

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2019

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Wagner makes a coaching change

Houghtaling out after five seasons; Masella a leading candidate

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For the Staten Island Advance

Wagner College dismissed head football coach Jason Houghtaling yesterday in the wake of the coach's fourth losing season in five years at the helm.

The school has scheduled a Monday news conference to introduce its new head coach.

Tom Masella, a Wagner College Hall of Fame player who has done two tours of duty on his alma mater's coaching staff, is believed to be the leading candidate to replace Houghtaling. Masella, a Tottenville HS product and former NYC firefighter, was the defensive coordinator this season at Bryant University, also a member of Wagner's Northeast

SEE HOUGHTALING, B3



Jason Houghtaling was dismissed as Wagner's head football coach yesterday after five seasons. *Advance photo*

Houghtaling

FROM B1

Conference.

This season, Houghtaling was the subject of an internal investigation by the school after the college's human resources department received a complaint. A lawyer retained by the family of one player said "allegations of physical and verbal abuse by the head coach have been brought to my attention."

However, Wagner athletic director Walt Hameline told the Advance yesterday that Houghtaling had been cleared of any wrongdoing in the school's probe — "Without any question," Hameline said — and that the decision to make a coaching change was based strictly on results. Houghtaling was 16-40 overall in five seasons, and 11-20 in the Northeast Conference.

"Anytime you make a change, it's always difficult," Hameline said, "and in the end, I've always said you have to do what you think is best for Wagner College and the football program.

"(The dismissal) was based on record. Bottom line. Nothing else. I can tell you he was a coach that had a great work ethic. He's great person."

"We thank Jason and his family for his service to our school and his undeniable commitment to our student-athletes. I have tremendous respect for Coach Hoss and his dedication to recruiting and developing young men of character while leading them with integrity. He has represented Wagner with dignity, class, and we wish Coach and his family the very best."

Houghtaling was the 11th head coach in program history and second in the Division I era following Hameline.

Wagner went 6-5 in 2016 in Houghtaling's only winning season. The Seahawks were 1-11 overall this year and 1-6 in the NEC.

"There's such a fine line when it comes to winning," said Hameline, who stepped down in 2014 as the school's winningest football coach. "We were a tackle away from beating Monmouth, and they won their first round (game in the NCAA playoffs). We were in so many close games, but at the end of the day, you have to win those games.

"It's the nature of the beast. You hate to say it. (Houghtaling) did all the other

things as good as anybody. Graduation rates, recruiting, the kinds of players he recruited, on campus, his relationships with all of our people. He was great. He did everything right except win enough conference games."

Among the standouts to play under Houghtaling are 2018 and 2019 NEC defensive player of the year Cam Gill — the NEC's all-time sack leader with 34 — running back Ryan Fulse, who finished the 2018 season as an Associated Press First Team All-American, and Greg Senat, who was selected by the Baltimore Ravens in the sixth round of the 2018 NFL Draft, becoming the first Seahawk in 53 years, and third all-time, to be drafted by an NFL team.