

# Canton football coach Tim Baechler steps down

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(Photo: Bryan Mitchell / Special to Detroit News)

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One of the most successful and respected high school football coaches in the state retired Tuesday night when Tim Baechler made the announcement he was stepping down at Canton's team banquet.

"It's just time," Baechler said. "I want the freedom to do things with my family in the summer and the fall. I want to watch (son) Lou play college football too."

Baechler, 50, has 208 career wins, including a 172-53 record in his 20 years at Canton, guiding the Chiefs to 17 state playoff appearances, nine district championships, three regional titles and a Division 1 state finals appearance in 2005 at Ford Field.

And Canton won eight league championships as well, including the KLAA title this season with a 35-21 win over Livonia Churchill, also winning the toughest district in the state when it defeated No. 15 Saline (42-14) and No. 1 Belleville (28-25) before a 27-26 regional final loss to Detroit Catholic Central, falling a yard short on a late two-point conversion to finish 9-3.

Canton's program has come a long way, especially since it had made just one state playoff appearance before Baechler's arrival. He inserted the full-house tight-T formation offense and 3-4 defense and treated every game like it was the Super Bowl.

"I honestly didn't know anything about Canton High School," Baechler said "I just knew it was a perfect job to take over because they hadn't been very successful. I remember walking into the gym and seeing the league banners on the wall, saw the names of Farmington Hills Harrison, Westland John Glenn and Walled Lake Western and said to myself, 'Oh boy, this is big-time football.' "

"I walked into the weight room and all they had was an old universal gym and one bench press. I had the first team meeting and had only about 30 kids standing in front of me. I told my wife that night that my last team at Hudson would've killed this team. I remember telling her, 'What did I get myself into?' Then, three years later (2000) we qualified for the playoffs and lost to Clarkston in the regional final.

"I'm just very proud of what we were able to accomplish here. We made the playoffs 17 out of 20 years. We won 11 division championships, eight league championships, nine district championships, three regional titles and we lost to Rockford in the 2005 state finals. We accomplished a lot and have met some of the best people I will ever meet as far as players, co-workers, coaches and parents. I had an absolute blast!"

And, Baechler fully enjoyed his final season, watching his youngest son, Lou lead the defense from his linebacker spot, even playing with a broken arm.

Wearing a cast on his forearm, Lou Baechler set the tempo in the pre-district win over Saline by returning an interception 45 yards for a TD to give Canton a 13-0 lead less than four minutes into the game.

Then, Lou grabbed a 4-yard TD pass on fourth down with 5:28 left in the district final win over Belleville, getting the job done against a defensive secondary that is loaded with Division 1 talent.

Churchill coach Bill DeFillippo will miss his rivalry with Baechler leading Canton's program.

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