

THE INDEX-JOURNAL

Sports

Clowney Resigns: Emerald Coach Accepts Assistant Head Coach Job At Carson-Newman

By KEVIN FIORENZO/kfiorenzo@indexjournal.com

Published: Saturday, February 7, 2009 12:10 AM EST



During his time as Emerald High School's football coach and athletic director, Mike Clowney has rebuffed many offers from Carson-Newman College football coach Ken Sparks to return to the Eagles. This week, Clowney finally answered in the affirmative.

Clowney, who just finished his third year with the Vikings' program, resigned Friday to take an assistant head coaching position at his alma mater Carson-Newman, where he played football for four seasons and also coached for four years in the same position he accepted Friday. Having roots with Carson-Newman was ultimately the

deciding factor for Clowney. "The biggest thing is being able to go back over to Carson-Newman," Clowney said. "(Sparks) had called me several times, and every time I had said no. We were taking a kid on a visit and sat and talked about it, and I still said no.

"The only time it came up back in December was when (Sparks) mentioned they might be looking for somebody. Then it later became a point where they were really looking for coaches."

Emerald coach Mike Clowney resigned Friday to accept the assistant head coach position at Carson-Newman. (Staff file photo by T.M. James.)

Clowney, a 1993 graduate of Union, was a first-team Division II All-American linebacker at Carson-Newman in 1996 and remained as a graduate assistant

from 1996-99. He returned to Carson-Newman in 2003 to serve as linebackers coach and assistant head coach before arriving at Emerald in 2006.

The tradition at Carson-Newman, where Sparks has coached for 29 seasons, was a deciding factor for Clowney.

"One of the other things that got my wheels turning was they had an article in Sports Illustrated a few weeks ago about coach Sparks, and the tradition they had there," Clowney said. "Being at one place and having that type of longevity, it kind of spoke a lot about the program they have there."

Clowney's decision was met with surprise, but well wishes from Emerald's administration. "No doubt about it I was surprised," Emerald principal Les Gamble said. "We were looking forward to next year. He shared with me, and I agree, that he needed to do what's best for him. "He's definitely going to be missed and is a person of good character."

Emerald senior running back Dee Parks expressed disappointment with Clowney's decision, a sentiment he said was shared by a number of the other Vikings football players. "To be honest, I felt like he promised a lot of things," Parks said. "He didn't tell anybody he was leaving. He just up and did it. That was cold. "He could've at least told us he was thinking about leaving. He just left. It was real messed up."

Greenwood School District 50 assistant superintendent for human resources Randy Vaughn and Clowney said a decision would likely be made Monday on when Clowney will officially step down, but Clowney did say he does not anticipate staying for the remainder of the school year. "Right now, we haven't come to a conclusion, but it will probably happen pretty fast," Clowney said. "I felt like at this point and time it was fair to everyone involved to start searching. "Now is the time to start doing it to make sure Emerald can do it right."

The Vikings reached the Class AA Upper State finals the season before Clowney arrived, but during his three-year tenure, Emerald compiled a disappointing 10-21 record with just one playoff appearance; the Vikings fell to Southside, 74-37, in the first round of the Class AA playoffs this past season.

Gamble said Clowney's influence on the Vikings' athletic department extended beyond wins and losses. "He was big in the (Fellowship of Christian Athletes) and developing character in the players," he said. "Emerald's a comprehensive school, and football's just a part of it. As far as I'm concerned, it's more than just about football. Overall, I think he's done a

good job as our AD.” Added Vaughn, “We don’t judge on wins and losses. Mike has done the things we asked of him as far as running the program. We’re very happy with the job Mike has done. “This is a different opportunity for him, and we support him.”

Following his time as a graduate assistant at Carson-Newman, Clowney spent five seasons as an assistant coach at Greenwood under Shell Dula, his coach at Union, and helped lead the Eagles to Class AAAA state titles in 1999 and 2000. He then returned to Carson-Newman for three years before arriving at Emerald.

Clowney will most of all miss the relationships he developed during his time at Emerald. “It’s been a blast,” Clowney said. “We had a great group of coaches here, and I’ve had to kind of scramble to tell them. I’ve got a lot of memories with the coaches, like us working together and getting together on Saturday and taking our team to a Christian rock concert this past season. “The kids have been one of the biggest things I’ve enjoyed. We didn’t have any problems or anything with kids getting in trouble at school. We were able to teach them the things that are really important in life. “There were kids that people told me they’re not going to make it through high school and now they’re in college. That probably sticks out more than anything.”