

GALLUP HIGH HIRES NEW HOOP COACH

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Details still fuzzy on former coach's dismissal

Wilbert Nez is the new head girls basketball coach at Gallup High School, officials confirmed. Nez started the job Nov. 1.

The hiring, which was finalized Oct. 28, brings closure to a tumultuous situation that saw the Lady Bengals' previous head coach, Kamau Turner, terminated from the job by Gallup-McKinley County Schools Superintendent Frank Chiapetti in July.

Nez teaches Navajo language and culture at Gallup High School.

"We have hired a new girls coach for the basketball team," Dominick Romero, principal at Gallup High, said. "He is someone who has worked at Gallup High the past several years."

Romero said Nez was chosen from a candidate pool of six.

He said the candidates who applied for the job were Michael Hawley, John Lamasne, Jr., Patricia Billy, Alicia Smith, and Larry Smiley.

Smith was a "C" team (freshmen) coach under Turner last year and Billy was most recently an

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assistant basketball coach at cross-town rival Miyamura High School. Nez was an assistant basketball coach under Turner for the past six years, Romero said.

The Lady Bengals went 28-1 in 2015 and were ranked in the Top 50 in the U.S.

Nez, who was interviewed for the job by a few members of the Lady Bengals' team and other school personnel, said at a girls basketball tryout session this week that he'll bring the same run-and-gun style he used last year with the Navajo Pine High School boys basketball team. That style catapulted District-1 2A Pine from a "nobody" team to a team that put fear into bigger teams like Tohatchi High School and Navajo Preparatory School.

Under Nez, senior guard Francis Nez of Navajo Pine became a household name and a player who opposing teams geared their defenses around. Nez torched opponents several times last year for 30 or more points in games. Wilbert Nez downplayed the motivator role.

"I knew we had very good and very smart athletes on that team," he said. "We were a microcosm of that."

THE BACKDROP

Turner was let go because of his connections to the Full Court Prestige Club. The club is not and has never been recognized by the Gallup-McKinley County Schools as a booster organization.

"You have admitted to depositing money into the bank account held by [Full Court Prestige Club] with funds that were solicited from the public in multiple ways for the purpose of supporting the Gallup High School basketball team," Chiapetti wrote in a July 25, 2016, termination letter to Turner.

GMSD officials have said that the district recognizes just one "booster" club — a club that

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generates money for a specific team through things like fundraisers, i.e, bake sales, etc. — and that is a club from Miyamura High School.

Full Court Prestige folks have said Chiapetti is out of bounds in administering discipline to a private organization.

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