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Hackworth homeward bound

Ex-Falcon heading up Minford boys soccer

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MINFORD — Simply put, Jacob Hackworth is making good on that old expression.

You can, in fact, go home again.

And, with all apologies to Dorothy and Toto, there's no place like it.

That's because Hackworth, a former Minford and Shawnee State University men's soccer standout and most recently an assistant at Northwest, has taken over the boys soccer program at his alma mater of Minford — as decade-long head coach Dave Gampp stepped down following last season.

In an interview on Wednesday prior to a Falcons' summer session of season training, Hackworth said simply "it's a dream".

"This has been my dream. This is me coming home and where I want to be," said Hackworth. "I'm thankful for the time I had assisting at Northwest and even here before, but there's no place like home".

That's right, as Hackworth was a four-year assistant coach in Roy Rogers Country with head coach Josh Keeney at Northwest — as he assisted Gampp for three years at the Falcons' Nest following his graduation from Shawnee State in 2014.

Hackworth is only the third Minford boys coach in the past decade-and-a-half, as he played from 2006 thru 2009 and graduated in 2010 — standing out as mainly a center-midfielder for Theresa Havens' teams for four Falcon seasons, which included three consecutive sectional championships (from 2007 thru 2009 as part of five overall from 2007 thru 2011) and the 2008 season which also included Southern Ohio Conference Division II and Southeast District titles.

Although he did play more forward for his senior campaign, and got to score some goals — he moved on to Shawnee State and two decades-long head coach Ron Goodson, who starred at Minford and still holds the school records for most goals scored in a single season (47 in 1986) and career (117 from 1983 thru 1986).

For the Bears, he played in at least 16 matches in all four seasons and started in at least 15 tilts in his final three falls — starting out as an outside midfielder and some

center midfield, before moving to right-back defender during his junior campaign in which he was a team captain.

At the time, Hackworth graduated as second in SSU program history in games played (71), ninth in program history in career shots (85), and ninth in program history in career shots on goal (30).

He was the Bears' Mid-South Conference Men's Soccer Champions of Character Recipient as a junior (2012), and was second-team academic all-Ohio as a senior a year later (2013).

He then came back home to the Falcons' Nest once, and assisted Gampp for three years, but his friend from Northwest Keeney contacted him about assisting there —and so his last four falls have been spent with the Mohawks.

"I was at the point that I thought I could learn more and build my coaching career a little bit more. I wasn't sure how long Coach (Dave) Gampp was going to be here. So I made the move to Northwest and learned a lot from Coach (Josh) Keeney," said Hackworth.

But now, with Gampp and Hackworth having offseason discussions, Gampp stepped down —and did so knowing Hackworth would officially step up.

"There's definitely a lot more to learn from the assistant coaching role to the head coaching role. But I've had a great support system out here that has helped me adapt and we're getting through," said Hackworth. "Everybody is buying in."

And working out.

Since March, the Falcons, getting 20-plus players practicing regularly, have conducted open fields for two days per week —often times training indoors in the Falcons' fieldhouse facility, which now features FieldTurf.

"A couple of gentlemen stepped up and purchased the turf and we had it installed. We are the only ones now without turf (for football) in our league (SOC II), and that was the big reason we did that," said the coach. "What we can do is at least get some touches and get a feel for how the ball is rolling. We're thankful to have what we have in there now."

But while FieldTurf is one thing, numbers is another.

As it stands in early July, Hackworth said there are 23 Falcons for the upcoming 2021 roster —an increase from the 16 or 17 of last season's coronavirus-impacted year.

He said improving upon and maintaining numbers, incorporating a possession-style soccer philosophy, and just building a foundation for these young Falcons are his primary short-term and long-term goals.

"I want to bring some pride back to the soccer program here and get these numbers back up. We need to keep these kids interested all the way from the youth league to the

junior high program and ultimately the high school program. And I want to see all these kids get better. We will have a young team this year with three seniors. But we will have a lot of good competition at several spots. We don't have a lot of weak spots one thru 23," said Hackworth. "On the field, I'm a defensive guy, I want to get numbers behind the ball, and then I want to counter and try and hold possession. Southern Ohio is known for 'kickball', but I don't want to play 'kickball'. I want us to keep possession, run the other team around, and then second half be in shape and open the game up. I want to set back first, get a feel, get into the game and then go."

Of course, bringing back Gold Balls to Bond Road and Minford High School isn't bad either.

"At Minford, you're always near the top of the league. So (SOC II) Gold Balls are expected and winning the SOC II is always the goal. It's always a battle with Wheelersburg, Waverly, South Webster and Minford," said Hackworth. "Any given year, we should have the team to do it. I don't expect nothing less from our guys."

Minford will sport three seniors this season —overly-experienced four-year standouts Zane Miller and Jacob Lewis and second-year goalkeeper Levi Coriell.

Hackworth said Miller and Lewis "probably have more experience than most every other high school soccer player in Ohio."

"They've played just about every game from freshmen year on," said the coach. "It's two senior leaders like coaches out there."

And, following their senior seasons and for future Falcons as well, Hackworth has a gameplan for the game of life, too.

"It's coaching and teaching soccer, but I am all about trying to help these kids in life. My main objective is what can I do for these kids after soccer. I want them to leave their mark on the soccer field, win matches, win trophies, what have you. But I want them to leave Minford knowing that I love them, care for them, that I am here and that I am their number-one fan," he said. "When you do that, you are building a program the right way."

And for Hackworth, there's no better building spot than back home in Minford.

The new Minford mentor said his assistants this season will be Michael Patrick, Jeb Coriell and Bill Tolle.