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## Preps

### Coaching hire ignites anger

**Families involved with the Crystal River High baseball team were excited to hear that Mike Hampton Sr. would return as head coach. Then a different man got the job.**

By DAWN REISS  
Published June 21, 2004

CRYSTAL RIVER - To say Mike Hampton Sr. is upset with Crystal River High School is an understatement. The father of Crystal River graduate and current Atlanta Braves starting pitcher Mike Hampton said he was offered and verbally accepted the Pirates head baseball coaching position - only to find out through hearsay on Thursday that the job was given to Victor Valley (Calif.) Community College head coach Nate Lambdin. "Originally I didn't want to do it," Hampton said of the baseball position. "Several parents contacted me and persuaded me to apply for the job." Hampton said he was first asked by Crystal River assistant principal Scott Meseroll if he wanted to coach the vacant softball position after Lanna Hough resigned at the end of the season.

After turning that position down, Hampton said he contacted principal Steve Myers after former Crystal River baseball head coach Robert Weiner resigned on May 12 to become the head football coach at Plant High School in Tampa.

Meseroll declined to comment during a phone conversation on Sunday.

Hampton said Myers told him the head baseball coaching position was his. "I asked Steve Myers if I could bring back (former head coach) Brent Hall as a nonpaid voluntary assistant, and he told me yes," said Hampton, who was Hall's assistant from 2001-03. Hall's contract was not renewed after the 2003 season, and the Florida High School Activities Association put the program on a one-year probation until Aug. 9.

After Myers told him Hall couldn't be part of his coaching staff, Hampton asked to have some time to decide if he wanted the head coaching position. A few days passed. On June 10, Kevin Schrantz, father of Pirates first baseman Matt Schrantz, said he called Hampton at

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his vacation home in Destin.

Schrantz said he had planned to surprise Hampton at his vacation home and try to convince him to take the job, but decided that was overkill. So he called.

"I got him on the phone (and said), "Mike, you're lucky, because I was going to take five kids up there,'" Schrantz recalled. "I was going to knock on your door and you wouldn't have known I was coming; I was going to show these kids that need you, Mike, they need you more than anybody in their baseball lives and I'm asking you to reconsider and take the job."

Schrantz said Hampton thanked him.

"Kevin, you've done so much for my family only because you are asking, you call Mr. Myers and tell him I've changed my mind."

After ending the phone conversation, Schrantz immediately called Myers on his cell phone.

"When he answered the phone, he was very gracious, very appreciative and he thanked me for calling him," Schrantz said. "Mr. Myers said Mike Hampton was the coach he wanted all along. He said, "You tell Mike to give me a call and it's his job if he wants it,'" Schrantz recalled.

After feeling confident he could put together a strong supporting coaching staff, Hampton said he called Myers to accept the head coaching position.

"Myers said he'd love to have me coach, that I was the guy he had wanted all along," Hampton said. "He said that a guy was coming in from California (Nate Lambdin) but it was a mere formality." Hampton said he then asked if he should officially apply for the baseball coaching position. Myers told him no.

That was the last Hampton heard from Myers until rumors started flying about the hiring of Lambdin. On Thursday, Hampton said he called Myers about the job only to be informed the position had been offered to Lambdin. "It kind of shocked me," Hampton said. "Myers never notified me, and he had my cell. He said he was blown away with the guy he brought in.

"I can't deny Crystal River that. I know nothing about the guy. I wouldn't have such a problem had Myers called to tell me, rather than having me call him after I heard it on the street. "I hate to say it, but I can't believe he wasn't man enough to call me," Hampton continued. "I'm just numb, and my pride is a little hurt. When (former Crystal River principal) Mr. (Craig) Marlett told you something, you could take it to the bank. He stood behind his word. But after three years of working with Mr. Myers, if you take it to the bank, you'll find it's been robbed. "I'll never trust him again. He doesn't care about the kids. I don't think there will ever be another Hampton attending Crystal River as long as Myers is there."

The Times left several messages for Myers on Saturday and Sunday on his work and cell phone numbers. He could not be reached for

comment.

Crystal River athletic director Earl Bramlett said he didn't know anything about Myers interviewing or offering the head baseball position to Hampton.

"I have no idea," Bramlett said. "I never negotiated or talked to Mike Hampton about this particular baseball position. If someone else did, I don't know anything about it.

**"In the past three years that Mr. Myers has been here, I've always been involved and we have discussed and come to a mutual agreement when we hire a coach."**

Sometimes the best person athletically is not the best person academically. It is a school."

Schrantz is still upset.

"I went out of my way to tell the (Crystal River baseball) parents and kids that I feel vindicated that Steve (Myers) understood what these kids needed and he would hire Mike Hampton back here," Schrantz said. "Every parent I talked to was beside themselves with glee that their boys were going to get Mike Hampton back as their coach."

So at 4 p.m. on Thursday, Schrantz decided to call Myers again. "He said, "Oh yeah, yeah, we hired the guy from California," Schrantz said about his conversation with Myers. "You'll love him. He's really strong." I said, I'm not going to love anybody, Steve. You lied to me. Because you lied to me, I lied to the kids and you made a fool out of me. His response was "I'm sorry you feel that way." Inverness lawyer Rob Cummins, father of third baseman R.J. Cummins, said he and several other parents complained when Hampton was not hired last year. "Steve Myers told me that none of your guys (parents) expressed interest in coaching, so we had to look elsewhere," Cummins said.

"We didn't give him that option this year. I even offered to coach, to change professions so to speak, and not practice law for four months and coach instead. But I heard that Myers had promised the job and offered the job to Mike Hampton, and the rest of us backed off. If he denies it, then he's a liar. It's just a big coverup for their (the school's) inaction."

Lambdin, the new Crystal River baseball coach, said he is aware that Crystal River was put on probation, but he is looking forward to the challenge.

"Does that scare me away?" said Lambdin, who says he will coach at Crystal River if he can sell his house in California. "No. My job is to coach baseball and teach English. The things outside of that are out of my control. I've always been the type of coach players respect. I work with my players. That's all I can do."

Although there has been some question about whether Lambdin officially accepted the position or not, Bramlett said Lambdin has put his California home on the market and will be coming back to Crystal River next week to look for a new home. When asked why he would

give up a head junior college coaching position in Victor Valley, Calif. Lambdin said he was ready for a change. "It's the geographic area that I'm most attracted to," said Lambdin, who lives in Hesperia, Calif., which is approximately 80 miles northeast of Los Angeles in the desert. "The prices here are outrageous. We bought a quarter-million home that two weeks later had graffiti on the walls. On every corner there is graffiti and it's not a bad area. I have a problem with raising kids in this area."

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