

Piedmont searching for new boys' lacrosse coach

Can PHS capture its past glory as successful team?

By Jonathan Comeaux

For the second consecutive Piedmont High School is searching for a head coach for its highly successful boys' lacrosse team. Last year's coach, Jeff Lamb, had to leave after moving to the East Coast.

The school is looking for a tested coach who can capture the team' glory years as a powerhouse in the Western Alameda County Conference,

Lamb took over in difficult circumstances for PHS last spring after former head coach Al Yu left the job following the 2023 D2 NCS Finals and six straight WACC titles.

An online records search shows that the school never prepared for Yu's departure, and didn't post the job on Edjoin.com until November. With a lack of available lacrosse coaches in the area, Piedmont parents scrambled to find Lamb just weeks before the season started.

Lamb came to PHS as a first-time head coach of a varsity program. His only coaching experience was in 2011-2012 as an assistant high school coach after he graduated from Georgetown University. After the job was posted in November, Lamb was officially hired in late-January. Piedmont's season started just weeks later in February.

It was an abrupt and accelerated timeline that left the 2024 team going into its season in a precarious position. PHS still had early success with a six-game winning streak as a new Div. 1 team, but their record dropped to 8-6 by season's end. It marked the conclusion of an illustrious six-year run as the WACC's best team.

They finished third in the league for the first time ever, including the school's first-ever loss to Berkeley, and were beaten by arch rival Bishop O'Dowd in the regular season and first round of the league tournament. Berke-

ley won it's first-ever league title; the noise from the Yellowjackets and Dragons' sidelines was deafening, knowing they have finally turned the tide against the mighty Highlanders' lacrosse team.

Prior to the spring of 2024, the team carried the torch as the school's most successful program in the WACC. The end of the 2023 marked an official close to the coaching tree that spawned six league titles, the 2019 D2 NCS title, and another NCS finals appearance.

Following the 2023 NCS Finals, Yu and assistant coaches David Hafner and Matt Palasek all announced they were departing the school. Yu took a job as a commercial airlines pilot, Hafner moved out of the area, and Palasek accepted a coaching job at Casa Grande closer to his home in Petaluma.

Yu was notably brought into Piedmont by former head coach Ryan Price, who the Highlanders hired away from Bishop O'Dowd in 2018. Price notably led PHS to the D2 NCS title in 2019, where the Highlanders defeated Novato 11-6. Price later lured Yu away from O'Dowd in 2021 as an assistant before Yu took over in 2022.

Piedmont's success at the top of WACC began in 2017 under Tim Booth. Price helped win league titles in 2018 and 2019 prior to the pandemic and then won the shortened 2021 post-pandemic season with a 9-8 overtime title win over the Dragons.

Yu led PHS to the 2022 WACC title as the underdog, beating O'Dowd 10-9 as the second-seed after losing to BOD in the regular season. Then in 2023, PHS dominated Bishop O'Dowd 14-6 for another WACC title, including an 18-1 regular season win over the Oakland school for the most one-sided win in the rivalry's history.

This year, Piedmont posted the job in June, giving ample time for the school to find a qualified candidate.



Former coach Jeff Lamb departs from the school after a tumultuous 2024 season.



PHS won a pair of WACC titles and made an NCS Finals appearance under coach Al Yu during his stint as head coach in 2022-2023.

Piedmont Gridiron Club launched to help foster growth of PHS football



The newly launched non-profit group, the Piedmont Gridiron Club, looks to foster the growth of Piedmont High School football.

Staff Photos

By Jonathan Comeaux

Two years ago there was real concern about the future of football at Piedmont High School. Covid had scared of many families, and signups for the sports were at an all-time low. But now in 2024, there's a different energy in the program as they return to a full-time program intent on winning championships.

The newly created non-profit Piedmont Gridiron Club aims to sustain the return to glory of Piedmont football.

"We're hoping this gives our players the support they need," said Greg Dietrick, the Gridiron Club co-founder and president, "The last few years have been really challenging. For a while, it felt like the community just wasn't with us and there were constant challenges.

"Now, it feels like the community is behind us. This is about building the culture, keeping the Piedmont community interested in football, and we feel it's going to snowball. We had a lot of success last year, we're winning. Having the PGC will give that little extra something to the kids," he added.

"We had a really good season last year," said co-founder Roderick Alemania, "We were asking ourselves how we can avoid being a one-trick pony and how we could emulate nearby programs. Our mission is to grow and foster both football and girls' flag football. It's not just about the boys; several parents have kids on both teams. When you look at where football and flag football is going, there are real college opportunities."

A common thread among successful football schools like Acalanes, Campolindo, and Miramonte is that each of them have groups dedicated to funding its football programs. As an assistant coach for Piedmont's Junior Varsity team and got a first-hand look at operations.

"Throughout all of last year, I was doing research on other schools. I looked at schools primarily across the tunnel like Acalanes, Campo and Miramonte because they were similar communities, albeit bigger schools than us. I found what they all had in common was a football-only boosters club. After a year with the program, I had a good sense of what the program needed from a resources perspective," Dietrick described.

Coming out of the pandemic,

PHS finished 2021 at 2-7 with a roster that fluctuated between 15-19 available players. The following season in 2022, depleted roster issues continued, leading to the varsity program shuttering for the first time in the school's 100-plus year history. But since then, Piedmont won the 2023 WACC Shoreline title, earning a promotion to the WACC Mission division for the upcoming 2024 season.

Dietrick has kids at Piedmont Middle School. He remembers visiting a Piedmont High football game around 12 years ago.

"We were living in San Francisco and we were picking towns where we wanted to live. My wife wanted to move to Piedmont and the first thing I did was go to a Friday Night Lights game, it was awesome. I found there's a nice community that supports its football program, which is something I never had growing up until I got to college. When the football program started dying, I thought, 'Oh no.' This was one of the reasons I moved here. Fast forward years later, both of my sons are very interested in football, and I started getting worried about whether we would have a team. It started the discussion on how we were going to get football back to its stronger days," Dietrick said.

His visit clearly left a lasting impression. In fact, 12 years ago was around the start of Piedmont football's heyday following the close of Kurt Bryan's A-11 offense from 2006-2010.

From 2013-2017, Piedmont never finished with a losing record. In 2014 under Scott Coats, PHS went 12-1 overall, reached the Division 4 NCS Semifinals, and won the Shoreline's championship. 2014 has remained the Highlanders' peak over the last decade.

James Holan took the reins from 2015-2017 after serving as Coats' offensive coordinator. In 2015, Piedmont went 9-3, reached the quarterfinals of the D4 NCS playoffs and won its second-consecutive Shoreline title, which earned them a promotion to the Foothill Division, where they resided until 2021. In 2016, Piedmont went 8-5 and made the semifinals of the D4 playoffs, falling to No. 1 seed Cardinal Newman. In Holan's final year in 2017, PHS went 7-5 and reached the quarterfinals of the D4 playoffs before losing to No. 3 Harker in San Jose.

PHS promoted former offen-

sive coordinator John Trotman to head coach in 2018, finishing 5-6. They went 3-7 the following season under Jerome Johnson with a cast of players called up from JV, It was the start of a decreasing interest in football.

Johnson's team returned from the pandemic in the spring of 2021 and went perfect, 5-0, in its shortened season. However, the team suffered from low roster turnout, which led canceling JV. The following fall season, the downfall of football began until winning the Shoreline title under Jordan Seiden in his second year at the school.

Now, there is a renewed spark of interest in the longest running sport at the school with extra support from the coaches. Offensive and defensive line coaches, Po and Oski Fotu-Tauaho, spend the entire offseason hosting weekly lifting sessions and building a new football culture. The Gridiron Club helps compensate coaches for the extra time and effort they've given to PHS student-athletes.

"Our two line coaches are showing up at 6am four days a week out of the kindness of their hearts. We ultimately want to pay all our coaches for the work they do over the offseason when there is no stipend," Dietrick explained.

Dietrick and Alemania hope the Piedmont Gridiron Club will continue promoting and building the sport because in high school sports, there is nothing quite like Friday Night Lights.

"We decided the values should be focused around youth development; not just high school youth, but grade school and middle school. Friday Night Lights is such an amazing community experience, not just for the football. It's an opportunity to get the community together and to build pride in Piedmont and playing for your school," Alemania said.

Dietrick will remain a part of the Piedmont Gridiron Club with his kids reaching PHS in the near future. Like many parents, Alemania will watch his son, Jordan, graduate with the Class of 2025. With the Gridiron Club entering its early days, the two are working to bring more parents into the fold to ensure PHS football continues to shine as bright in the future as it does going into the 2024 season.

For more information on the Piedmont Gridiron Club, reach out to Greg at Dietrick@gmail.com and Roderick at Ralemania@gmail.com.