

HODGES:

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of Hodges' retirement this week, said he saw it coming. He and Hodges had discussed it in passing for awhile and the timing made sense for Olson.

Players were surprised initially, but the signs were there. Knutz said Hodges would complain about his hips every bus ride. This spring, Hodges told track and field coach Emily Strot he wasn't riding buses anymore, his hips couldn't handle it.

A recent doctor's visit effectively forced him into retirement. His doctor said he was probably born with dysplasia, a developmental condition in joints and, in Hodges' case, his hips. He said Friday his hips began popping when he was 15 years old; when he was 17 his tensor fasciae latae muscles, or T-bands, would remain tight with his groin, while the rest of his upper leg would be loose. This is consistent with chronic hip problems.

"I don't think a lot of people realize how his hips are bothering him and how he fought through this year," Kay said. "He knew he had a special group."

Hodges has a pair of hip replacement surgeries scheduled for June and July, but he wants to have them done together. He said recipients have to qualify to have both hips done simultaneously, but his insurance has caught a snag with the respective hospital. He won't be getting metal hips, however. Instead he'll get a ceramic socket and "poly" ball. This will last longer than metal or plastic implants, while letting Hodges do everything he wants to do except run long distance, he said.

"It's the only problem I have with my body," Hodges said. "I don't have any other problems anywhere. My health is actually very good. Cholesterol levels, blood pressure, everything's good."

When Hodges arrived in town, Hermiston football had nothing it has now. The weight room was lacking. The football stadium was falling apart and the field was poor quality. The team had no direction or identity of its own. Coaches used Hermiston as a jumping off point for another job. No one stayed long enough to build a program here.

Hodges changed that. "You run into some difficulties sometimes if you bring in somebody that's outside of Hermiston, you wonder how loyal they are to Hermiston," Hodges said. "Hermiston has been in a highly unusual situation the last seven years because they haven't had a staff that's used Hermiston High as

a stepping stone to go to a Tualatin or someplace like that — a big 6A school or money or whatever. They've had a staff that is loyal to Hermiston."

That loyalty will continue and be rewarded when, in all likelihood, defensive coordinator and associate head coach David Faeteete is approved by the Hermiston School Board on May 11 as the Bulldogs' next head coach. The staff has pledged to work under Faeteete, maintaining a cohesion and consistency that was missing with other coaching changes.

When Hodges interviewed for the HHS job, the choice was obvious, Thompson said.

Thompson, a Hermiston native and Bulldog football player in the mid-1970s, was on the hiring committee in 2008. After the interviews concluded, Thompson knew the guy from Nevada — Mark Hodges — was the guy.

"Coach Hodges was far and above the best football guy and best guy for the kids," Thompson said Thursday. "He brought a love of the game and also a love of the kids, and you can tell that by the passion he has every day on the sidelines, whether it be practice or Friday night."

Hodges' sideline persona is well known. He is energetic. He is loud. On fall evenings, his voice echos around the Kennison Stadium complex, bouncing off the aluminum and off the facing of the school building east of the field.

"Every coach brings something different," Thompson said. "He brought the passion and the focus and the love of the sport."

Olson arrived in town a year before Hodges and first met the Nevada transplant in the spring of 2008 when Hodges was hired. Olson said the enthusiasm was noticeable then.

"I think initially you just start with the energy that he brought into the program, in some ways an intensity," Olson said. "Especially the attention to detail to things that were reasons they ultimately won this year."

An offensive-minded coach, Hodges called the plays on offense and taught his schemes and theories. Senior wide receiver Carson Morter, who had never played tackle football until his junior year, said Hodges' concepts were complicated, but they worked. He also effectively taught his schemes, constantly putting his players in positions to win.

He was never married to a certain style. The past three years, with all-state quarterback and 2014 5A Offensive Player of the Year Chase Knutz, the Bulldogs threw

Hodges' career

2008-2014 Head Coach, Hermiston
2005-2007, Head Coach, Fernley, Nevada
2000-2004, Assistant Coach, South Medford
1994-1999, Assistant Coach, North Medford
1991-1993, Graduate Assistant, Southern Oregon University

and threw often. But he also had effective running backs in Cory Adams and Sam Colbray and an offensive line that could run block and pass protect. When Cory's brother Bobby was playing, Hodges focused on the ground attack, and Bobby racked up more than 2,000 yards Bobby his senior season.

That willingness to adjust tactics based on athletes and attention to detail, both on and off the field, helped take the Bulldogs from second fiddle to champion.

"This was his 30th year coaching," Olson said. "He's

already been around 23 years before he got to Hermiston. They adjusted what they did in the offseason. They found the offseason programming that'll work. Some coaches are hardline. Mark's found ways to adjust. They say you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but he and his staff found ways to learn new tricks for the benefit of the program."

Olson pointed out there's also an integrity there. He said, with the exception of one fake punt, Hodges never ran a trick play — no double passes, no flea flickers or reverses.

"It says that there's an analytic side to calling a game as an offensive coordinator, and he knows what his numbers are and what his percentages are and he trusts his play," Olson said. "The problem with a trick play is there's a negative to them. A trick play can be a negative 15 (yards). There's always a belief in the system."

Luis Medina, a graduating senior who started playing football his freshman year

with no knowledge of the sport, sees Hodges as more than his coach.

"To me, he was like a dad," he said. "He knew what I did was wrong. He made sure I was at school and doing things I was supposed to be doing. I'm going to miss my dad at school."

Knutz echoed those sentiments.

"I wouldn't want any other coach in the world," he said. "I can't even put into words what he meant to me in developing as a player. What he did for me and everyone else on the team goes beyond recognition."

Senior Keegan Crafton tracked down Hodges outside of the weight room Friday, asking about the decision to retire and his hips. He asked about Hodges' upcoming hip replacement procedures and listened to the explanations his soon-to-be former coach gave him. His players haven't been the only ones seeking Hodges out since news broke that he would be leaving the program. Hodges said female students have approached

him, concerned about him and the football program.

Friday morning, Hodges eased around the weight room, his arthritic hips fighting him every step. But he was still smiling, still encouraging, still teaching.

"His passions are for students and their success," Kay said.

"Some years you can win a championship and some years you may not win a championship, but the bottom line is the relationships you build with the coaches and players," Hodges said. "And I think that's a really big part of what's kept me going. I had a great staff and my staff is a wonderful bunch of guys and they're all professionals and they all work very hard. My staff really kept me going and helped me out a ton. Not being able to be around them and the day-to-day activities and laughing it up with them and enjoying the time I have with them and, of course, the players — that's what I'm going to miss the most, is the relationships."

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PAGEANT:

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Sara Lomas, a 17-year-old Hermiston High School student, was crowned queen, followed by princesses Hillary Fernandez, 17, HHS; Jennifer Garcia, 17, Stanfield High School; Maribel Marin, 16, HHS; and Brissa Gutierrez, 18, from Chihuahua, Mexico.

Fitzgerald said only these five girls participated in the pageant, but she hopes it will grow in future years.

"We can say that all of them were winners for us because they are the ones who are setting a precedence for future pageants, and they're going to be the role models for younger ladies," she said. "We want for them to extend their hands out into the younger community and to make them not only feel welcome but also participate and have pride in our heritage."

The contestants were judged on essays they submitted, several question-and-answer sessions — one before the pageant and two during — and a presentation about themselves in front of an audience of more than 100 people at the pageant. Fitzgerald said the event



helps the girls in a variety of ways.



"It gives them self-esteem. It gives them pride. It gives them a sense of belonging to the Hispanic community," she said. "It also gives them a sense of direction. It's a new experience, a different experience. This is going to help them develop their skills that are going to be skills for life, such as talking in front of people."



As queen, Lomas also earned a \$500 college scholarship, and she told the *East Oregonian* she hopes to have a role beyond Sunday's Cinco de Mayo celebration.

"I want to participate in other activities and represent the Hispanic community," she said.

The pageant queen and princesses will be presented at 1 p.m. Sunday on stage in front of Hermiston City Hall.

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