

## Quiet leader develops into confident coach

### Henninger is described as “kind” and “versatile”

By Lexie Julbert

“Kind” and “dad-like” are words senior **Jessica Kidwell** uses to describe English teacher and head football coach, **Matthew Henninger**.

He played football in high school and was described as “a great example of what Perry football is,” by 2002 undefeated team coach, **Craig Potter**.

“Henninger called the defensive signals. Inside/outside linebacker, backup full back. 3rd string quarterback,” Potter rattled off, continuing a list about Henninger’s versatility. “...made defensive calls in the huddle and on the line. On every kicking team and captain of those teams.”



**Matt Henninger,**  
a senior in 2003

As a little boy, Henninger played soccer and other sports, but his dad signed him up for football in middle school. Henninger said he learned to love the sport, culminating in 2002

when Perry won Conference.

But coaching and teaching weren’t in his game plan at first. His first major was English at Wabash College, then he thought he’d go on to law school. That changed once he started substitute teaching at an elementary school. His major changed to secondary education, and he transferred to IUPUI. He soon de-

cidated that high school coaching would be enjoyable, too.

Students’ descriptions of Henninger in the classroom sound like they would fit him on the football field as well. “Henninger is a good teacher and wants his class to stay on task,” said sophomore **Sylvan Kenney**. “He *rushes* people to do what they need to do.”

Fellow sophomores **Tysin Green** and **Bethany Johnson** said their teacher is “outgoing and smart.” He keeps a brisk *pace* but still explains material, Johnson said.

Henninger sees a close connection between teaching and coaching, but they’re not identical.

“Coaching is much more intellectually challenging,” he said. “As a player I loved the physicality of it, and as a coach, I love the mental part of the game.”

In his classroom, Henninger enjoys teaching the finer points of writing.

Most of the coaching staff goes way back to their own high school football friendships.

“Henninger’s class was rambunctious, active and intense,” said Steve Wade, who coached Henninger and coached Perry football for 30 years. “We wouldn’t let them in the locker room for more than a minute because they would wear themselves out before the game.”

Perry Meridian alumni include math teacher **Paul Toler**, special education teacher **Mike Feigel**, Austin Larsh, Nick Henninger, the head coach’s brother and

Joe Steward, the MVP quarterback of their all-star game.

That provides a level of trust and loyalty to Perry, rare to high school teams.

Henninger calls it “camaraderie closeness,” explaining how it is one of the best parts of his coaching experience.

But it’s not what he said is most important. Students’ first impressions of Henninger might include how blunt, brisk and bold he is.

Yet when talking about his players, the 32-year-old doesn’t mention the importance of teaching them complicated plays or fancy footwork.

“Loving the kids is the most important,” Henninger said.

“To say I’m not excited would not be true. To say I’m not nervous would not be true,” he said.

Nonetheless, he expects coaches and players to step up and embrace the fans’ support.

“I do not think they will cover in the moment. When the lights come on, they’ll be ready to go.”



Freshman **Bella Sandefer** is PM’s new Falcon mascot. Her costume is 15 pounds and she wears an ice vest on hot game days (Photo by Alexis Lee).

## PM in history books for first IHSAA overtime

By Allie Wooton

A new stadium isn’t the only first for Perry’s football team or the community.

In 1973, Southport High School split into two separate schools. Thus, Perry Meridian was born.

Perry Meridian.

The new school would only have freshmen, sophomores and juniors because the seniors stayed at Southport to graduate.

The year also marked the first year

the IHSAA, Indiana High School Athletic Association, allowed overtime in high school football.

In fact, PMHS played the first IHSAA recorded football game with overtime in Indiana history. The game took place on Sept. 1, 1973.

PMHS played Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School at Southport stadium as a home game.

Instead of a normal Friday night under the lights, the game was on a Satur-

day night.

Due to having a team full of underclassmen, fans expected to have a rough year. Despite this, Perry overpowered.

Perry won the game 13-10 in overtime.

Gym teacher, **Mike Armstrong**, an eighth grader at the time said, “everyone was really excited... it was a big first.”

The 2017 football season will mark the 44th year the team has been playing with the over-time rule.