

Gaster named new head football coach at Princeton

By Cam Ellis

Published in Sports on March 25, 2015 1:48 PM

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PRINCETON -- After almost eight weeks of interviews, Princeton High School finally has a new football coach -- Travis Gaster.

Gaster's hiring ended two-month search and interviews with 20-plus applicants.

It's the first head coaching job for Gaster, who previously served as a defensive coordinator at Carolina Forest (S.C.) High for a year. He also spent four seasons at Cleveland HS.

Gaster, who first heard about the job after talking to his friend and Princeton assistant coach Jeremy Joyner, was drawn to the small-town community feel that the 1-A school offers.

"He (Jeremy) was talking about how good of a situation it was community-wise, support-wise, kid-wise, the whole game," he said. "I came down to visit and went to a basketball game to see the atmosphere, and it pulled on me. It was very obvious that this was a special place."

Gaster has roots in North Carolina.

His father, Jack, was a successful football coach at both Albemarle and Smithfield-Selma High School. It was on those fields where the Gaster picked up the love of the game. He played at the Air Force Academy and his first coaching job was as a student-assistant at N.C. State.

Football has been Gaster's life.

"I think it was when I was four and I would ride the tractor across Smithfield-Selma's football field," he said. "That's probably one of my first memories... I was a field rat. I couldn't get enough of it. I didn't want to be playing with friends, I didn't want to be riding around the neighborhood on my bike,

"I wanted to be on the football field."

Gaster takes over a Princeton program that has flourished over the past three seasons and compiled 26 wins, including an appearance in the eastern regional 1-A final in 2012.

There's a level of uncertainty surrounding the future of the program, though. Head coach Derrick Minor is now the new head coach at Rockingham County. Johnny Frasier, the school's all-time leading rusher, signed with N.C. State.

Gaster plans to continue the winning tradition.

"It's going to be physical," he said. "I like running down hill on both sides of the ball. The line of scrimmage is obviously where it's going to be won, and I want our offensive and defensive line to know that.

"Our success is going to rest on them."

Gaster, whose wife and two children still live in the Myrtle Beach area, mentioned that the hardest part of adjusting to life as a head coach was filling the assistant coach positions. Having to deal with the scarcity of open positions at a 1-A school means that he'll have to work even harder to make sure that he makes the right personnel decisions.

"The reality of a 1-A school is that when teachers come here, they don't leave," he said. "For a father who's raising two children, that's perfect. For a head football coach who's looking to bring in new people and rehire people who are already here, that's tough."

Despite those challenges, Gaster is confident that Princeton's future is bright.

"It's much more pleasing to me to be back involved in North Carolina

12/4/2015

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football," he said. "I know in my heart that this is where I'm supposed to be."

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