

Former coach puts academics first 'Help someone else because they helped you'

By Adam Crozier

Retired English department head **Craig Potter** coached football in parts of three different decades: 1970s, 1990s and 2000s. He demanded excellence from his players, his students and himself.

He is known across the state of Indiana for being a great offensive line coach, according to current head football coach **Matthew Henninger**.

Potter played Division One football at Western Kentucky University in the Mid-American Conference. He graduated WKU and taught a year in Franklin, Tennessee.

He was hired at Perry Meridian as an English teacher and assistant football coach. Potter came here in 1973, the first year of PMHS.

To be a head football coach, Potter took a job at Greenfield Central High School for six years. Then Perry hired him back, this time as head football coach for ten years.

It took a bit of effort to build the program.

Potter describes the nature of his first two years back: "Terrible. Nightmarish. Suicidal (not really, kind of)." The season records were 3-7 and 2-8. But the third year was a winning one: 9-3.

After so-so seasons brightened by several wins over Southport, Potter's 2002 team went undefeated, the first in the school's history to do so.

During each interval of coaching, Potter said Perry athletes impressed him. "They play like they give a damn — way down deep, they play hard."

He's encouraged that Perry is switching to a new conference, which means Falcons will play more nearby, similar high schools. This will attract larger crowds. Before, the team played "lots of games they couldn't win," Potter said.

He's excited for the stadium too. "It will give the school more of an identity and strengthen football as long as school choice is a factor," Potter explained. "If you were an athlete and could choose to go to Perry or some other place, why would you choose a school without a stadium?"

Potter got in players' faces, he grabbed face masks, said English department head **Jessica Hunter**. He was stern; firm, but fair. He could be like that off the field and in the classroom, said Hunter.

Despite his love of football, Potter is even more devoted to teaching. His devotion meant intensity in the classroom.

Once out of frustration with a noisy senior class, he flipped over his desk. Papers, pencils and photos flew as the items — and the desk — crashed toward the floor. Students quieted and returned their attention to assignments.

"Athletics are important. Not as important as academics. Athletics, as it should be, comes second."

Potter himself exemplified that fact in the 2001-2002 academic year. He was named Perry Meridian's Teacher of the Year and then went on to win Perry Township Teacher of the Year.

He continues his commitment to teaching.

Potter came back from retirement to

remediate Perry students who need help to pass ISTEP or the ECA.

As Hunter explained it, "Craig is a data guru. He is very linear and looks at a picture holistically. He will come in and gather all of the data for both the ISTEP and the ECA. He looks at the juniors who will have to take the ISTEP retake, from that he will look at multiple points of data."

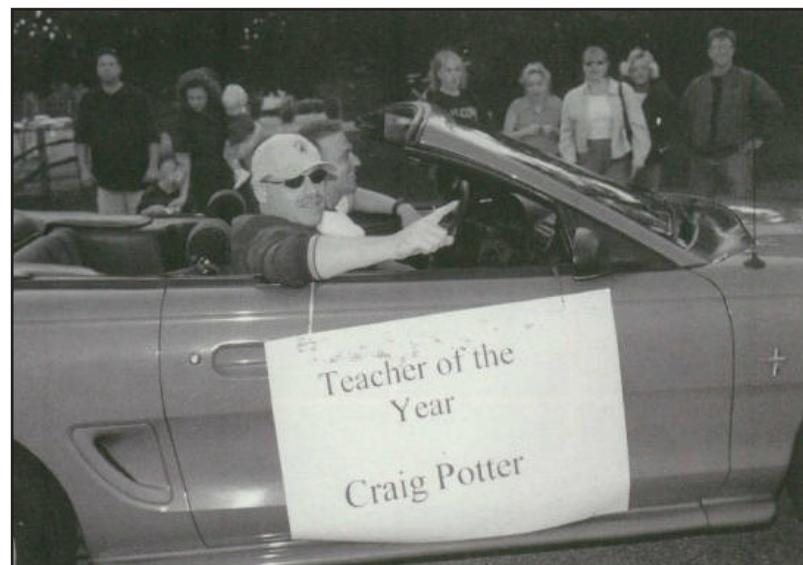
From there he will "Alphabetize the students, push it out to guidance department, math and English heads. The list will be sorted by math ISTEP scores alphabetically as well as highest score to lowest score. He will make an additional list called ISTEP takers on the bubble, just below the passing cut score."

His attention to detail served his lengthy teaching career.

He built a reputation among his colleagues, like he did with his students and his student-athletes. Potter and English teacher **Susie Schoch** taught AP Language Arts together 15 years ago.



Craig Potter



Retired football head coach and English teacher **Craig Potter** rides in a convertible at the homecoming parade (2001-2002) after he was nominated teacher of the year (Photo provided by Passages).

Potter brought the program to Perry, and Schoch still teaches the class.

She said students left his room questioning and thinking. This is a man whom they respected. Comparing Pot-

ter's regular speaking voice to someone using a microphone to project volume, Schoch said: "It's like the voice of God."

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ter's regular speaking voice to someone using a microphone to project volume, Schoch said: "It's like the voice of God."

His baritone voice thunders as he speaks about his passion: education.

The 66-year-old is outraged by the U.S. Secretary of Education's inability or unwillingness to recognize excellence in

public schools. Perry Meridian in particular.

"You have people like Betsy DeVos, who doesn't believe in 'failing' public education.

"I believe in this school," Potter said. "Rich kids. Poor kids. Chin kids. Black kids. PM is what education should be. Everyone gets a fair shake.

"The kids here are nice and respectful. They say please and thank you. They hold the door for you."

Quality educators chose their career path often because they had teachers and coaches who invested and believed in them, he said, and he wants that positive cycle to continue.

"You can't pay it back, but you can pay it forward. Help someone else because they helped you."



Students (from left to right) seniors **Lexie Julbert**, **Danielle Justice**, **Noah McCullough**, **Nolan Rosberg**, junior **Reni Boyarov**, and senior **Jessica Kidwell** rehearse their performance for the national anthem (Photo by Luis Zepeda).

Four part octet performing national anthem

By Luis Zepeda

Senior **Nolan Rosberg** has never been a linebacker, nose guard or quarterback, but tonight he'll be in the spotlight.

"It's a great feeling to know that we can showcase something at the football game that isn't sports-related," he said.

Choir teacher **Melissa Walsh** chose Rosberg and seven other Then and Now members to sing the national anthem at the grand opening of the new Falcon Stadium.

The other students performing are seniors **Lexie Julbert**, **Danielle Justice**, **Jessica Kidwell**, **Noah McCullough**, **Max Sandefer**, **Embrly Vernon** and junior **Reni Boyarov**.

The octet has been practicing every day after school for more than a week.

Then and Now is the most selective of the four choirs and holds the highest expectations for its members who perform complex singing and dancing, Walsh said.

Thirty-four students (17 pairs) are in the singing group.

"I feel very honored just to have this opportunity," said Boyarov, knowing she is the youngest performer of the national anthem octet.

Walsh said she labored for days to make the tough decision.

Walsh singled out students she said knew the song and arrangement the

best.

"It was difficult to narrow down from such a big group," said Walsh. "Everyone was qualified."

The group will perform a four-part arrangement, with two people on each part, contrasting their soprano, alto, tenor and bass voices.

This arrangement has been used before in different occasions such as the veteran's day celebration and the senior graduation.

"I feel like it's something that is going to represent new beginnings for generations of Perry Meridian High School," said Boyarov with a glint of glee in her eye.