

VIKING VETERANS: Duckett, Scott Offer 30 Years Of Experience

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Emerald High School athletic director Mike Clowney jokes about Anarie Duckett and Robin Scott's long tenure as Viking coaches, but the sentiment rings true. "One of the things, it's like I tell people, they come with the building," Clowney quipped. "Both of them have been here since the building's been here."

Duckett and Scott are more than coaches at Emerald; they've become institutions at the Class AA school often overshadowed by Greenwood's bigger public school.

But the coaches' accomplishments and tenure frequently have been in the spotlight, especially since both mentors wield a hefty amount of success. Scott has coached the varsity boys basketball team all but two years of the school's history, while Duckett is the first and only varsity girls basketball coach at Emerald.

Their coaching resumes include more than hoops. Duckett, in her 35th year in education, is a two-time state championship coach in girls tennis, plus guided the Vikings' volleyball and softball programs. Prior to Emerald becoming a high school, Duckett was Greenwood's softball coach. She's even been the girls soccer coach for two games and an assistant principal for two years.

Scott, like Duckett, also has an extensive coaching career. Along with his job as boys basketball coach, Scott, who is in his 30th year as a teacher and coach, has coached football, cross country, baseball and golf. Scott started Emerald's girls golf team.

Today, the two coaches boast 65 years of combined experience in the classroom, but many years ago they were young teachers fresh from college, learning to survive as educators. When Duckett, a Greenwood native, first began attending classes at Erskine College in Due West, the teaching profession was crossed off the list of future vocations. Her mother and grandmother were teachers, and Duckett had no interest in following those footprints. But as college wound down, Duckett found herself applying to become a physical education teacher and not finding work.

She went back to school and studied physics, landing as a science teacher at then-Emerald Junior High School. "(My first job) was pretty overwhelming," Duckett said. "I was outside of my area. I hadn't had earth science since I was in the eighth grade. I was teaching eighth-graders, and it was a hard level (to teach). I had no idea."

Scott, who graduated from Lander, student-taught at East End Elementary before landing a job as a chorus teacher at Emerald Junior High School. Today, Scott's chorus room is spacious and tucked away near the Vikings' gymnasium. Thirty years ago, however, he was relegated to a portable that lacked lines of communication. "When I got the job, half of my seventh-graders knew me (from his student-teaching job), but it was still scary," Scott said. "I was in a portable room at the old school across town. We couldn't hear the bell. We'd look and see people moving around and knew the bell had rung. A lot has changed since then."

The biggest change came in 1994, when the population grew enough that a second high school was needed in Greenwood. Once a feeder school to Class AAAA powerhouse Greenwood, Emerald began its own identity as a high school, and Duckett and Scott were on the scene as first-time high school teachers. Looking back on the switch to an older group of students, Duckett can only laugh about her feelings when she began dealing with high schoolers. "To me, it was like I died and went to heaven," Duckett said. "I don't know how I worked with junior high kids as long as I did."

Scott agreed. "I didn't think junior high was easy," Scott said. "I didn't think it was difficult to do. But when we switched over, if I had realized high school was going to be easier, I would have done it years ago. I would have at least thought about it, at least." While the ages changed by only a few years, Scott said the job was much different. "In junior high, you have a million problems, but they're all small," he said. "In high school, you have very few problems, but when you have them, they're a pretty good size."

When Scott's boys were students at Northside Middle School, he said he often saw reminders of his previous tenure as a junior high teacher. "I'd pull up, and it would be like a circus out front," Scott said, a broad smile on his face. "I'd think, 'Man, I did that for 15 years.'"

Since Emerald became a high school, the memories and highlights have been plentiful. Scott's boys basketball team played in the 2000-01 boys basketball state title game against Calhoun County, but it was the Upper State championship game against rival Abbeville at Lander that elicits the most satisfying memories. "The most fun was when we beat Abbeville in the Upper State championship," said Scott, recalling a game the Vikings won 68-65. "There must have been 2,500 people. It was packed. It was us and Abbeville. It wasn't us and somebody else down the road. "It was a close game the whole way. It was a lot more fun for us than them."

Duckett, meanwhile, conjures up visions of the Vikings' first region championship, which involved a narrow victory over Ninety Six. "We beat Ninety Six in a tie-breaker game," Duckett said. "Toni Leopard was playing at Ninety Six. I remember Gary Gillion was my assistant coach at the time, and after the game, he just grabbed me in a big, old bear hug. "I looked at the scorebook, and I said, 'Man, Toni had 32 points,' and he said, 'But she needed two more.'"

There have been other recollections, of course. In 1998, Emerald captured the Class AA state championship in football, bringing home a first-place trophy in a town still enveloped

by Greenwood fans. "It was not expected," said Duckett, who is the team's statistician, "but it was a great experience to have. They were third in the region and had to play every game on the road. We didn't have a stadium anyway."

Duckett also has the privilege of being the first Emerald coach to guide a Vikings team to a state championship. In 1994, Emerald topped perennial powerhouse Bishop England 4-2 in the Class AA girls tennis state finals. The Vikings, loaded mostly with freshmen, were a surprise winner that year, too. "It was really funny. I met with those kids in this room," Duckett said while sitting in Scott's chorus classroom. "The majority of them were ninth-graders. But they had played at Greenwood High School, so they knew how to play the game. I told them they had the potential to win the state championship, but I didn't think they were quite ready. "I guess they did it to prove me wrong."

With a combined 65 years of experience teaching and coaching, Scott and Duckett now work under temporary contracts since they're both officially retired. But both continue to work, preaching the virtues of good defense during basketball games or keeping a watchful eye on students in classes.

Despite 30 years in coaching, Scott still coaches three sports, handling the girls and boys golf programs, as well as basketball. "It's hard to find guys willing to give up that much time," Clowney said. "To be away from home, I know that's tough even though most of his kids are older. To be here and coach three sports, that's three people you've got to look for (to coach)."

Clowney said his first realization of Scott's all-encompassing responsibilities at the school came during his first basketball game. "He's the basketball coach, and he cranks up the chorus before the game," Clowney said.

Duckett, meanwhile, coaches just basketball but she had her tenure of coaching three sports at one time. When she isn't coaching basketball, Duckett can be found at nearly every Emerald event, whether it's a tennis match in Columbia or a chorus concert at the school. "Coach Duckett is a fan of the program," Clowney said. "She's a fan of Emerald High School. ... Coach Duckett is always here supporting kids."

Duckett and Scott's level of dedication hasn't changed, but some of basketball's intricacies have. When asked of the biggest changes in basketball in 35 years of coaching, Duckett quickly jokes about the addition of the 3-point line. "They're always making little rule changes," Scott said. "The officials allow players to get away with more. Walking is rampant and inconsistent. And that's not the officials' fault. I think that's the way people want it to be."

Despite some of the changes, Duckett said she often mentally revisits her time as a junior high basketball coach and pulls ideas from those days. "We do some of the same things we did at the junior high," she said. "We run some of the same offenses, some of the same inbound plays. ... The game itself hasn't really changed. It's just added little things and little adjustments."

One thing that hasn't changed is the coaches' commitment to children. "I just love working with the kids and watching them develop as players," Duckett said. "Last year's team is a perfect example. I told somebody we'd be lucky to win four region games, and we put ourselves in position to win a region championship. I didn't think they'd develop as well as they did. "That's the fun part. Coaching in a game like we had against Saluda (earlier this week). We shouldn't have won it; we stole it. But we did things they didn't think they could

do.”

And when the games are over, the final buzzer sounds and the score dictates who will celebrate and who will sulk, Scott said it’s not always how you win a basketball game that matters.

There are no summaries in the record books. The numbers, the facts tell the story. “You’re not going to remember how it gets done, you’re going to remember how you did it,” Scott said. “Years from now, when we beat that team you shouldn’t have beaten, you’re not going to remember that you dribbled behind your back or hit a 3-point shot. You’re just going to remember that you won the game. “Duckett is like me; we’re real competitive about things. When you get beyond the point of where you can play anymore, what else can you do?”

Students and players at Emerald’s two existences have learned the answer to that question for quite some time.