

I still remember my first semester at Buffalo State. I walked onto campus and into the men's soccer team in 1991. After four years as a player and another four as an assistant coach for the men's team, I was offered the position of head coach for the women's soccer program in 2002. I was hired to turn the program around and to change the culture, and I am pleased and proud to tell you that we did just that. 2021 marks the end of thirty years as a Bengal, and in that time the women's soccer program has grown from wondering if we could field 11 players to being a competitive force in every game.

Many people have asked me why I decided to coach "women" and my answer has always been the same. I don't coach women, I coach soccer. It has always been my policy to treat all of my players equally, regardless of their gender. I treat them professionally and hold them to high standards. Anything less would be disrespectful to my players, the team, and to the game of soccer.

In terms of my leadership style, I am always honest and up front with my evaluations and assessments. My communication is direct and to the point, and the onus is on each player to use my critiques for their own development. In my view, players want real feedback in order to improve. I do not patronize nor do I deliver false praise because frankly, players know better. I also believe that a strong team wants discipline and that discipline is an expression of respect and love for the game and the players. I care about my players and how they behave because soccer is a reflection of life. I hold high standards for my players because I want them to be ready for the challenges they will experience in the real world.

One of the most important hallmarks of our program has also been accountability, for players and coaches alike. When I make a mistake, I own it. And it is my expectation that my players do the same. Each player and the team as a whole are responsible for our collective performance and it is the responsibility of each player to develop and improve year on year in order to contribute. That kind of introspection can be a challenge for every player, but it is in that kind of competitive environment that our toughness and grit have always been forged. I am so proud of the team culture that we have created during my tenure and I am confident that the players who have come through the program have used their experience here for the greater good in life away from the game. Sports teach life lessons.....it is not just about winning or losing, playing time or being on the bench, receiving an award or cheering on others who do....it's about learning to deal with success and failure, accepting constructive criticism to become a better player and person, and learning to win with class and lose with grace.

I am sure that if you asked any Alumni of our program about what they learned while playing here you would get a variety of answers, but one rule that stands out for me today is about leaving a place better than the way you found it. When reflecting on my time as the head coach, I consider that a job well done. Nine playoff appearances, five semi-finals, two finals, two regular season championships, first league title and first NCAA appearance. Fifty-three seats on SUNYAC All-Conference teams, a SUNYAC Player of the Year, Offensive Player of the Year, Defensive Player of the Year, Rookie of the Year, three-time SUNYAC Coach of the Year (well taken), four players named to the All-Decade SUNYAC team, five All-East Regional Players, and the program's first All-American. When I look over the record book, we have together rewritten almost every record, including all-time leader in goals, assists, shots, wins, win streak, shutouts and more. We have even seated Buffalo State Sports Hall of Fame players and I expect several more in the coming years. Beyond all of the athletic achievements are the myriad of academic achievements, including two SUNY Chancellor Award winners and ten All-Academic Teams. Well taken.

While I take with me so many great memories on the field and feel a great sense of accomplishment, the most important things have always happened away from the game. Our Alumni have moved on from the

program to become great people with strong values and integrity. My former players know what it means to sacrifice. They developed integrity, discipline and determination. Those are the benefits of hard work, commitment and dedication to a cause bigger than yourself. That is what it means to be part of a team and to put the needs of the many over the needs of the few or the one.

I would be remiss if I did not also take this opportunity to say thank you to a great many people. First, none of this would be possible without Jerry Boyes. His vision for Buffalo State Athletics was clear and decisive, and he was directly responsible for the success of our program. He was also a mentor to me personally, guiding me through highs and lows, and allowing me room to grow and learn. His influence on my coaching philosophy cannot be overstated. Gail Maloney also played a pivotal role in not only starting the women's soccer program, but teaching me about what it takes to be successful in the early days of my career. Thank you to Sean Roberts and all of the trainers who have helped our team stay healthy and safe through the years. Thank you to the entire Athletics team, contributions big and small. To my friend and Shifu Kevin Cunningham of KC's Fitness, I thank you for 20 plus years of lessons and inspiration. To Joe Machnik and the No.1 Soccer Camps family, you gave me my start and taught me so much about the game. And of course to my friends and family who have supported and loved me unconditionally.

Of course no team is complete without a great coaching staff and we have had some amazing people with us over the years. Thank you to Paula Sinclair, Larry Higley, Karen Lawton, Carrie Leardini, Mike Idland, Lew Potter, Dave Mathews, Kristy Tartaglia, Chris Hershey, Mindy Brant, Meg Kiliszek, Brian Knapp, Meghan Sleezer, Francesco Cardillo, Kelsey Ferguson, Matt and Ken Andrews, Ryan Louis, Meghan Allen, Kailee DeFranks and of course my ace, Victoria Colotti. And to my first assistant and mentor who has been with me through it all, there are no words to express my gratitude to Ken Voght, without whom I would not be the person I am today.

As for the Buffalo State Alumni, I owe everything to you. You put in the all the work. You played the games and gave everything for the team. You suffered and you stuck with it, through victory and defeat, and you deserve all the credit. I give you my eternal gratitude. Should you ever need me for anything, even now, I will be there for you. Just ask. And that is a promise for life.

As for the new coach, I wish you and all the players great happiness and success. Be true to yourself and never give up. I'll be rooting for you. GO BENGALS!

Coach Nick