

Alumni Return to Lead Presidents Basketball and Football Teams

Jamie Pearson and Demetrius Ross Named New Head Coaches

On April 28, Jamie Pearson was announced as Harding's new boys head basketball coach, but to fully appreciate the story, we have to go back to the summer of 1993. That year, Pearson, who was born and raised in Marion, had transferred to Harding from Marion Catholic High School. He played that season for Coach Jeff Diehl on a team that would tie for the league championship with some pretty tough competition. That year was also the first time Pearson



Coach Jamie Pearson during open gym

met another former Harding student, Demetrius Ross, who was in town and practicing with the basketball team. More on that later. Pearson's love for basketball started as a child, shooting on the hoop in his backyard and spending most of his free time at the YMCA gym.

"I remembered as a kid watching the NBA Finals between the Lakers and the Celtics on TV with my parents and loving Larry Bird and how he played the game," said Pearson. "I played a variety of sports growing up, but no matter what sport I was in at the time, I always ended my night shooting baskets at the Y."

Pearson took his love for athletics and focused it into his career. He knew he either wanted to coach or write about sports, so after he graduated from Harding he was accepted into the prestigious E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University. He then went to Capital University for his Secondary English Certification for grades 7-12. At that same time, Pearson took his first coaching job as the junior high boys basketball coach at Edison Middle School. It was an eye-opening experience as the team went 0-14 that first season. Pearson rebounded and continued his coaching career with a number of assistant and head coaching positions at high profile schools including Dublin Coffman, Hillard Bradley, Dublin Jerome and most recently

Centennial High School. He was named Division II Mid-State League Ohio Coach of the Year in 2011, AP State and Central District Division I Boys Basketball Coach of the Year in 2015 as well as the 2016 District 10 Boys Basketball Division I Coach of the Year. Pearson has also led a number of district, division and league champions in his coaching career.

“I have been fortunate enough to coach at every level of high school basketball, which gives me a good perspective on how to run a program,” said Pearson. “My philosophy has always been to emulate those coaches and teachers that made an impact on me. I have had the opportunity to work with and learn from many great coaches around Ohio.”

In his time away from Marion, Pearson always followed his hometown closely, even applying to be the basketball coach at Harding 20 years ago, fresh off of his first coaching job.

“I never even got an interview,” said Pearson. “It’s ok to fail and be told no. It builds character. I worked hard these last two decades and earned the right to apply at my alma mater again when the opportunity presented itself.”

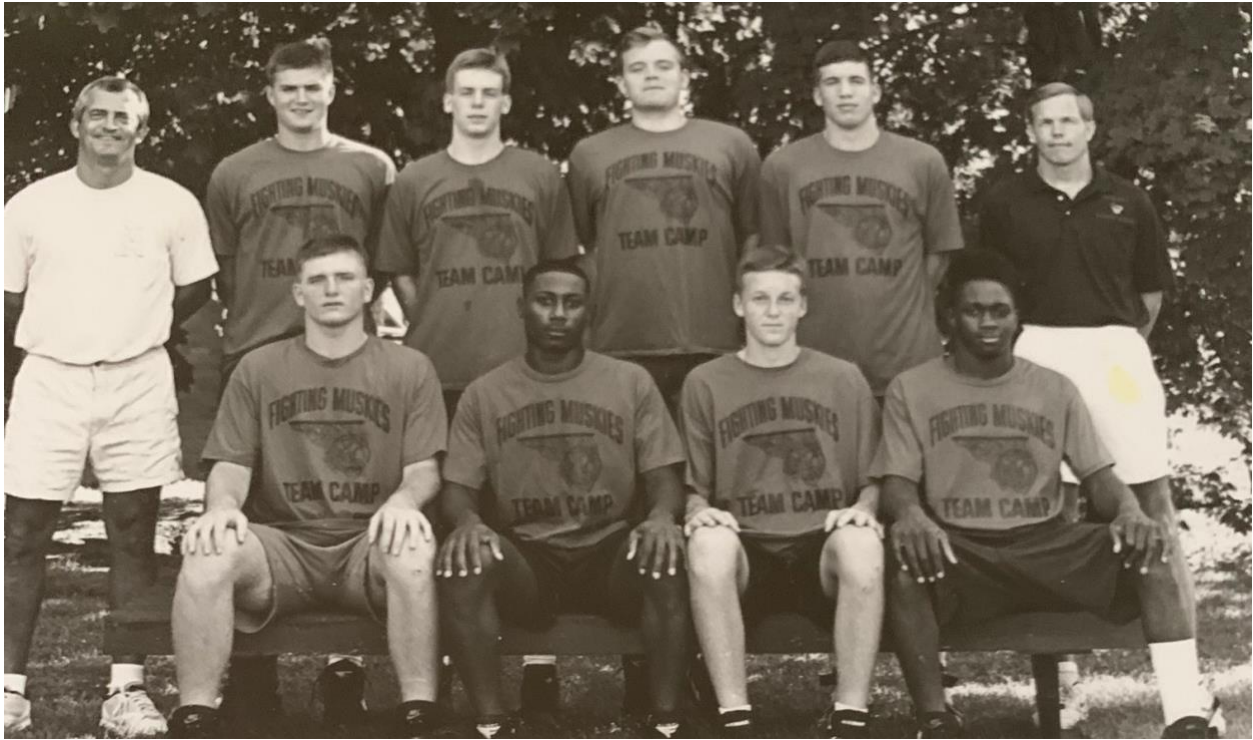
As for his upcoming first season at Harding, Pearson plans to focus his team around motivation, preparation and hard work.

“The way I approach coaching is the philosophy that my guys are going to work harder than yours,” said Pearson. “The one thing we can control is how hard we work, and we will build the rest of our players’ skillsets from that mindset.”

Pearson lauded the job that coach Donald Worstell had done with the current program and plans to build off of that solid foundation moving forward. He will also be teaching Career Based Intervention at the high school, a course that allows for students to learn about entering the workforce, creating resumes, preparing for interviews and guidance on finding the right employment opportunities.

“I’m excited to come back to the Marion community and work with these kids,” said Pearson. “Harding has great facilities and an impressive staff, and I look forward to being able to give back to the place that gave

so much to me. If this were to be the final stop in my coaching and teaching career, it would be a storybook ending.”



1993 - Pearson, back row, 3rd from the right, Ross, front row, far right

Answering the Call

Domination. That’s the first word that comes to mind when you think about the new Harding football head coach, Demetrius Ross. Ross was always playing football and basketball at a young age. Growing up in an athletic and sports loving family, Ross began his football career with the Marion Midget Football league and the Green Bay Packers. At that time, he didn’t understand what it meant to be good at football, he just knew he was faster and stronger than just about everybody he stepped on the field with. It was during that time, from the ages of 8-10 that Ross learned what it meant to be to be “good at football” under the tutelage of coach Troutman, who put him in a position to excel. From just starting out, up until his freshman year at Harding, Ross definitely understood winning. He was rated a top defensive back in the state that year and that team was known for its dominance on the field.



Coach Demetrius Ross at Harding Stadium

“Mansfield Senior was one of our big rivals at that time and I’m proud to say I never lost to them in middle school or high school,” said Ross. “One of my favorite memories from my freshman year was beating them with that incredible team we had. So many great players.”

Ross would move to Washington State during his sophomore year and finished up his high school career there, all while never forgetting his roots in Marion and what he

had learned. He was even back in town in 1993 and played at the Harding basketball camp with Jamie Pearson that summer.

After high school, Ross went on to become a JUCO All-American defensive back at Walla Walla University from 1996-98 before becoming All-Conference at Boise State University, where his team was two-time Big West and Humanitarian Bowl champs. He was nominated to the All-Blue Team while at Boise State as one of the top 30 to ever play at the university. Ross graduated from Boise State as a hall of famer along with a bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice. When he wasn’t picked up in the NFL draft that year, he had private tryouts with the Bengals and the Lions. While he felt confident about his chances in the league, it ultimately didn’t work out. That setback put Ross on the next path of his playing career which included a stop in the Canadian Football League with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers and then a three-year stint in arena football, with his playing career coming to an end with the Columbus Destroyers in 2004. Ross knew he still needed to be involved with the game he loved and wanted to make a difference, so he turned his attention to coaching.

“I’ve always been a student of the game and a coach on the field,” said Ross. “I was a captain at every level I played, and when I was out there, I didn’t just learn my position, I learned all the positions around me because I wanted to know what those players did and why they did it.”

Ross volunteered to coach junior high players right after high school and he was able to see behind the scenes of a football program and loved it. He thrived on sharing his knowledge of the game and wanted to continue to get better at coaching. His coaching resume is extremely diverse, featuring multiple junior high and high school coaching assignments to a decade plus of arena football head coaching experience. Ross also had a general manager role for a number of those arena football teams, which he feels shaped his coaching acumen.

“When you work as a GM, you work with the public and not just the players,” said Ross. “There is an accountability to delivering on promises and furthering not just the team but the community as well. As the head football coach at Harding, I want to listen to the community. I want to bring interest to the area, stay socially active and create an environment to make these kids successful. I’m community first, because I’m from here, and I want to build these young men to be shining examples of Marion, Ohio.”

As a man of faith, Ross had prayed for an opportunity like this where he could teach and serve. He enjoys being able to serve the youth through the platform of football and credits his family for shaping him into the man he is today.

“I couldn’t do what I’m doing today without the support from my wife, Lynette, and our blended family of seven, Kaysha (25), Kierra (21), Rashard (15), Elijah (13), Daunte (13), Demetrius (11) and Faith (9).”

On the field, Ross plans to be efficient and achieve success on the concepts of hard work and discipline. He plans to implement the winning recipe he grew up with and build on the principles of dominating. He will also be working as an attendance advocate with Marion City Schools, working alongside social workers with students who need mentorship, programs and strategies to bridge the gap between school attendance and success.

“It was just a matter of time,” said Ross. “I am where I am supposed to be and doing what I was called to do.”

Both of these new coaches are currently gearing up for exciting seasons in 2021. Pearson is holding basketball camps this summer and Ross plans to hit the ground running early in June. We are excited to see what the future holds for both of these programs and their new leaders.

“We are so thrilled to bring on both of these coaches to lead our programs,” said Athletic Director, Sean Kearns. “I have heard how excited the community is for them to get started and so are we. The combination of their enthusiasm and their Marion roots provides a unique circumstance for us all to benefit.”