

Off the grid: Canton Hall of Fame football coach Tim Baechler retires after 20 years

[Tim Smith](#), [Hometownlife.com](#) Published 11:15 p.m. ET Nov. 20, 2017 | Updated 12:52 p.m. ET Nov. 22, 2017

After 20 years as head coach, Canton's Tim Baechler is stepping down. Wochit



(Photo: FILE PHOTO)

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Tim Baechler absolutely loves football, especially coaching the Canton Chiefs.

But the 50-year-old Plymouth resident loves family more. Baechler announced at Monday night's team banquet what those close to the team have been whispering about for months — he is retiring after 20 years and 173 wins on the Canton sidelines.

"It's a bittersweet feeling," said Baechler, who talked about his decision during an exclusive interview last week with [Hometown Life](#). "I am sad to say goodbye to what was a large part of our family's life for 20 years as we raised our sons, but excited at the prospect of having some free time."

Baechler's final game was Nov. 10, when [Canton dropped a 27-26 decision to Novi Detroit Catholic Central](#) in the Division 1 regional championship game. That was only the 52nd loss during his outstanding two-decade run at Plymouth-Canton Educational Park.

Keeping his program running at such a lofty level for so long proved to be a “really, really hard” task. But he was up to it and then some.

More: [Players, fans react to Baechler's retirement](#)

More: [Canton's Baechler reaches the 200 career victory mark](#)

“Building it is not even remotely hard compared to keeping it going as long as we’ve been able to keep it going,” Baechler emphasized. “That just wears you out, it wore me out. And I love it (football).”

“It feels like a 50-pound gold chain, that you love, but you wear it every single day — every day of the year — I’m glad to take it off. I will, however, miss the kids and the coaches and the excitement of it all.”



Tim Baechler talks to players during a preseason practice in August. (Photo: Bill Bresler | [hometownlife.com](#), Bill Bresler | [hometownlife.com](#))

There for Lou

Baechler explained that he always considered stepping down as soon as his son, senior linebacker Lou Baechler, finished his high school career.

“I wasn’t sure,” Baechler said. “I’ve been wrestling with it since Lou came up freshman year (2014). I’m like ‘You know what, let’s see how I feel when Lou gets through it.’”

“There was a day in football class when Lou was absent due to an illness. I walked into class, and when I didn’t see his face in the group, I knew I wouldn’t be able to coach once he was gone.



Coach Tim Baechler knew it was time to leave as son Lou finishes his high school football career. Julie Baechler photographs her son's introduction during senior honors.. *(Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)*

“He’s lived it (Canton football) his whole life. I considered retiring before Lou got to Canton, but then realized I had to try to give him the same experience, so I kind of knew when Lou was done I’d be done.”

He added that following through on his retirement plans still might take a while to fully digest.

“It will, especially still teaching here (Canton High School physical education),” Baechler noted. “It will be different. I have a lot of football players in my class. It will be a little weird here on Tuesday.

“It’s kind of like Bob Cummings. He used to be the head football coach at Salem and he teaches the Salem football class.”

Lou Baechler (1) playing with a spiral fracture of his forearm, is helped up by Colin Troup (3) during a 2017 contest. (Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com, Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)

Never a second thought

Canton's latest standout season, featuring a 10-game winning streak that carried the Chiefs to KLAA and district championships, did not change Baechler's inclination to retire.

He stayed on course even as others tried to gauge whether the victories might sway him to hang on for another season.

"No, never a second thought to it," Baechler said. "I have got a few close friends that would ask the same thing, 'Well, what are you thinking, about ready to change your mind?' I was like, no, no. It's just going to happen."

More: [Players, fans react to Canton football coach Baechler's retirement announcement](#)

More: [Defense also sizzles for red-hot Canton Chiefs](#)

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Longtime assistant coaches Tony Boucher, Bob Williams and Rich Mui knew all season what Baechler planned on doing.

Would any of those trusted confidantes take over for 2018? Or some of the younger coaches like Andy LaFata or Craig "Bubbs" Hnatuk?

"That's going to be totally up to them," Baechler said. "I've talked to the guys and the only one that's remotely interested is Andy LaFata who played for me in 2005."



Tim Baechler should have more time with wife Julie and son Lou as he retires from coaching. (Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)

Sticking with it

With Baechler at the helm beginning in 1998, after having coached several seasons at Hudson, the Chiefs soon became an annual title contender.

His final coaching record of 208-72 included a 173-52 mark at Canton.

The program he inherited was on the downside, with only four winning seasons since the team's 1973 debut. In 1997, the Chiefs finished 1-8.

Baechler recalled making changes right off the bat, implementing what was called by some as "a little league" offense.

"Some of the parents were not happy with the offense in the first two years," Baechler said. "My coaches and my players believed though. They could see that we were getting better, and that we were in games deep into the fourth quarter. (Still) I heard things like 'You have to throw the ball' or 'You play offense in a 10-foot box.' We stuck with it and I'm glad we did."

Those comments dissipated quickly, especially once the results started rolling in.

Employing a triple-back set that often made it difficult to detect which player actually was carrying the football, Baechler's Canton teams made the playoffs 17 times, won 11 division titles, eight league titles, nine district championships and three regional crowns.

In 2005, the Chiefs made it to Ford Field for the Division 1 finals against Rockford.

"We started getting more kids to play football, and our work in the weight room was starting to show," he noted. "We were getting stronger and faster."

Chance to exhale

But with the success came expectations. Those eventually took a toll.

"When you show up every Friday and you're supposed to win, it kind of takes the fun out of it a little bit," Baechler said.

Now, with the decision to end a career that already has Baechler enshrined in two halls of fame (Michigan High School Football Coaches Association and Michigan High School Coaches Association), there finally will be opportunity to exhale.

Not to mention taking a long vacation with wife Julie and their sons Broc (who also played football for his dad) and Lou. Or maybe even enjoying some autumn golf with buddies.



Julie Baechler. (Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)

“Julie and I and the kid we can do anything we want whenever we want,” Baechler emphasized. “We can go on a three-week vacation (next) summer. I can go on some golf trips in the fall that I’ve always had to say no to.”



Coach Tim Baechler confirms the rumors of his retirement. *(Photo: Bill Bresler | hometownlife.com)*

“I haven’t played golf in September or October since I was eight years old (playing for a youth team in White Pigeon). This is going to be crazy not having anything to do August, September, October.”



Longtime Canton coach Tim Baechler talks to his players after the 2015 Division 1 semifinal. (Photo: MICHAEL VASILNEK)

Road trips

His schedule won't be that empty, though, because he plans on traveling to watch Lou play college football. The younger Baechler has received an offer or two, but probably won't make his decision until National Signing Day in early February.

"I know Lou wants to play football in college somewhere, and it would be nice if Julie and I'd be able to go to all those games and enjoy it. Not drive there thinking about 'Oh my god, what happened last night' in our game, constantly thinking about the next opponent coming up."

The accomplished veteran also remembers what it was like to be a young coach looking for sage advice. That's why he won't completely abandon the sport.

"I'm sure there's going to be a lot of coaches around, every year there is," Baechler said. "Hey you want to give my staff a mini clinic on your defense, your offense?' I'm sure that kind of stuff will continue. It's part of being a coach.

“You always got to give back to people when they ask you because I used to be a young coach and there were some coaches I used to ask help from. They were always more than willing to help me. It’s our job as older coaches, if somebody asks for your help you should do it.”

Through 20 years of trials, tribulations and — mostly — triumph, Tim Baechler’s tenure has left him fulfilled with a lot of great memories and success, but also ready to just be dad.

It’s taken a huge bite out the family time that is so dear to him.

Yet he wouldn’t have changed a thing.

“I loved it and I’m going out on top,” Baechler said. “I had an absolute blast.”

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Retired Canton coach Tim Baechler always considered the practice field like an extension of the classroom. (Photo: Bill Bresler | staff photographe)