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Prep Zone: Hall of Famer rejoins Vikings



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Rob Wicinski had a lot to digest about Geneva football upon taking over the program in 1999.

One truth that did not take long to grasp: Jerry Auchstetter's central place in Vikings lore.

"I knew there was a tradition here, and I knew coach Auchstetter was in the middle of it," Wicinski said. "From Day 1, I contacted him."

While the conversations over the years mostly have been casual – "friends' dialogue," Wicinski said – the possibility of the Geneva Hall of Famer joining Wicinski's coaching staff crossed both men's minds.

At long last, it's happened. On Friday, Auchstetter, 71, will make his return to the Vikings' sideline as part of the Geneva coaching staff for the team's opener at Dundee-Crown.

From the sound of it, Auchstetter will be battling all the butterflies of a 16-year-old varsity newcomer.

"I won't know until that happens, but I have a feeling there's going to be some excitement involved," Auchstetter said Wednesday. "I'm going to probably light up a little bit and be pretty excited to be out there with this team."

Auchstetter went 142-35-1 coaching Geneva from 1967-85, including three 11-win seasons. Auchstetter returned to take over for injured Geneva coach Larry Davis after the first two games of the 1992 season, and stayed on for the 1993 season before stepping away a second time.

Since then, Auchstetter has been inclined to rekindle his coaching career, but circumstances – namely his work for a building company and his son, Steve's, own budding coaching career at Kaneland – meant the timing wasn't right.

Now those obstacles are gone, and despite the nagging after-effects of a knee replacement, he is delighted to be back.

"I'm just honored to be a part of it now in the small role that I'm playing," Auchstetter said. "At least I'm involved. I'm not going to be a difference-maker. Whether I'm there or not, they're going to have a good season. The little part I'm playing now, it's just fun for me."

Wicinski calls Auchstetter a "quality control coach," saying he works in a wide-ranging role that will include emphasis on the offensive line. Perhaps best of all, Wicinski said, Auchstetter provides "a shoulder to cry on" and fully understands the challenges of leading a program.

The time that has elapsed since he last coached has not eroded Auchstetter's ability to connect with kids, Wicinski said.

"Coaching's coaching and charisma's charisma," Wicinski said.

Auchstetter said today's kids remind him of the ones he used to coach, two of whom – Jeff Ainsworth and Kevin Bell – are current assistants in the program. The game, too, has not changed much – except for more extensive summer programs and, in Geneva's case, a much larger roster.

“Everybody says the game passes you by and there are parts of the game that have probably passed me by, but there are some things in the game of football that will never change,” Auchstetter said. “The basic fundamentals of blocking and tackling ... I don’t really see much change, to tell you the truth. I think coach is doing a lot of the same things I did.”

The 21st century Auchstetter era is open-ended. He’s taking things one year at a time – spoken like a true coach.

“I haven’t forgotten how to say that,” Auchstetter said.

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COMMENTS

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