

Ending the revolving door of coaches

Athletic department gets infusion of first-year coaches it hopes are here to stay

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One thing Emerson is not known for is athletics.

It often seems that the coaches have just as little interest as the students. Teams have a new coach every few seasons. Is this a possible reason why some of the programs are not as strong as they could be?

This year, the Athletic Department is home to three new coaches. Graham Stafford took over the men's soccer team from Henry Francillon, Susan Costello replaced Vicki Lawrence as head volleyball coach, and Dan Papile stepped up from assistant to take over for Richard Kelly as head coach of the women's basketball team.

A large factor in the lack of coach longevity at Emerson is the tight budget, according to Athletic Director Rick Bagby.

"The majority of coaches are part-timers," he said. "We can't afford to have coaches full time."

Only five full-time employees, who also double as coaches for a few teams, staff the Athletic Department. They are Bagby (athletic director, golf and lacrosse coach), Christian Elias (information director and baseball coach), Hank Smith (recruiting coordinator and men's basketball), John Hoffman (assistant intramural director and women's softball) and Kristen Parnell (SWA and women's soccer).

The rest of the coaches are part-time employees who receive a stipend of a few thousand dollars.

Another large factor in the lack of commitment from the coaches is the fact that Emerson does not have any of its own athletic facilities.

"Logistics has something to do with it," Bagby said. "It's a very difficult place to get to. Our coaches have to come here and then transport the team to practice."

Papile agreed that location could be a factor in coaches leaving.

“We have to get city people,” he said. “Coaches don’t want to travel in and out of the city.”

Bagby notes that coaches leaving will continue to be a problem until Emerson has more to offer in its athletic program, but he does commend the job of the coaches over the last four years since he became athletic director.

“The coaches have done a phenomenal job,” he said. “When we took over four years ago, we had a .270 win percentage and last year we won .595. That’s almost unheard of.”

Costello did a good job with the volleyball team last season.

She inherited a team with a 7-11 overall record (3-7 in the GNAC) with only three returning players.

Even for a returning coach, this makes for a difficult season, but Costello’s team ended its season with a 6-10 overall record (2-8 in the GNAC).

Costello thinks that having so many new players and a new coach made the adjustment easy for the team.

“Everything was so new,” she said. “It was tough to judge, but they adjusted well by the end of the season. Overall they did a great job getting to know my coaching style.”

Costello was hired as the fitness manager at the Fitness Center just before school started and interviewed for the coaching position at the same time.

Lawrence decided not to return to coaching during the summer because of her commitments to her schoolwork. Costello plans to return to her position as coach in the fall.

Papile did not have to go through the same process as Costello. When Kelly announced he was leaving, Papile was next in line for the head coach position.

The women’s basketball team was 15-9 last year, and is off to a good start this year with a record of 2-1 so far.

Papile’s team consists of seven returners and six new players. He thinks that the balance of old and new is working for the team.

“Everybody is getting along really well,” he said.

Papile had been Kelly’s assistant for the four years that he was head coach, so he was familiar with his coaching style and has tried to keep some of the same techniques.

“I’ve kept some of the same philosophy,” he said. “We’ve changed a little bit offensively, but it has been a pretty easy adjustment.”

Stafford heard about the open position as men’s soccer coach from a player on the women’s squad who attended one of the soccer camps where Stafford worked.

The team had a successful season last year under Francillon, ending up with an 8-7-2 record.

But, after losing 14 players, the team did not have as good a season this year, ending at 6-10. Only six players returned this season to be joined by eight newcomers. Having a team of only 14 was also a problem for the team, which had 22 players last year.

The men’s soccer team may have been a bit worried at first about its new coach, but by the middle of the season, the players really felt comfortable with him.

“Graham challenged them more,” Bagby said. “He is more of a motivator and the kids appreciated that.”

Stafford stressed the importance of recruiting as part of a job of new coaches.

“I’ve been recruiting,” he said. “It doesn’t matter how great of a coach you are, if you don’t have the players, you can’t win.”