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A10

A TOUGH DECISION

Stanfield football coach
Davie Salas steps down
instead of getting vaccinated



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Stanfield football coach Davie Salas talks to his team on April 9, 2021, during a home game against Grant Union. Salas stepped down after a game Thursday, Oct. 14, because he did not want to get the mandated COVID-19 vaccine. He also relinquished his Irrigon boys basketball head coaching job.

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

STANFIELD — Davie Salas hung up his whistle after his Stanfield Tigers beat Umatilla 26-6 on the football field on Thursday, Oct. 14.

It's not something he said he wanted to do, but Oregon's vaccine mandate, requiring teachers, staff and coaches to be fully vaccinated, was something he was not comfortable doing.

"I didn't want to get the shot," Salas said. "They had to do what they needed to. I had to do what I thought was best for me."

Salas' decision also forced his hand to step down as the Irrigon boys basketball coach.

"I never wanted this to be about me," said Salas, who made his decision public on Facebook over the weekend. "But I wanted everyone to know what was going on. It was a tough decision to make. I didn't want to do something I didn't want to do. I have a lot of football and basketball left in me. I didn't want to leave, but I respect that they (the schools) are in a tough place."

The outpouring of support for Salas was touching. Former players reached out, telling him he had made a difference in their lives. Parents thanked him for the hard work he put in the programs and with their boys.

Salas said he would cherish the memories. "I want to thank every player who ever played for me, every parent that allowed me to coach their child," he wrote in his Facebook post. "I gave you all everything I had up until last night. I'll take with me all the wonderful memories of nine seasons at Stanfield and six at Irrigon. Thank you for all the love and support. Forever a Tiger and a Knight."

Lasting memories

Salas spent nine years with the Stanfield football program, the past seven as the head coach.

He finished this season with 13 players, but he was able to wring every last bit of talent from those players. The Tigers are 2-4 with two games remaining.

Dan Sharp, Brad Rodgers and a couple of others will see the program through to the end of the season.

"It has been a couple of long months," Salas said. "My coaching staff is young. It has been a long season and I have done my best to hold us together. We have a good team ahead of us."

When Salas took over the Tigers in 2015, he led them to the state semifinals where they lost to Kennedy 34-20. Stanfield finished the season 10-2.

"Heppner beat us handily that year (60-6), and we beat them the next year for the league title," Salas said. "Prior to that, we beat them at our place in 2012 when I was the JV coach. We had some great games."

In 2016, he led the Tigers to the state championship game for the first time in 59 years. They lost 53-14 to Regis and finished with an 11-2 record, which included a 14-0 win over Heppner.

Among the talent on that 2016 team were Dylan Grogan, Thyler Munkus, Noe Sanchez and Enoel Angel.

Salas had a record of 34-27 from 2015 to present.

His time with the Irrigon boys basketball teams was not as lengthy, but just as enjoyable.

"Honestly, I enjoyed them both," he said. "They have their differences. Reminders of kids who grew up like me. I wanted to be a role

model for these young men. It's good to have a fresh start with each season, and two places that believed in me. If some day I could find myself back on a coaching staff, I would enjoy that."

Salas replaced Mitch Thompson at Irrigon at the start of the 2016-17 season. The Knights won the Eastern Oregon League title, lost in the first round of the state playoffs to Salem Academy, and finished the season 15-9.

The following season, the Knights won the EOL title, placed sixth at the 3A state tournament and won the sportsmanship title at state. They had a 22-6 record.

"I loved it," Salas said. "We played Umatilla for the district title and beat them (53-48)."

The following few seasons have not been as successful, but Salas' faith in his team never wavered. In five seasons, he had a record of 47-56.

"I was able to accomplish great things with both teams," he said. "I feel I gave them everything I had. Trying to teach those young men to navigate through life, and being held accountable."

Salas graduated from Umatilla High School in 2001, where he played football and basketball. He said he never thought about coaching his alma mater.

"I never want to coach the kids of people I know," he said. "I don't like that."

Salas has had a few players who have gone on to play in college. The latest is football player Mario Sanchez, who is playing at Linfield College.

"I'm extremely proud of him," Salas said. "Hopefully he will take the lessons I taught him and go on to be a great man, husband and father."

ON THE SLATE

Tuesday, Oct. 19

Prep volleyball
Stanfield at Heppner, 5 p.m.
Weston-McEwen at Enterprise, 5 p.m.
Union at Pilot Rock, 6 p.m.
Pendleton at Hood River Valley, 6:30 p.m.
Prep girls soccer
Hermiston at Walla Walla, 4 p.m.
Pendleton at The Dalles, 4:30 p.m.
La Grande at McLoughlin, 5 p.m.
Prep boys soccer
The Dalles at Pendleton, 4:30 p.m.
College volleyball
College of Idaho at Eastern Oregon, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Oct. 20

Prep boys soccer
McLoughlin at La Grande, 5 p.m.
Prep cross-country
McLoughlin at Pioneer Run, Milton-Freewater, TBD
College volleyball
Blue Mountain at Yakima Valley, 6 p.m.
College men's soccer
Spokane at Blue Mountain, 4:15 p.m.
College women's soccer
Spokane at Blue Mountain, 2 p.m.

Thursday, Oct. 21

Prep football
Irrigon at Heppner, 7 p.m.
Prep volleyball
Baker at McLoughlin, 6:30 p.m.
Ridgeview at Pendleton, 6:30 p.m.
Prep cross-country
Hermiston at MCC Championships, Hanford, noon
Heppner, Nixyaawii, Pilot Rock, Riverside, Stanfield/Echo, Weston-McEwen at Gold Rush Run, John Day, TBD
Prep girls soccer
Riverside at Irrigon, 4 p.m.
Crook County at Pendleton, 4:30 p.m.
Hermiston at Southridge, 7 p.m.
Prep boys soccer
Pendleton at Crook County, 4:30 p.m.
Riverside at Irrigon, 6 p.m.

Friday, Oct. 22

Prep football
Pendleton at Ridgeview, 7 p.m.
Pasco at Hermiston, 7 p.m.
McLoughlin at Weston-McEwen, 7 p.m.
Pilot Rock at Sherman, 7 p.m.
Riverside at Stanfield, 7 p.m.
Ione/Arlington at Cove, 7 p.m.
Grant Union at Umatilla, 7 p.m.
Prep girls soccer
Stanfield/Echo at Four Rivers, 4 p.m.
Umatilla at Nyssa, 2 p.m.
Prep boys soccer
Umatilla at Nyssa, noon
College volleyball
Warner Pacific at Eastern Oregon, 7 p.m.
College men's soccer
Carroll College at Eastern Oregon, 4 p.m.
College women's soccer
Carroll College at Eastern Oregon, 6:30 p.m.

Williams' enthusiasm gives BMCC volleyball team a spark

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — This season has not been all sunshine and roses for the Blue Mountain Community College volleyball team, but coach Ceanna Larson can count on Kenzie Williams to bring the energy every day.

"She is such a team player," Larson said. "Even the night she got injured, she was in the training office, got assessed, got a boot on and she was back as a bench player. You've got to love her enthusiasm. It's great to have a player like that."

Williams, a 2020 graduate of La Grande High School, has always had a spark to her game, and she's not shy about sharing that with her teammates.

"It comes from my parents," Williams said. "I do my best and give my best every day. I try to bring that to practice and to the team. We have a lot of talent and we work hard. It's important to me, especially since they nominated me as a team captain. I try to take that positive vibe to practice every day."

The Timberwolves are off to a 5-13 start to the season, and have just started the second half of Northwest Athletic Conference East play. They have shown they can play with the best teams in the East, pushing No. 3 Columbia Basin College to five sets Friday, Oct. 15, before losing.

"Last year was very hard," Williams said. "It was hard having no one in the gym but us. It made us better players. We are prepared for whatever comes."

BMCC had to play a few matches without Williams after she came down on a Treasure Valley player's foot during their Sept. 24 match and injured her ankle.

"You could see her leadership, especially through her injury," Larson said. "When she was on the bench, she led the team with that enthusiasm."

The Timberwolves actually lucked out in having Williams on their roster.

"I wasn't really planning on trying to pursue any college sports," she said. "I watched one of the Blue Mountain games after my (senior) season. I knew one of the assistant coaches. She said she had told Ceanna about me. I had a tryout the next week. Just a dumb luck thing. If not, I don't know what I would be doing now."

A hidden gem

Williams, a 5-foot-8 setter, was a standout player in high school. She was a right side hitter and setter for the Tigers, and Larson liked her versatility.

"There are kids who are sometimes overlooked because of where they are at," Larson said. "In all sports, you could see she has such a competitive streak. She under-



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Blue Mountain Community College's Kenzie Williams sets the ball Wednesday, Oct. 13, 2021, while playing at home against Walla Walla Community College. Williams, a 2020 graduate of La Grande High School, is a player the Timberwolves count on to bring enthusiasm and leadership.

stands the whole of the game. She understands the roles of her teammates and how important they are. She comes from a family of

coaches, and I think those players understand the game more."

Larson has played everything from soccer to volleyball to basket-

ball and track. She played soccer up until the eighth grade when she tore her ACL.

The Tigers went to the 4A state volleyball tournament her junior year, but they went 0-2.

"I've always been involved in sports," she said. "I love to compete and I'm very competitive."

Williams gets her athletic ability from her parents. Her mom, Cindy, played volleyball at Eastern Oregon University, and is the junior varsity volleyball coach at La Grande. Her dad, Clint, played football at EOU.

"They have always been supportive with everything I do," Williams said. "I appreciated them very much. My mom has only missed one game since I've played — even at Blue Mountain. "It was this year, because she had a match the same day."

Williams is working toward her veterinary technician certification at Blue Mountain. She said she would love to go back to the Animal Health Center in La Grande.

"I actually started working at the vet clinic in La Grande three or four summers ago," she said. "I was part of the kennel staff, feeding the animals, walking them, and then I started helping the current technicians with some things. I just wanted to keep pursuing it. I love working there. The owner told me he would love me to come back."