

NJ football: Plainfield names 'proven winner' Sofilkanich head coach

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Veteran mentor Don Sofilkanich, who has had tremendous success reviving football programs in urban school districts, has been named Plainfield High School's new head coach.

The Plainfield Public School District Board of Education on Tuesday night approved Sofilkanich, who will commence his 13th season as a head coach at his sixth school.



He also served as an assistant for five years under John Quinn, who is currently Plainfield's athletics director.

Sofilkanich becomes Plainfield's sixth head coach in the last decade. He inherits a program that has not enjoyed a winning season since 2005 and which has compiled a 24-46 record over the past 12 years.

"I don't know if there is a better coach in the state of New Jersey that has taken programs at inner-city type schools to new heights," New Jersey Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame mentor Marcus Borden, who coached Sofilkanich at East Brunswick, said of his former player.

Sofilkanich most recently engineered a remarkable turnaround at New Brunswick, taking over a struggling program in 2014 that posted a 2-36-1 record during the five seasons prior to his arrival, including a 26-game losing streak.

After posting 3-7 mark in his initial campaign with New Brunswick, Sofilkanich led the team to a 9-2 record and its first postseason appearance in nearly a decade.

Five New Brunswick football players earned Division I football scholarships under Sofilkanich's tutelage, the most prominent of which is 2015 Home News Tribune Offensive Player of the Year Maurice Ffrench, who is at the University of Pittsburgh.

Sofilkanich, who will remain a special education history teacher at New Brunswick, also had success turning around a once-struggling Asbury Park program. He inherited a 1-9 Asbury Park team in 2007 that went on to post a 33-3 record and claim three consecutive Central Group I championships over the next three seasons.

Renowned for building strong defenses, Sofilkanich was an assistant at New Brunswick under Quinn from 2002-06. The Zebras appeared in the playoffs during each of Sofilkanich's years with the program, finishing undefeated in 2003 for the second time in school history and the first time since 1926.

"He's a proven winner," Quinn said. "He's got a state championship pedigree going through his years as an assistant coach and going up through the ranks. He had amazing success at Asbury Park, winning three consecutive state championships, and that was a rebuild. They were kind of struggling for years. When he returned to New Brunswick, they had fallen on hard times. He immediately righted the ship and got them back in the playoffs. He was able to mentor several scholarship athletes there. He's had an amazing run as a coach, not only in terms of winning, but building programs and molding young people."

Quinn said Sofilkanich will make Plainfield's student-athletes accountable on the field, in the classroom and in the community.

A father to three daughters who compete in multiple sports, Sofilkanich resigned from New Brunswick following the 2017 campaign, telling MyCentralJersey.com at the time that he wanted to spend more time with his children.

"For 25 years I've been coaching other people's kids and I wanted the ability to see my kids play," he said in November 2017. "Maybe down the line this idea will change, but right now that's a part of it. I want to have an opportunity to see them play a little bit."

Sofilkanich said, with tongue-in-cheek, "I can only deal with so much middle school basketball," adding that he is "looking forward to getting back" to the football sidelines.

"I hope to bring stability to the program and to have an opportunity to work with some great young men," Sofilkanich said. "I hope to bring a winning atmosphere and change the culture going forward. I think it's an opportunity to be successful. It's an interesting challenge. Sometimes in life, challenges bring out the best of us."

Sofilkanich previously served as the head coach at Bishop Ahr (2011-13), Neptune (2010) and Holmdel (2006).

Sofilkanich guided Neptune to a 6-4 record and a Central Group II playoff berth. He led Holmdel to an identical mark and a share of the Shore Conference Class C South title.

Sofilkanich went 12-18 at Bishop Ahr, which was always competitive under his direction, losing seven games by a total of 21 points.

Sofilkanich graduated in 1988 from East Brunswick and later served as an assistant at his alma mater under Borden.

The two coached together at Bishop Ahr.