

College Basketball: Schutz Steps Down, Sells Steps Up

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NWAC Women's Playoff Basketball: Centralia vs. Bellevue

Images from the NWAC Women's Playoff Basketball game between Centralia College and Bellevue CC at Everett on Friday.

Caleb Sells is moving up — even if, in the literal sense, he's only moving one spot over on the bench.

Sells, an assistant coach with Centralia College's women's basketball team for the past six years, has moved up to the head coaching spot with the departure of coach Shane Schutz.

"He really likes to go out and pick up anything he can," CC athletic director Bob Peters said. "He's ready. You never know if you're ready until the lights go on and you're there, but he's been mentored by good people, and I think that makes a difference."

Sells, who will celebrate his 31st birthday on Wednesday, is a 2003 Adna High School graduate. He played two years of baseball at Centralia College for coach Bruce Pocklington, and finished his education at Washington State University. While at WSU he assisted Pullman High School girls basketball coach Phil Morgan for two seasons.

He's currently a fourth-grade math and social studies teacher in the Rochester School District.

"When we originally started this process, that was my number-one goal before I stepped down. I wanted him to have an opportunity," Schutz said. "He's got a brilliant young mind. He's an enthusiastic, great teacher of the game."

He had been on Schutz's staff since the start of his six-year run in blue and gold.

"It's something we've talked about for a while," Sells said. "Shane was going to coach as long as he wanted to coach, but kind of the cool thing was the last three or four years, he's almost put as much effort into developing me as a coach as he has developing his players. He's really been looking out for me."

The Lady Blazer post will be Sells' first head coaching gig, outside of coaching middle school ball in Adna.

"You kind of play it out in your mind, thinking what's it going to be like, and it hasn't hit me yet," Sells said. "But right now it's still busy, trying to finalize our recruiting class for next year, game schedules, and all the other things that go into it, other than the Xs and Os — right now it's kind of business as usual, just working, trying to keep this thing going."

The recruiting end of things, he added, is going well. News of the coaching change had no effect on the commitments the Blazers had in hand, which include a pair of six-footers slated to sign on April 1, the opening of the signing period.

"We were a little undersized this year," he said. "That definitely won't be the case next year." Sells has also added the first member of his coaching staff, bringing in Kyahri Adams, who starred at River Ridge and played two years for the Lady Blazers.

"She's already a great recruiter," he added.

The on-court product, however, won't be much different next year.

"As far as the Xs and Os, I'd say 90 percent isn't going to change," Sells said. "The reason we got along so well, from Day 1, is we shared a lot of the same philosophies. Not a lot is going to change in that regard. Practices are still going to be intense; it's a fun way to play, and a fun way to coach."

"When you're playing with emotion, that's when some of the best results happen." Schutz coached the Lady Blazers for six seasons, which featured five trips to the NWAC

Championships tournament and three NWAC West Region titles.

Schutz said he made the decision about a month prior to the end of the Blazers' 2015-16 campaign. Centralia caught fire in the second half of the season, despite a roster featuring just seven players, and went 13-1 (24-9 overall) to share the West Region title with Lower Columbia.

The Lady Blazers went 1-1 in the first two rounds of the NWACs and were scheduled to play for fourth place. Following their consolation win over Bellevue, however, five of the team's players were found to be in violation of the NWAC's student-athlete code and ruled ineligible for the trophy-round game, resulting in a forfeit and a fourth-place finish for Spokane.

"The unfortunate part of it is it looks like, after the results of what happened, that's why I'm leaving," Schutz said, "but that's so far from the truth."

Peters, too, pointed out that the Schutz's decision predated the end of the Blazers' season.

"It wasn't all accumulated on what happened at the end of the year," Peters said. "This was something he's thought thoroughly about."

Schutz, who is also the athletic director at Napavine High School, said missing his own kids' activities — he has two daughters, Avery, 9, and Alexis, 6, and a son, Cameron, 2 — played a big role in the decision.

"I was missing about 80 percent of her (Avery's) games, and I just said, 'What am I doing?'" Schutz said. "It's just stuff that, priorities in your life, that you have to reevaluate and see what's important."

Prior to taking the Centralia post, Schutz coached Napavine's girls basketball team for 11 years, taking nine teams to the state tournament, winning seven trophies and finishing second twice. His father, Dan, coached the CC women's team prior to Gary Viggers — who preceded Shane — and Schutz played point guard for the Blazer men's team for two years.

"I loved it there," Schutz said. "It's not obviously how we wanted to end this year, but even then, the kids, and everybody was so helpful. ... Everybody was fully involved. It was a fun group of people to work with."

Schutz also didn't necessarily rule out coaching again in the future, though he's not in any hurry to get back to the sidelines.

"Will I ever coach again? I hope not. I hope I can just be a dad, and just be there and support and take on a different role," he said. "But at the same time I definitely don't want to see the programs fail, so I'm sure I'll have my hand in the mix somehow, somewhere."

"But I'm really enjoying the administrative role and piece that I'm doing, so as of right now?
No. But you can never say never."