contract to coach was not renewed, and after a year of working at KSCB, Hinkle returned to coaching as an assistant for legendary Seward County coach Jim Littell in 2001.

The coaching duo led the Lady Saints to the first-ever national championship at Seward County, and in 2004, Hinkle returned to LHS as the athletic director, a position he has held for nine years.

“I’ve wanted to do it for quite a while,” Hinkle said. “The timing had to be right. With (daughter) Holly being a senior and (son) Cade being a freshmen, I can put the time back into it. Basically, high school coaching is a year round job. As my kids were younger coming through I didn’t want to miss their stuff.”

With Gruver stepping down, not only was the coaching position available, but the area of Hinkle’s teaching endorsement of business was also available.

“Whether assistant or head coach, I wanted to make the move this year,” Hinkle said. “It happened that Drew was looking. He had looked for a couple years. The timing happened to work for all of us.”

Hinkle will be turning the reins of an athletic department that has struggled to be competitive in most sports in recent memory. Liberal finished last in the race for the Western Athletic Conference Cup the past two years. The WAC Cup race provides points based on each sports finish in the conference.

“I think it is in a pretty good state,” Hinkle said. “The expectations are there every year in every sport. I will leave things in good order. I think it is one of those things that they come in with the passion I had nine years ago. I remember saying nine years ago when I would speak to Rotary and Kiwanis, I can’t believe they pay me for this. When you love what you do, it is a bonus to get paid. My love has always been basketball, I felt it would call me back some day. I hope the new AD has the same passion I had nine years ago. I had hoped we would have been more successful, but we have a good group of coaches and a good group of kids.”

His perspective since his last head coaching stint has changed since his experience working with Littell and as the athletic director.

“It has allowed me to approach the game from a broad spectrum than what I did as a new head coach,” he said. “You see all angles from athletic side. I knew Littell before I coached with him. As far as setting up practices, game management, that was invaluable of further knowledge of the game — the influence he had on me as far as what I think will be, a new and improved head coach because I have that perspective.”

Hinkle has already been leading the basketball team since Gruver’s announced resignation, and he will be coaching his son.

“I’ve coached him in MAYB stuff,” Hinkle said. “My question to him was, ‘Can you handle me being your head coach when my job is on the line?’ It still has to be fun, but it comes down to wins and losses. Our whole family talked about it. It really came down to doing what I really love. Being able to coach him, being involved in his high school career, it is something I feel fortunate to be given the opportunity.”

The district will begin the process of locating a new athletic director, and Hinkle will coach in 2013.

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