

Teacher/Coach Profile: Downsville's Dustin Keesler

By Rosie Cunningham

DOWNSVILLE - Dustin Keesler is both a teacher and a coach at Downsville Central School.

The 29 year old worked his way up the ranks from teacher's aide to a full time teacher of 7-12 mathematics last year.

"My favorite thing about being a teacher is being able to connect with all different types of students," he said. "I love learning about who they are as a person, their dreams, wishes and personal goals."

Keesler said his decision to become a teacher was not something he determined at an adolescent age. In 2012 he began coaching and substituting and he came to realize how much he enjoyed working with students.

"I felt like I could connect with the tougher students because I used to be one of them," he said. "After a while being a sub, I started as an aide. Some colleagues expressed that I was doing a nice job and that I should really go back to school to become a teacher. I believe those kind words helped give me the confidence to go back to school."

The Walton resident, husband and father, graduated from Downsville Central School in 2009 so it was fitting that he came to slowly work and coach at his Alma Mater.

"I became a coach in 2012," he said. "My first coaching gig was as a boys modified coach. Dan Haynes actually was the one who came and asked me to coach as he was starting as the varsity coach. They had an undefeated season the year before and were

returning some great players from that season - it helped transition me into an easier position."

Those first two years were wonderful for Keesler, who not only found his niche, but his team went undefeated.

Keesler personally played on the varsity soccer and basketball team for the Eagles and during his senior year, he tried his hand at baseball.

"Most summers I spent working to improve on my soccer and basketball game so, baseball was just a senior year type thing," he said and noted that coach Scott Reed was a mentor of his.

Earning his education wasn't easy out of the gate for Keesler following high school.

He "flunked" out of SUNY Delhi for Physical Education and admitted "flunked" is not quite accurate because he never truly attended.

"I wasn't mature enough, or ready for college," he admitted and said it's a story he often tells his students. "We can all learn from our mistakes, maybe they can learn from mine."

He went on to attend Western Governors University which is an on line institution.

"I actually worked, coached and went to college all at the same time," said Keesler. "It was really tough at times, I thought about giving up but, I knew the end goal would be worth it."

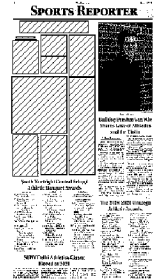
He started coaching at the varsity level in the 2014-2015 season and had the boys varsity soccer coaching job.

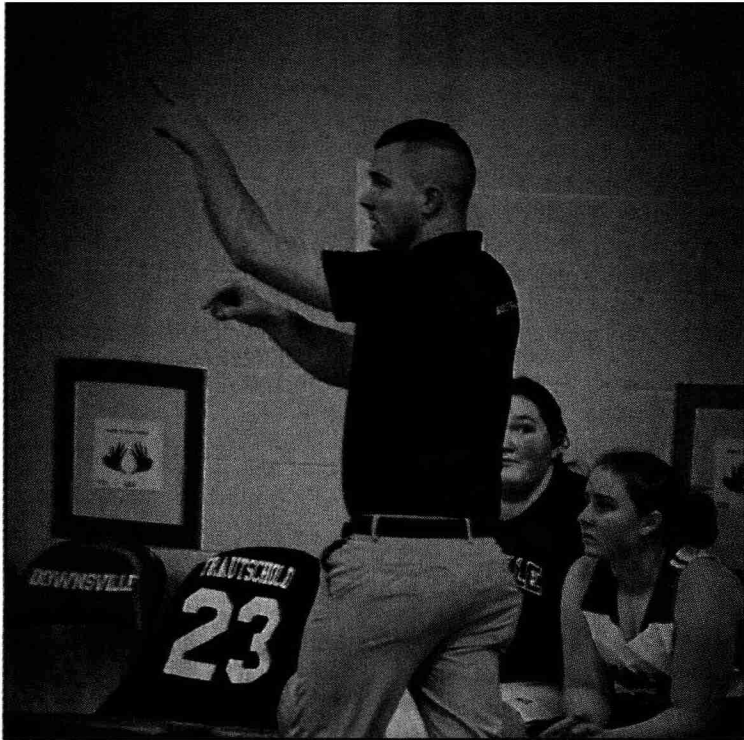
"My first year we went 11-5 and lost 5-3 to Edmeston in the

first round (they later on went to the Section Finals)," he said. "I also coached the girls varsity basketball team that year and we went 13-3. We lost to Milford after Kaileen Townsend broke her nose in the first quarter. Milford also went on to the Section Final that year. Tough draws that year for us."

He shared some of his fondest coaching memories and said there were "a lot."

"My first sectional win in soccer in 2017 was special," he said. "We weren't an overly talented team that year, we weren't even that athletic, but we were great together as a team. It was a fun year, we were very close as a group, and we started off strong and grew momentum. We traveled all the way to Southern Cayuga, it was a haul. I am surprised we came as ready to play as we did - we won our first sectional game in a long time. I can still remember how excited the kids were after the game and how good it felt. Southern Cayuga actually gave us sandwiches for the ride home and I'll never forget how generous they were. Another great moment was this year, we made (girls varsity basketball) the crossover game for the first time in almost 13 years. You could tell how badly the girls wanted it, they wanted a chance at that title. We came up short at the game, but even being there is an important part. I have had a lot of great memories, teams and players. I have been fortunate to coach at Downsville - they have been very good to me."





Dustin Keesler

Contributed Photo