

By Randy Whalen

Darien Jacobs remembers his introduction to Lockport Township basketball.

"I remember vividly the games against Lockport," said Jacobs, who attended O'Fallon from 2006-2010 and played two seasons on the varsity basketball team. "There were two great games (a 48-45 O'Fallon win in the Class AA State Quarterfinals in 2007 and a 50-47 Lockport win in a Class 4A Supersectional in 2008) with a buzzer-beating shot (a 3-pointer by Brian Bradley in 2008). It put Lockport on the map for me.

"When I went to Illinois State my roommate freshman year, Jake Kuper, went to Lockport. Then a handful of guys in my fraternity went to Lockport. So I knew nothing but good people from Lockport."

Now Jacobs, who majored in health education, is working at Lockport as the new head girls basketball coach.

"I am very excited," said Jacobs, who will be a physical education and health teacher. "I've moved to Lockport after hearing great things about it. It's a great community and I'm very excited to be a part of it."

He comes to the Porters after being an assistant girl's basketball coach at Belleville West for the past four years. He was also the head girls lacrosse coach at the school, leading the Maroons to a 19-2 record this past season. He will be an assistant girl's lacrosse coach at Lockport.

"I was in a good spot but I have a child that is in the Chicago area, so I was looking at opportunities to be closer and relocate," Jacobs said. "So I put it out there and Lockport was the first one to reach out to me.

"I was also interested in an opening as an assistant coach in both (defending Class 4A state basketball champion) girls basketball and girls lacrosse at Stevenson. But when I talked to Mike Dwyer it was like we knew each other for years."

Dwyer, who is entering his fifth school year as athletic director at Lockport, is very happy that Jacobs accepted the job and looks forward to him leading the program.

"Darien brings an infectious positive and fun vibe that will continue to motivate and elevate our girl's basketball program," Dwyer said. "He has a tremendous ability to connect with players and hold them accountable for their growth and development not only as student-athletes but also as young women of character."

Jacobs was born in Naperville and lived there until his family moved to southern Illinois when he was four. He started playing basketball at a young age and has been in every role on the court.

"I was 5-foot-6 in the fourth grade but when other kids kept growing, I didn't," said Jacobs, who stands 5-foot-7. "So I was a post player to start but then became a guard and a 3-point shooter."

He played varsity basketball at O'Fallon his sophomore and junior years. Then enlisted in the military. He is still in the Illinois Air National Guard.

"I'm still out of Scott Air Force Base in Southern Illinois," said Jacobs, who commutes there for one weekend a month and also traveled to Italy with the Illinois Air National Guard this summer. "I love it. It gives me a good balance in life. I get to learn as a teacher and coach in both professions. I interact with people that are successful, get advice from them, and learn leadership qualities."

He brings those qualities to Lockport, where he takes over for Dan Kelly, who coached the Porters the past eight seasons and is still at the school as a guidance counselor. Jacobs is the third girl's basketball coach in the past 20 years at Lockport.

The Porters had a lot of success in the 20-year period between 1980-1999, winning nine regional titles, two sectional championships, and advancing to the state quarterfinals in 1986. They, however, have only won two regional titles since.

But the seeds for success have been planted as Lockport was .500 or better in five of the past six seasons and won a regional title in 2018. This past campaign had a lot of ups and downs as the Porters won the Oak Lawn Holiday Tournament and got off to a great start before finishing 15-15. Although the Porters lost 11 of their final 13 games, this six-season stretch was their longest continued success streak since the late 1990s.

Jacobs plans to continue to build on that success.

"Right away I expect us to have a team that has the right mindset," he said. "We will be physically and mentally tough and ready to compete. In the long term, I want to have a great program from top to bottom and that starts with feeder schools."

"I don't want to say we are rebuilding, I want to say we are reloading. I want to keep it moving, keep it rolling, keep moving forward and keep that momentum going. We have five more contact days this summer and I'm hoping to get a summer league game or two in against another school. There's no doubt I made the right decision and I'm excited to get the ball rolling."