

## Peters' impact felt at NHS

By Scott Moore

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— Butch Peters did not want it to happen. He was against anyone making such a big deal about his career at Norman High.

“That’s just the way I am. I’m not one of those guys that like the spotlight,” Peters said.

But as players, coaches, teachers and friends came by to shake his hand at a reception honoring him Wednesday at the NHS Commons, he wasn’t regretting the fact he was, indeed, in the spotlight one more time.

“I’m enjoying it,” he said.

The Commons was full of people who showed up to show their gratitude for a man that taught and coached football at NHS for 35 years.

Peters’ retirement will be effective as soon as school ends May 23. Peters was an assistant coach for 23 years, then the head coach the final 12. He announced his retirement April 3.

“It’s been a great run and a great ride,” he said. “I’m going to miss Norman High. I’m going to miss wearing the orange and black.”

He had been there so long it didn’t seem leaving was possible, even though he certainly could at any time. When he announced his retirement, it took many by surprise.

“I was kind of shocked,” NHS athletics coordinator Lucious Selmon, III said. “He called a staff meeting and told all of us. He’s kind of like a leader and now he’s going to step down. It was an emotional time.”

Some flew in from out of state just to be there Tuesday. All the people he’s made connections with over the years is worth more than any district championship, Peters said.

“Seeing all these kids and coaches come back, it’s pretty emotional,” he said. “It meant enough to them to take time out of their lives to come here today. It’s an incredible feeling. It means lot.”

Peters meant enough to John Jewell that he wanted his son, Jack, to move from Nebraska to Norman just to play for Peters. John was an offensive tackle in the early 1980s when Peters was the offensive line coach. He retired from the Air Force last year and wanted to move back to Norman. He contacted Peters about his son transferring to NHS.

John wasn’t sure if Peters remembered who he was. But Peters did and even remembered what position he played.

“That impressed me,” John said. “He pretty much remembers most of his players, if not all of them. He’s a great man. He did more than just coach football.”

Jack started at defensive end last season and will be a senior next year.

“I wish he could coach me for my last year,” Jack said. “I’ve improved a lot and he taught me how to be tough. He’s just a great guy. I think he’s helped make me a better man.”

The connections between Peters and members of the community seem endless. Norman Public Schools athletic director Frank Thompson’s brother, Cotton, played for the Tigers when Peters was an assistant coach in the mid-70s. Thompson’s other brother, Toby, was a team manager.

“It’s almost unheard of for a coach to stay in a system for that long,” Thompson said. “He has the respect of not only the school and the administration, but also the community. It was an enjoyable time to get to work with him.”

The search to find Peters’ replacement could end as soon as Monday. In fact, Peters said that a decision will be made on that day.

“The search is done,” Peters said.

But Thompson said it might not be that soon.

“It’s a possibility,” Thompson said. “We’re getting close to naming a coach. We’re still a little ways away. We’re not going to go into a meeting and make a decision just to meet a deadline.”

The search committee consists of Thompson, Selmon, NHS principal Dr. Lynne Chesley, director of secondary education Roger Brown, NPS superintendent Dr. Joseph Siano and assistant superintendent Pat Nolen. Selmon said the bottom line is picking someone who is the right fit for NHS.

“Trying to replace a man like coach Peters is very difficult,” Selmon said. “You don’t want to rush into it. You want to

get the right guy or else your setting someone up for failure.”

Whoever is named, it will be odd for all involved to see someone other than Peters roaming the sidelines. The next coach will have some huge shoes to fill.

Speaking of shoes, Peters joked that he has enough of them to last another 20 years.

“In my closet I have 35 coaches shirts,” he joked.

Later on, he added: “I also have a lot of memories.”

Scott Moore

366-3535

sports@normantranscript.com

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## Photos



Former Norman High football coach Butch Peters talks with former player, and current OU running back, Mossis Madu, following his retirement reception Wednesday, May 14, 2008. Transcript Photo by Kevin Ellis The Norman Transcript