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Kidwell helped lay Chieftains foundation

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For the second year in a row, the Hopewell-Loudon football team is making a trip to Stark County for the Division VI state championship. And for the fourth time in five years, the Chieftains went 10-0 in the regular season and won a Midland Athletic League title.

Brian Colatruglio has coached the Chieftains in that five-year span, but he stands on the shoulders of his predecessor -- current Ross coach Derek Kidwell.

Kidwell, in his first head coaching job, turned Hopewell-Loudon -- a relatively recent arrival in the football ranks, fielding a football team for the first time in 1972 -- from a rudderless, moribund program to a winner.

"There was a solid program in place," Colatruglio said of when he took the job in 2004. "I think Derek did a fantastic job changing the attitude."

After a high school career at Fostoria that saw him named Ohio Mr. Football, Kidwell followed his father, Dick, into the coaching ranks. While at college at Bowling Green State University, Kidwell assisted his father at Fostoria and was also an assistant at Lima Senior before getting the job in Bascom in 2000.

Kidwell, at the time only eight years older than his seniors, took over a program that had gone 2-8 the year before. Rick Wonderly, the football coach at St. Joseph Central Catholic at the time, said the Chieftains were long on talent, but couldn't put it together.

There were winners in Bascom -- the volleyball team was on its way to winning the fourth of five straight state titles in the first fall Kidwell was Chieftains coach -- but they weren't on the football team.

"The kids didn't know how to win or have fun," Kidwell said.

Almost immediately, he started to right the ship. Hopewell-Loudon beat SJCC for the first time ever during his first season.

"They always had some talent, and they really started to put it together when Derek Kidwell came on," Wonderly said. "He really showed them how to win."

That year, the Chieftains went 4-6.

The next year, with the help of an offseason weight program instituted by Kidwell, Hopewell went 5-5. In Week 9, they won a tough game against Seneca East, and found themselves going into the season finale against Mohawk with a shot at the playoffs.

"That is when the kids started believing in the program," he said.

After that, the Chieftains went 8-2 in the next two seasons, advancing to the playoffs both times. They went one-and-done in the playoffs, but the seeds were planted.

"Winning and losing is contagious, and once they got the taste of winning, it developed from there," Kidwell said.

Kidwell heard of the opening at Fremont -- which had fallen on hard times -- interviewed for the Ross job and got the position. He described telling the kids at Hopewell-Loudon as one of the toughest days of his life.

"We left a great senior class," he said.

Hopewell-Loudon hired Colatruglio, and he made the most of it. That year, the Chieftains went 10-0, and got their first playoff win in school history.

"That was the only thing that was missing," Colatruglio said.

Since then, Colatruglio has lost one regular-season game. They'll play Delphos St. John on Friday morning at Paul Brown Tiger Stadium.

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ROSS COACH Derek Kidwell came to the Little Giants from Hopewell-Loudon. (News-Messenger file photo)