

“...Treat Them Like Kings”: How Mars Hill is Embracing a New Coach

The biggest shift from the reclassification last January was that private schools were grouped into their own classes. The AHSAA took the private schools and made two classes now known as “Double A” (17 largest private schools) and “Single A (the rest of the private schools). To level the playing field in sports. Mars Hill will compete in the Single A division, which, in the old format, is full of 1A-3A schools. Mars Hill can still play public schools in the regular season, but not in the playoffs and region/area play.

That is not the only change at Mars Hill this offseason. Coach Darrell Higgins took the job at Russellville which meant Mars Hill would need to hire the third coach in program history. Mars Hill would hire Coach Chris Hill. He takes over a program that has won back to back state championships plus 20 straight games. He said, “A lot of people may have said you may be the dumbest guy in the world to take that job.” He also added, “Winning breeds winning.” He also noted how he would rather take over a winning program.

Coach Hill is not a complete stranger to Mars Hill; he comes from his last stop at El Dorado High School in Arkansas. He has coached for 30+ years so far, with stops in Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Alabama. He has won over 150 games in his career, which includes 20 years as a head coach. He then talked about how he sent a resume in 2019, Coach Higgins kept the resume since then, and when he stepped down, he turned the resume into Mars Hill as a potential candidate. Coach Hill then talked about how he had talked with Coach Higgins. Then a few days later, Principal Dexter Rutherford called Coach Hill and asked what he thought. Coach Hill came to Mars Hill to visit, and the rest is history. Coach Hill had also been to Mars Hill in the past to recruit players when he was at Harding University in Arkansas, and they signed Joseph Hanson (2018 1st Team All-State Defensive Back).

The reclassification means Mars Hill will play nearly an entirely different schedule. The non-region has some familiar faces with Madison Academy, Russellville, and Deshler. They will also play Baldwyn, Mississippi in the non-region. The region consists of Coosa Christian, Decatur Heritage, Lindsay Lane, Shoals Christian, Westbrook Christian, and Whitesburg Christian. Mars Hill has only played the following once and all in playoff games: Decatur Heritage, Westbrook Christian, and Whitesburg Christian. They have never played Coosa Christian or Lindsay Lane. Lindsay Lane is entering year one of a varsity program. They have not played Shoals Christian since 2019. The players are not thinking too much of the Russellville game and getting to play against their former head coach.

While he is not from here directly, he understands the mission stays the same. He talked to some of the assistants about the split of the private and public schools. He noted how they had played private schools in state championship games the last two seasons. “Football is football.

We have to win our last few games,” he added. He noted how he does not know enough about how people feel about the split. He also said, “All I know is we are going to line up on Friday night, and whoever is in front of us, we are going to do our best to beat them.”

Coach Hill was hired back in February, so he has been around the program and school for a while. “It’s a special place. Everybody pulls for everybody.” He noted how they did not do spring training because they had so many guys in other spring sports making playoff runs, whether it was soccer, track, baseball, etc. “Whatever sport is in season is the most important one.” He has had to get used to the parents being so involved and talked about how he did not have that kind of help in Arkansas but has it now. Coach Hill joked, “Work them like dogs and treat them like Kings.”

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Shoals Sports Report