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## Forest Hills AD Gironda headed to Pine-Richland, Fleming fills interim role

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SIDMAN – Joe Gironda will conclude a 10-year stay as athletic director at Forest Hills High School on Wednesday and move on to hold the same role with Pine-Richland High School in District 7.

Tom Fleming, a former administrator at Richland and Bishop McCort Catholic high schools and former football coach at Greater Johnstown, will fill the Forest Hills position on an interim basis.

“It’s been a good experience all the way along,” said Gironda, who officially was approved during a Pine-Richland school board meeting on Oct. 18. “Moving from one school to the next, you learn more. I’m sure that will happen moving onto Pine-Richland as well.”

A 1994 Central Cambria High School graduate, Gironda had his start as an athletic director during a three-year stay at Conemaugh Valley High School. He then spent three years as AD at Windber High School before joining the program at Forest Hills, where the Rangers have enjoyed success in multiple sports, including team and individual championship efforts in basketball, wrestling and football.

Throughout the past decade, the school also has had major facility upgrades, with a state-of-the-art multi-sport venue for football, soccer and softball, as well as a top-notch field house and recently-turfed baseball field.

“Larry Celmer, the athletic director before me, was just so efficient and he had so much energy,” Gironda said of the former Rangers administrator. “He was just fun to follow.

“When I stepped in, everything was in line already. There was nothing really to try and fix. Just try to maintain.

“Forest Hills has always had the pride and tradition. It was an honor to be selected to the position 10 years ago. I take pride in what I do here every day.”

Gironda, 45, had a goal of joining a program in District 7, also known as the WPIAL.

“We were looking at facility upgrades at Windber when I was there, and (Pine-Richland) was one of the showcase schools we chose to attend,” Gironda said. “As soon as we got out of the van, I said, ‘Oh, my goodness. This is where I want to be someday.’”

“I’ve always wanted to be in District 7. I just feel that the WPIAL is at the forefront. They have so many schools and so many high-achieving schools, and I’ve always wanted to be a part of it.”

Pine-Richland is among the larger schools in the state according to PIAA athletic classification. The Rams play in Class 6A in boys basketball and 5A in football.

Pine-Richland has a history of success, including the 2005-06 academic year when the Rams had state champions in baseball, girls soccer, gymnastics, volleyball and hockey.

Among the notable athletic alumni are Boston College quarterback Phil Jurkovec (2018), Dallas Cowboys quarterback Ben DiNucci (2015) and former Pittsburgh Pirates infielder Neil Walker (2004).

“I’ve been at Conemaugh Valley, then to Windber and now at Forest Hills,” Gironda said. “I’ve always felt that it’s been the right move personally and professionally, and that’s where we are at Pine-Richland.”

Fleming, 60, said he will help Forest Hills fill the athletic director position until a full-time replacement is found.

“My role as the interim (athletic director) is I’m going to try to keep the train on the track and keep things moving forward,” Fleming said. “It’s a good time for me to come in. It’s in between seasons and Joe has things lined up for the winter sports and the spring as well.”

“I’m grateful for all the hard work he’s put in to have everything in place for me to fill a role where I could be here and help out Forest Hills athletics until they find a permanent athletic director.”

Fleming previously served seven years as superintendent at Richland, where he also was high school principal for three years and assistant principal for seven years.

After retiring from Richland in 2014, Fleming became the principal and chief administrative officer at Bishop McCort Catholic for five years, retiring in 2019.

He will participate in a commencement ceremony on Dec. 17 at Duquesne University, where he recently earned his doctorate.

“All of my professional career I’ve been involved in athletics or oversaw athletics in my role as principal or superintendent,” Fleming said. “I’m aware of what needs to be done and helping to set the culture. The athletic director deals in the details.”

Fleming smiled as he told a story his close friend and former Greater Johnstown AD Paul Litwalk once passed along to emphasize the importance of those details among the athletic director’s duties.

“Paul said it’s a very thankless job. You can do 100 things right, but if you forget something or something doesn’t go well that’s your responsibility, and it’s pretty glaring,” Fleming said. “He always said, ‘Nobody thanks you on a Friday night that the officials showed up, the lights worked, the scoreboard worked and the chain gang showed up. But if you misspell a name in the program, then you’re criticized.’ That’s the reality.”

*Mike Mastovich is a sports reporter and columnist for The Tribune-Democrat. He can be reached at 814-532-5083. Follow him on Twitter [@Masty81](https://twitter.com/Masty81).*

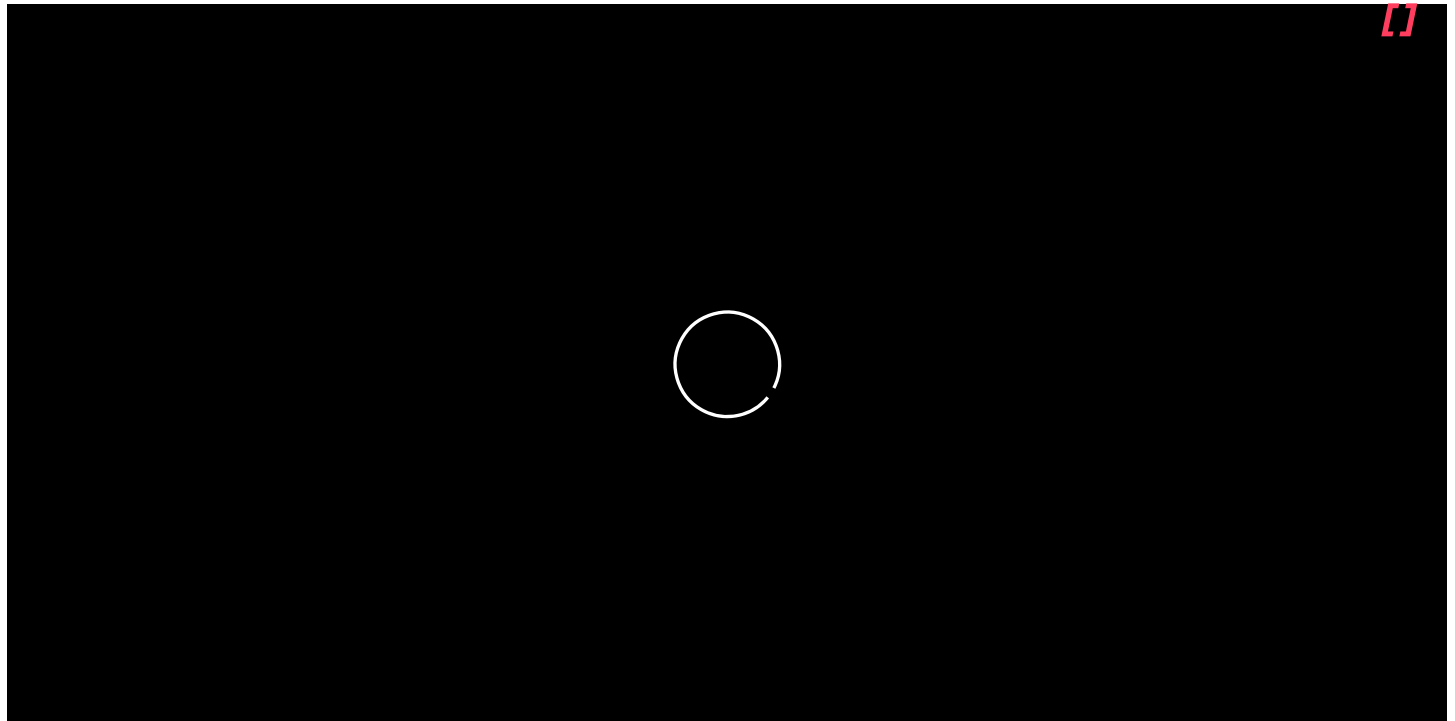
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