

Faith Grooms Rebuilds Basketball and Softball Programs at Alma Mater, East Jackson Comprehensive High School

By Catherine Eastman

At just 24 years old, Faith Grooms, a highly involved member and native of the East Jackson community has found herself back in her old stomping grounds, rotating between the basketball court and softball field at East Jackson Comprehensive High School.

The former high school dual athlete who up until the past two years held the record for the school's all-time leading scorer in basketball, has gone on to continue carrying her legacy at East Jackson.

Grooms is currently in the thick of a transition, going from completing her second softball season coaching 27 girls, to beginning an unknown territory coaching nine girls and handling the logistics of the start of the basketball season.

The motivation behind this is a saying Grooms preaches: "You don't grow where you are comfortable." These past couple of years of coaching, Grooms has been focusing on rebuilding these teams and programs in hopes of reaching a state title or being listed top four in the region.

As of October, Grooms was hired as the varsity girls' basketball head coach, replacing her former colleague and assistant coach of the softball team, Matt Allen. Allen has left the East Jackson community and begun a new opportunity as the head coach of the girls' basketball team at Alpharetta High School.

"If I didn't feel strongly that Faith would be more than capable of stepping in and continuing to build on what we started there, I probably would not have accepted this job," Allen said.

Grooms offers a unique perspective and an unbeatable strength as head coach of these two teams. Having been deeply involved in the East Jackson community her whole life, Grooms is extremely passionate, has set high standards for herself and the girls, is well-connected and determined to succeed.

"I am East Jackson through and through," Grooms said. "I love East Jackson with my whole entire heart and would give anything to the programs and to the school and to the community."

When she is not writing practice plans, scheduling games, hopping into scrimmages and analyzing competitors, Grooms is in the classroom teaching fourth graders at East Jackson Elementary School. Grooms has been a teacher at East Jackson Elementary for three years and worked with East Jackson Middle School athletics in the early stages of her career.

Her passion for coaching and teaching combined with her youthfulness and large network has given her an advantage to bond with these high school athletes. Often described as an older

sister and best friend to the players, Grooms will leave a lasting impression on these young female athletes that goes much further than the wins and losses.

"She'll be honest with you, she's funny, she will do what she can to make sure we're getting everything we need and she really cares about us," Emilou Moore, a sophomore on the girls' basketball team said.

Moore grew up attending Faith's high school basketball games because her older sister was on the same team. Even when Moore was just a young fan in the stands, Grooms developed a relationship with her and began offering her help.

"That's really my ultimate goal, creating good relationships with these girls and letting them know, yes these sports are important, but I care about you as a person beyond the four years that you're in high school," Grooms said.

Team culture is one defining aspect of growth and under Grooms' leadership, the softball team has developed a culture of acceptance, love and sisterhood.

"In the past couple of years, she's already established a great culture in her program," Allen said. "The girls love playing softball, they love each other and they love being around Faith."

Coaching softball and basketball is certainly a full-circle moment for Grooms and an incredible opportunity to continue her East Jackson legacy. Grooms plans to rebuild these programs from the ground up and create a fun and uplifting atmosphere where students can positively represent East Jackson.

"I hope that one day, she will win a state title to bring her back around to her senior year of high school," said Makenzie Wilson, a junior on the varsity softball team. "I know she can do it, she is an amazing coach and she knows everything that anyone could know and she is all about building the program."

