

Canton football keeps head coaching job close to home with hiring of assistant Andy Lafata

Tim Smith, hometownlife.com



Canton's football future still is in the hands of a hall of famer. Canton athletics director Vernon Crump announced Friday that Andy Lafata is the new head football coach, taking the reins from longtime coach Tim Baechler.

Both Lafata — an offensive lineman on the 2005 Chiefs team that reached the state finals —and Baechler were part of the [first class of Canton High School Hall of Fame](#) inductees, announced late last month.

“Andy was my starting center on the 2005 team, and the team went to the state championship,” said Baechler, during a Friday telephone call. “And

he's coached with me the last 10 years. So he's been around it pretty much most of his life, and he loves Canton Football."

Lafata will continue teaching in the Roseville district while taking over Canton's high-profile football job. He was informed Thursday that he had the job

"It's a big opportunity," Lafata said. "You feel great about it just to be considered for the job to start, and then when you finally get offered the job you just know the responsibility that comes with the job.

"Our kids are ready to go, I'm excited for them and for our coaches, too, who get to still come along for the ride."



Offensive line coach Andy Lafata was named Canton's varsity football coach.

Staying the course

According to Baechler, who retired in November after 20 successful seasons at the helm, the fact that Crump hired Lafata — who in recent years was the team's offensive line coach — is a sign that the program will enjoy continuity into the next era.

"I think it's big, because we've got a winning formula," said Baechler, who remains a teacher at Canton High School. "... Everyone wants to talk statistics and things like that, but the biggest statistic in football is how many points are you scoring a game and how many points are you giving up in a game.

“And over 20 years, I think we scored over 35 points a game and only let up 17. You’re going to win a lot of games doing that. So the systems are very good high school football systems, and now that Andy’s got the job we’ll be able to keep five, six, seven assistants.”

Lafata also underscored the importance of continuity.

“Our expectations stay the same, what we want out of our kids,” Lafata added. “They know who their coaches are, and that familiarity helps with this process.”

Even with Lafata (a Lake Orion resident) not having a teaching job in the building, Baechler said he could help with the transition in a behind-the-scenes manner. He coaches the football class, for example.

“During football class next year, I know the systems better than anybody,” Baechler said. “So I’ll be able to watch film with the kids and talk to kids, X and O on the board with the kids.

“There are certain things on film I can help out with during the school day. I will not step foot on that practice field.”



The hiring of a new coach took longer than expected, especially compared to how quickly other high school coaches have been hired this off-season.

But Baechler said there was a good reason for that.

“Initially, he (Crump) was just waiting for more applicants,” Baechler continued. “I said you’re not going to get any. People know we’re not a school of choice, they know we don’t have middle school football.

“To be frank, it’s not a great program to take over, because we win just shy of nine games a year over the last 20 years, that’s not exactly the kind of job you want to come in and have all that pressure on you. That’s the expectation, it’s going to be pretty difficult to live up to.”

Time to work

Yet Lafata wanted the Chiefs job so badly that Baechler said it would have “crushed him” had the job gone to another applicant.

“Of course, it would have just broke his heart,” Baechler said. “We were talking about it last night. It would have just crushed him to see it go to somebody else. Because he’s lived it and he wants it to continue. I’m happy he’s got his shot.”

Lafata, meanwhile, said it will be great to finally get to work with the players who will comprise the 2018 roster.

“That’s the best part, to finally get going, get with the kids,” Lafata emphasized. “I know they were put in a difficult spot when your head coach steps down.

“But I’m happy for them that they finally have an answer now, we can get moving and start working.”

According to a press release issued by the Canton Athletic Department, Lafata will be the sixth head football coach in school history.

Lafata, a 2006 Canton grad, has a bachelor of arts degree in secondary education from Eastern Michigan University.

In addition to his assistant coach's role since 2008, he was junior varsity head coach in 2015-17.

“He was inducted into the inaugural Canton High School Hall of Fame, as a member of the 2005 state finalist football team and is a proud Canton Chief,” noted a statement. “In true Chief fashion, Coach LaFata has worked his way through the ranks to earn the position of varsity head coach at Canton High School.”