

Meagher resigns as Paynesville AD, coach

PHS grad led Bulldogs' football team to four state trips

By Joe Brown
West Central Tribune

PAYNESVILLE — Max Meagher has resigned as activities director at Paynesville.

Meagher, 38, stepped down from all positions in a letter sent to the school board on Wednesday, Nov. 17. Along with being activities director, Meagher was the head football coach, an assistant wrestling coach and dean of students.

In his letter to the school board, Meagher noted that he and the school district were unable to come to an agreement on a new contract.

Meagher's resignation is on the agenda for Tuesday's

Paynesville school board meeting.

"It was an extremely difficult decision," Meagher said by phone on Friday, "but at this time, for myself and my family, it wasn't a good fit any longer."

With Meagher's resignation, Paynesville Secondary School principal David Oehrlein will be the acting activities director for the rest of the 2021-22 season. A posting for the job will be listed sometime at the start of 2022.

"The timing of the resignation does present some challenges," Oehrlein said by e-mail Tuesday regarding the mid-year change. "We are working on a plan to continue to ensure the needs

of the district are met."

Oehrlein added, "We appreciate what Mr. Meagher has done for the students at Paynesville Area Schools as an activities director and coach."

A 2003 Paynesville High School grad, Meagher returned home to become the head football coach in 2009. In 13 seasons as head football coach, the Bulldogs had a record of 88-47 and went to state in 2011, '17, '18 and '19.

In 2010, he became the activities director, replacing Kyle Nehowig.

"It's been the absolute time of my life for me and my family," Meagher said about his tenure at Paynesville. "It's been an incredible ride. In 2009, they took a chance on a



Joe Brown / West Central Tribune

Paynesville head football coach Max Meagher roams the sidelines during a game against Royalton on Friday, Oct. 1, at Paynesville.

guy that didn't know anything and we managed to keep our heads above water. It's an incredible community with incredible people.

"(My family) got way more out of this than we gave. We're forever indebted to people along the way. It's been marvelous."



Photo courtesy of Kirk Irvin

Minnesota State's Avery Stilwell makes a save Friday, Nov. 10 against Ohio State in Columbus. Stilwell is from Litchfield.

BACK ON THE ICE, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY

Litchfield's Stilwell, a tennis player at Minnesota State, plays hockey in a pinch for the Mavericks

By Tom Elliott
West Central Tribune

Mankato
When Litchfield/Dassel-Cokato's girls hockey season wrapped up last March, Avery Stilwell put her skates away. While a college tennis career loomed, she figured she'd played her last hockey game.

Wrong. Way wrong. Three key injuries left the Minnesota State women's hockey team without a goaltender heading into perhaps the Mavericks' toughest WCHA road series of the season, a pair of games with Ohio State. The Buckeyes are ranked second in the nation.

Enter Stilwell. A coach from an opposing team in high school gave a recommendation to the frantic Minnesota State coaching staff, which had its last healthy goalie unable to play because of concussion protocols after a weekend series with St. Cloud State. A couple of players on the

Mavericks who Stilwell played some youth hockey with in the Twin Cities also gave their approval.

"I'm pretty used to switching sports with not a lot of time in between," Stilwell said.

Stilwell plays for Minnesota State's tennis team after a standout career at Litchfield, where she was the West Central Tribune's Hengstler-Ranweiler winner in 2021, awarded to the area's outstanding three-sport athlete. Stilwell shined in tennis and softball and regularly got heavy work in goal for the Litchfield/D-C girls hockey team, which was usually outshot on its way to a 3-12-1 record last season.

With Stilwell suddenly on the Mavericks' radar, a meeting with the tennis coaches and the hockey coaches ensued. Stilwell took to the ice for the first time since March 16 in the week leading up to the Ohio State games last Friday and Saturday.

Yes, she went nearly eight months without skating, unheard of in college, especially at the Division I level. But, hey, this was an emergency.

"With me not skating since

March, I was very nervous," Stilwell said by phone. "To be at a smaller high school program to the highest level for (women), it was a big jump."

By all accounts, Stilwell held her own.

Introduction by fire

She made 48 saves the first night, a 6-3 Minnesota State loss. The second game, the Buckeyes beat the Mavericks 9-0. Stilwell had 39 saves.

"There was a lot of catching up to do," Stilwell said.

The game's a lot faster, of course. The players are more talented. And Ohio State is really good.

"There was a huge speed change," Stilwell said. "There were a lot of smarter, quicker players."

Stilwell said one of the biggest adjustments was getting used to her new goalie pads. They're a backup set for Dryden McKay, Minnesota State's two-time All-American senior goalie.

"We're about the same size," said Stilwell, a 6-footer who played No. 2 singles in the Mavericks' last match of the fall tennis season, a 7-0 win over Iowa Central.

McKay's pads, however, felt huge to her. That's because Stilwell played with goalie pads in high school that were a little too small. She chose not to get new ones for several years — they're really expensive — knowing that she was not going to play college hockey, or so she thought.

"I didn't think I was going to play again," she said.

Ohio State was a fortuitous trip for the walk-on goalie. It's one of two long trips by air the Mavericks make this season. The weekend Minnesota State played in Columbus, the ESPN GameDay pregame college football show was at the school for Ohio State's game with Michigan State.

"We got a police escort to the game because there were so many people," Stilwell said. "It was crazy."

While she's definitely with the hockey team for the time being, goalie Calla Frank returns for the Mavericks' next series Dec. 3-4 against St. Thomas. Minnesota State plays St. Cloud State on Dec. 10-11 in Mankato then plays Dec. 17-18 at Bemidji State.

And then? Stilwell goes

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Kill vs. Fleck? It could happen next fall

By Andy Greder
St. Paul Pioneer Press

The Minnesota Golden Gophers football team's season opener in 2022 didn't have much sizzle until Tuesday.

After facing powerhouse Ohio State to open this season, Minnesota's game against New Mexico State on Sept. 1 looked like it would be a status-quo start against lower-level competition. Then a report from FootballScoop.com said former Gophers coach Jerry Kill is expected to be named the Aggies' head coach starting next season.

The website said Kill is the top target and pointed out that NMSU athletics director Mario Moccia was in that same position at Southern Illinois when Kill was the head coach there.

Kill, 60, was Minnesota's head coach for four-plus seasons before he was forced to retire by complications from epilepsy in October 2015. At that time, Kill said he was following doctors' recommendations to step aside to improve his health, and that he wouldn't be a head coach again. He also said he could return in college sports in another capacity, and he wasn't away long. In 2017, Kill was the offensive coordinator at Rutgers, and a year later interim AD at Southern Illinois. In 2019 he was an assistant to the head coach at Virginia Tech and starting in 2020 he was assistant head coach Gary Patterson at Texas Christian.

When his good friend Patterson stepped down as TCU's head coach in late October, Kill became the Horned Frogs' interim head coach.

If Kill takes the Aggies' job, it would make for an awkward season opener at Huntington Bank Stadium. In February 2019, Kill sounded off about current head coach P.J. Fleck, who was an assistant under Kill at Northern Illinois in 2008-09, telling Sirius XM that a phone call to Fleck after Fleck replaced Tracy Claeys in January 2017 did not go well. Claeys was Kill's long-time defensive coordinator before succeeding Kill in the second half of 2015 and 2016. Fallout from a sexual misconduct case in 2016 led to Claeys' firing after the season.

"When (Fleck) went to Minnesota and treated the people the way he treated my guys

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STILWELL

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summer, I would play tennis and softball. I really didn't do a lot of hockey."

Famous coach

The Mavericks' women's hockey team is coached by John Harrington. Sound familiar? He was a player on the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team that stunned the Russians and won a gold medal.

"My sisters were a little star-struck after the game when they met him," Stilwell said of twin sisters Anna and Sophie, who were on Litchfield's state runner-up tennis team this fall.

"He's a great coach and a great guy, a really cool guy," Avery said.

Like Avery, her sisters have watched the movie "Miracle" repeatedly.

"I've seen that movie a lot," Avery said. "We would watch it in youth hockey and everywhere all the time."

When Stilwell had the meeting with the tennis and hockey coaches, overseeing the gathering was Lori Meyer, who is Minnesota State's Senior Women's Administrator. She's also the Mavericks' legendary softball coach, who in 37 years has 1,287 career wins, including a 2017 national championship on her resume.

"She joked about me playing softball," said Stilwell, who was a first-team All-Area West Central Tribune softball player last spring.

Yes, it was just a joke.

GOPHERS

From Page B1

and telling them he had to go in and completely change the culture," Kill said on Sirius XM. "... He made it sound like we didn't know what we were doing, and I took it personal."

Kill, who was 29-29 at Minnesota and Big Ten coach of the year in 2014, also told KSTP-AM in 2017: "I won't be stepping foot back in the stadium."

In the Sirius interview, Kill also took shots at Fleck as a person. "I just think sometimes ego gets carried away," he said, adding later in the interview: "Do I still root for the Gophers? I do. Do I enjoy him running up and down the sidelines? No. Do I think he's about the players? No. He's about himself."

Fleck responded to Kill's comments a few days later. "I've got a lot of respect for Jerry Kill; I always will," Fleck said on KTLK-AM 1130. "I've learned so much from him, especially working for him and knowing him a lot of years. I'm really sorry he feels that way. I'm not sure where that came from."

On the accusation that he doesn't care about his players, Fleck responded: "That saddens me. It saddened (wife) Heather. It saddens our entire family. But this isn't a profession about feelings. One thing that is really, really important to me is our players. It always has been and always will be."

If Kill's Aggies face



Jeffrey Becker / USA Today Sports
Minnesota Golden Gophers head coach P. J. Fleck looks on before the game against the Iowa Hawkeyes on Nov. 13 at Kinnick Stadium in Iowa City.



Raymond Carlin III / USA Today Sports
TCU Horned Frogs interim head coach Jerry Kill reacts against the Kansas Jayhawks during the second half Nov. 20 at Amon G. Carter Stadium in Fort Worth, Texas.

Fleck's Gophers next nonconference game. and uncomfortable, the September, it won't The pregame com- postgame handshake be another forgettable ments could be dicey icy and brief.

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