

by Jackie Perrone

Coach Bailey Harris

Bailey Harris looks back with mixed emotions on a storied career in sports. As one of South Carolina's winningest coaches, his name is in many record books, from his days as a student athlete through 32 years of coaching. Now he's stepping down from the demands of coaching winning teams in basketball and track and is looking ahead to his new title as grandfather, with more time for his wife and his family as well as other interests.

"I came very near going into the ministry," he says. "My father was a Presbyterian minister, and it was something that was always on the horizon as I was growing up. While I was searching for direction, I was putting a lot of time and energy into high school and college sports, mainly basketball and track, and some football. I was a student assistant on staff, and coaching began beckoning to me. That's where I landed, and, after 32 years, I know it was a true calling. The good influences in my life brought me here."

A storybook basketball season came to an end in February, as the then-undefeated Lexington Wildcats lost to Berkeley in the Lower State championship. Coach Harris will be back at Lexington High next year but with a scaled-down schedule, coaching cross-country track, and teaching U.S. history. "I'm stepping it down from three jobs to two," he says.

The list of professional honors is a long one, beginning with letters in football, basketball, and baseball at Thornwell High School in Clinton. He was named all-state in basketball and Laurens County player of the year in football. At Presbyterian College, he played basketball and became a track letterman, setting a school record in 400 m hurdles, which still stands.

At 22, he became the youngest collegiate head coach in the U.S., as he led the women's basketball team at Coastal Carolina. Then, a year as graduate assistant coach at Furman University with men's basketball, while earning a master's degree.

In 1987, he began a three-decade reign at Lexington High. Thirteen region championships, 10 final appearances, six state championship appearances, and two state titles. Only two losing records in 32 years. Ten consecutive 20-win seasons, unmatched in AAAA and AAAAA annals. Hall of Fame for S.C. Basketball Coaches and S.C. Track, and XC Coaches.

Coach Harris' wife Beth, a speech therapist in the schools, also will be cutting back on her hours at work next year. Their son Drew, a town planner in North Carolina, and his wife are making them grandparents in August. Son Thomas is in graduate school at Harvard, and daughter Eliza, newly graduated from University of Alabama, is coaching gymnastics at a private gym in Athens, Georgia. ■

