

Freeman hired to lead Clark's baseball program

Coach will remain with Heritage High School this spring

By PAUL VALENCIA
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Clark College's return to intercollegiate baseball just picked up some big-name buzz.

Longtime high school coach Don Freeman, who also works with Major League Baseball

and USA Baseball, has accepted the head coaching position as Clark returns to the diamond next school year after a 19-year hiatus.

"It's going to be a great thing for the kids in the county to have a team



Don Freeman

in the county," said Freeman, who will be the coach at Heritage High School this spring before taking over at Clark.

"We're excited, to say the least, because of the quality of the individual," Clark interim athletic director Denny Houston said. "He gives our program an immediate identity."

Freeman coached at Prairie from 1979 to 2004, winning state championships in 1986 and 1989. He was the head coach at Hillsboro, Ore., for

three seasons before returning to Clark County as the baseball coach at Heritage in 2008.

Freeman also is known for his coaching stints with USA Baseball. He led the 16-and-under team to a world title in 2003 and was an assistant coach on the world championship team in 2007. He also works as an envoy for Major League Baseball and clubs teams overseas. He has called off a trip to Germany this summer in order to prepare for Clark's transition

from club baseball to an intercollegiate sport in the Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges.

Freeman acknowledged that his contacts throughout the game could help in recruiting. But, he cautioned, it will take time.

"Kids have a tendency to follow kids," he said. "They want to go where their buddies had a good experience."

Freeman:

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Right now, that would not include Clark College baseball, which has been out of the game since 1992.

"We want to create a good experience at Clark," Freeman said.

Freeman said his wife Roxy influenced him to take the job at Clark.

"She said, 'What more can you accomplish in high school? What else can you do?' She said this would be a great challenge," he said. "Here, I get to work with kids from the entire county, not just one school."

Freeman said he will be aggressive in recruiting local talent. He would not turn away a prospect from, say, Seattle. But he does not plan on recruiting too much north of Kelso or south of the Portland area.

And he would love for most of his team to be from Clark County high schools.

"It's a community college. It's our community. I'll do anything I can to keep kids here," he said.

He will actually get started while completing his final year with the Timberwolves.

"My No. 1 priority right now is Heritage High School. But I have an advantage. We will play 20 or up to 25, 26 games if we make the playoffs. I get to watch other kids playing against us. I can talk to them about coming to Clark," Freeman said. "I've got to get a lot of cooperation from the local high school coaches to help me identify the players who could be Clark College athletes."

Freeman will get started with daily duties at Clark this summer, and he expects to coach fall ball at Clark in 2010 to prepare for the 2011 season.

Leta Meyer, Heritage's athletic coordinator, called Freeman a "class guy" who kept her in the loop as Clark was attempting to lure Freeman to college baseball.

"I said, 'They'd be crazy not to want you.' He's definitely a guy that is going to be difficult to replace," Meyer said. "He's just good. He's a Hall of Fame coach. We're really going to miss him."

But the position is not open at Heritage because Freeman is the coach this season.

"I would never bail this late. That would be inhumane," Freeman said. "Leta would never speak to me again."

Meyer said she is not concerned right now about finding a coach for Heritage for the 2011 baseball season.

"Don's coaching this year," she said. "The person who will be here after Don, we will find that person. We'll get a good coach for the kids."

