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Sports

Many Shocked By Clowney's Resignation

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Former Emerald High School athletic director and football coach Mike Clowney spent a lot of time thinking about moving on to an assistant coaching position at Carson-Newman College before ultimately resigning Friday, but his decision was met with surprise from those in the Emerald community. Based on comments from players and coaches, the only people made aware Friday of Clowney's decision were the school's administration, the administration at Greenwood School District 50 and the Vikings football team's assistant coaches.

Emerald girls basketball coach and assistant athletic director Anarie Duckett was coaching the Vikings at Liberty on Friday and was caught off guard by Clowney's departure. "I'm shocked. I had no idea (he was leaving)," Duckett said. "I felt like he had done a good job. He hadn't won a lot of games, but he had to deal with a lot of injuries. He helped all the young men who were under his tutelage. "I'm just in shock right now."

That sentiment was shared by football players who took the field for Clowney during the fall. "That's completely out of the blue. I didn't even know he was thinking about that," Emerald quarterback Zane Newton said. "Coach Clowney is definitely someone who was good for our program. We have had more success in the past, but he was definitely a morally upstanding person. "He didn't put up with any bad behavior from the players. He gets you ready for real life."

Clowney arrived at Emerald in 2006 from Carson-Newman, where he spent three years in the same role he will be resuming. He also played linebacker at Carson-Newman from 1993-96. During Clowney's three years with the Vikings, Emerald was 10-21 and reached the playoffs just once, falling in the first round of the Class AA playoffs this past season to Southside, 74-37.

Prior to his All-American collegiate career at Carson-Newman, Clowney played football at Union, where he was coached by former Greenwood coach Shell Dula. Clowney coached on Dula's staff at Greenwood from 1999-2003 and helped lead the Eagles to Class AAAA state titles in 1999 and 2000. "I think a great deal of Mike and his coaching ability," Dula said. "I know he enjoyed Carson-Newman as a student-athlete and then when he went back there to coach. It's always been in his life and evidently they made him a good offer."

Watching Clowney as a player and as a coach was a unique situation for Dula. "Mike was very special to Mary (Dula's wife) and me. We love him very much, and we saw him grow up," Dula said. "He was a great player at Union, did some outstanding things, and he's a great football coach. "He had done a lot of great things at Emerald as far as getting them into the playoffs this season. I just can't say enough good things about him."

After informing Emerald principal Les Gamble and District 50 superintendent Darrell Johnson of his decision Friday, Clowney met with his assistant coaches, mostly on an individual basis. "I really didn't have much of a reaction. I was happy for him in the fact that he made the decision for himself," said Vikings offensive coordinator Sentell Peake, who arrived at Emerald in 2007 from Greenwood. "We're both from Union, and I felt like I know he would do whatever was best for him. "It was a surprise, but I'm not really surprised about anything in football."

Emerald offensive line coach Ben Adams, who played for Clowney at Greenwood, said Clowney did a good job keeping the Vikings upbeat despite setbacks on the field. "It was like being a quarterback -- you've got to have a short memory," Adams said. "You can't pout about an interception. You have to work and get after it. He really coached them to be good individuals on and off the field."