

# Culver enjoys life in the stands

By Alan Dale

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It has been almost a year ago to the day that Gary Culver sat in the stands of a varsity high school football game for the first time in nearly four decades.

And he kinda dug it. "I went to see my alma mater play our old rivals and hadn't had many chances to see my old high school play over the years," Culver said. "It was great just sitting back and I saw a lot of old classmates that I had an opportunity to visit with. "During the anthem I thought to myself, 'this is cool.'"

Culver didn't go to Vermillion High School's season opener at Lennox last fall, but that was because he had a chance to see his old high school, Sioux Falls East play old rivals Heelan Catholic play.

So instead of watching the Tanagers of Vermillion, a team he had led onto the varsity field for 36 years, Culver's new life began with a slight change.

So far so good as year two begins this Friday when the Tanagers play host to Lennox at the DakotaDome at 7 p.m.

Culver will now watch the first Tanager season opener in nearly four decades from the fans' section.

"Last year I told Andy (Homan) that I wasn't going to the Vermillion opener and was going to see my alma mater play,"



**CULVER**

Culver said of his conversation with the new Tanager football coach. "I got updates during the game and when they won I texted Andy and congratulated him on the win."

Culver had quite the run as the Tanagers' football coach – five state titles would attest to that. But this is more about Gary Culver the man outside of football, the game he retired from last spring.

He meant a lot to so many people, but now he means more to a small group called his family.

"It was a great change for me, I am happy that I made the decision when I did," Culver said. "I am 60 years of age and 36 years of coaching was certainly a lot of work. I am still teaching here so the kids are keeping me young at heart."

This is the man we visit with today.

(sub) Well not to fast...

A full-time football coach Culver is not and he technically isn't calling out X's and O's, but he still is involved with the sport.

He is still serving as the President of the Vermillion Youth Football Association that works with kids in grades 3-6.

"He's still running the youth program for me and he does a great job with that," second-year Vermillion head football coach Andy Homan said. "He makes me have to do one less thing. He mows and chalks the field and he does so much that without him I'd have a full plate load."

Culver is more in charge of the actual running of the organization rather than getting his hands in the turf and drawing out plays.

"I am basically coaching the coaches," Culver said. "I stay out of the X and O business. I just watch the games now. There are a lot of hours in coaching and I'm getting to the point where I like to just sit back and relax and enjoy the game."

(sub) Home sweet home

With two sons – one in seventh grade (Kobe) and a freshman now playing with the Tanagers (Brett) – Culver can now enjoy spending more time cheering on his own kids rather than others' children.

"I was missing (his sons') games and now I have that opportunity to

see all of their games," Culver said.

He was also able to have some good moments with his daughter, McKenzie, 18, who was a senior and is now attending Southeast Tech in Sioux Falls.

"I thought it was awesome," McKenzie said. "I missed him coaching, but it was nice to have him around. When he was coaching I never saw him around so I liked having him around a lot."

Gary's daughter was able to see plenty of her dad now that he had taken time away from the gridiron.

"We obviously became a lot closer being around each other a lot more," McKenzie said. "We talked more and he helped me with school and helped with a graduation party too."

"I saw a lot of stress taken off his shoulders and he was a lot more laid back and relaxed."

Kim was pleased with the family's lifestyle changes.

"It's all different to have him here more," Kim said. "What's the really nice thing is, he is here for the children and he is invested in their activities. Physically and mentally having him around now is nice."

Culver comprehended the time lost off the field once he walked away from the 100-yard distraction.

"You don't even recognize the amount of time you put in to this endeavor and it was a

passion, it still is a passion, until you are away from it," Culver said. "Coaching is one of those things that until you are away from it you don't realize how many hours it takes away from your family and your friends. That was eye opening."

"Even the dogs look forward to me because they know I am taking them for a walk. Now I am freed up after school when things pop up where it used to be on the back burner."

(sub) On the radio Culver has found other ways to stay involved with the game as he is entering his second year of doing color commentary with KVHT 106.3 radio as they broadcast University of South Dakota football games.

Culver has joined forces with Joe Van Goor to bring the Coyotes' games to Vermillion.

"I am doing the color for Coyote football games on the radio," "I get to travel with the team and it's been a great experience. I am humbled that they asked me and it just kind of fit in. They lost their color man at the time and I had just retired so they came to me and asked me."

Kim was pleased for her husband to have the opportunity.

That's pretty amazing for him since he deserves to kick back and do those types of things too," she said.

"He's pretty good and he's very professional on the radio and he did the other radio shows when he was coaching so I was used to hearing him on the radio."

"He knows what he's talking about and people like him and enjoy him and appreciate him doing that."

It must be fun for a Coyote alum like Culver to call the games and he seems to have gotten the knack for it.

"Gary and I have worked together for the radio for games for a very long time," Van Goor said. "It's great to have a coach in the booth to be able to point out the obvious things and also the little things that guys don't normally see."

"He's very consistent – not too high, not too low. He gets excited when the Coyotes make a good play. He doesn't mince words and is very forthright with his analysis."

(sub) Now and more now

"Now when my wife asks for me to grill I can do that," Culver said. "I don't have to worry about running back to the high school. I've helped more around the house."

"Summers now I don't have to worry about

lifting, the camps, and worrying about football. Now my summers are freed up. I haven't taken up the fishing or hunting like I would like to...or the golf."

He hopes to improve his golf score as his handicap hovers between 15-20. Could he get it below 10? People will find out another year from now.

"I want to increase my time on the golf course which has been nil lately," Culver said. "I'd like to get my handicap down to low double digits."

In the meantime Culver may aim to have to set a trip to Chicago and Wrigley Field after being a lifelong Cubs' fan.

He may even start training for the New York Marathon, something Kim has delved into.

But he will always be important to those close to the football program.

"It's nice to have a coach with that much experience there that I can ask any question," Homan said. "Gary's a good guy to have around. I couldn't have walked into a better situation."

*This story was one of the items you may have missed in last week's edition of the Vermillion Plain Talk. To see next week's edition of the Plain Talk subscribe today, call 605-624-2695.*

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**When: September 12th, 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM**

**Where: Vermillion Recycling Center**

**Why: To get rid of Hazardous Waste that can harm you, your family or the Environment.**

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