

# Jersey welcomes Ric Johns as new football coach

by John Hough, Sports Writer  
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JERSEYVILLE - After six weeks of searching the Jersey Panthers football program has found their new leader.

That man is none other than the longtime, successful Ric Johns.

“I’m really excited to have been given the opportunity to coach Jersey. It feels pretty good at this point in my career,” Johns said. “I want to establish what I do, and I want the kids to have success.”

Earlier this month he resigned from Wesclin coming off a 9-1 year, that saw the Warriors go undefeated in the regular season and earn a 1-seed in the Class 3A playoffs.

Johns has been in the business of coaching for 28 years and owns an overall record of 187-110.

Jersey is his fifth head coaching position. He spent 15 glorious years at Calhoun eventually taking the head job at Carlinville for four seasons. In the next seven years, he was an assistant at Triad then four more years in his hometown at Belleville West and is coming off five seasons at Wesclin.

Six weeks ago, Jon Adkins accepted the head coaching position at Cape Coral High School in Southwest Florida. He left after two seasons at the helm for the Panthers.

Johns approached Jersey Athletic Director, Scott Tonson about the job, which left Tonson thrilled.

“When he talked us about the job it was really exciting. He talked about what the job was entailing and where it was at,” Tonson said. “I’ve known Ric for 24 years and got to coach with and against him. Being here in Jersey, too, we’ve watched him at all of his stops. He’s a program builder.”

Johns has been in the Riverbender area before.

Hardin is where he put himself on the map. His reign as the head coach of the Calhoun Warriors is the program’s golden age.

Johns established a winning culture with a record of 131-43. During that time the Warriors enjoyed 13-straight winning seasons, and seven of them had over ten victories. Johns’ most significant achievements included a Class 1A state runner-up finish in 1987. Six years later, he guided Calhoun to two straight state championships in 1992 and 1993. The only other 1A school to claim state in consecutive years was Carthage through 1998-to-2000.

His time in Hardin has provided lasting friendships and unforgettable memories for him and the community.

“It was a magical time for myself, my family and Calhoun. The highlight of my coaching career thus far,” Johns on his time coaching the Warriors. “Everybody that was associated with that football program was a magical time. I’ll never forget and always appreciate it.”

“I still have a lot of friends and make it over there now and then. It’s such a great place and will always cherish my time there.”

Tonson knows about Johns’ legacy at Calhoun and what he means to the community.

“A lot of my friends from Calhoun played for Ric. Those guys all have great things to say about him, and of course, he’s one of the top influential people in my coaching career, so he’s always been great with me. I think he’s going to bring that personality to our kids and our staff, and they’re going to gravitate to him.”

After making the playoffs in 2014, the Panthers have since been in a lull the past three seasons with a combined record of 7-20 going 1-8, 2-7 and 4-5. Like any coach, Johns will have his hands full, but he’s a veteran when it comes to turning programs around.

In 2007 when he took over Belleville West, they were 6-21 in the past three seasons, and Johns left in 2010 with a 23-17 record. When he joined Wesclin in 2013, the previous they went 0-9, and four seasons later they had an undefeated regular season.

“Ric’s got a great personality. If you’ve ever been around him long, he’s got a great sense of humor. The kids seem to gravitate towards him,” Tonson said.

Getting the players genuinely interested and believing again is a trait that Johns has worked wonders within the past and Jersey may very well have the right man for the job. After all, he has a passion for coaching and teaching not only football but the life lessons that come with the sport.

“You have to rely on your friends and people around you. I love working with young men. One of my jobs is always to see if I can get them to come together to a place where the sum is greater than the parts,” Johns said.

“I think entwined with football. If you go about it right, there’s always life lessons involved. The reality of the situation is for any young man at any program that doesn’t enter the military; football will be the most difficult organized activity you’ll ever belong to, it’s a tough deal.”