

Muhl found a home at Kirkwood - and 700 wins

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 26 January 2013 20:50 -

Kim Muhl wasn't sure what he wanted to do as a young man.

He spent three years in the Army, then enrolled in college but left William Penn University during his senior year without a degree. Looking for an adventure, he moved to California with an Army buddy.

"I painted and steam-cleaned apartments and made more money than you can imagine," he said about his trip to the West Coast. "Just had a blast."

It took a few more years, but Muhl eventually found a home at Kirkwood Community College and found his calling as one of the most successful women's basketball coaches in the nation.

He added to his glittering list of accomplishments Saturday when the Eagles traveled to Creston and drubbed Southwestern Community College, 99-40, for the 700th victory of his career.

Muhl, 57, has won six NJCAA Division II national titles at Kirkwood and has an overall mark of 700-126 in 24 years, putting him sixth on the all-time list among junior college coaches.

His teams won 106 straight conference games from 2006 to 2011, he's produced 19 All-Americans and he's compiled an eye-popping 297-25 mark in home games. He's lost 25 home games in 24 years.

Muhl's graduates have played at Iowa, Iowa State, Northern Iowa, Oregon, South Florida, Drake, Illinois State, Missouri State, St. John's, Stetson and Marquette. He's sent numerous others to Division II and NAIA schools.

His glorious career began humbly in 1989 with few expectations.

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"Eight kids. One van. No assistant coach," he recalled Thursday of that first campaign in 1989-90.

Despite the limitations, he thought it was a good deal. "I was so new and so young and stupid, I didn't know," he said, relaxing in his office at Johnson Hall.

Muhl returned to William Penn after his apartment-cleaning days in California, rejoined the men's basketball team as a point guard and graduated in 1981 with a bachelor's degree in education.

He worked as an admissions counselor at William Penn and coached the track team, then taught and coached in Ohio for awhile. He got his master's degree in education from Cumberland College in Kentucky in 1987.

Muhl, originally from Lost Nation, returned to Iowa and worked at Norway High School for a year as a physical education teacher, girls basketball coach and baseball coach.

He applied for the men's basketball job in 1989 at Kirkwood, but the post went to Ted Oglesby. Instead of coaching the men, Muhl was offered the women's basketball job at Kirkwood and accepted.

He's been there ever since, and now only five people have won more games as a junior college women's basketball coach in the history of the sport.

As you can judge from his earlier wanderings, coaching women's basketball was not his lifelong goal as a young man. "No," he affirmed. "It just kind of presented itself."

Kirkwood made the national tournament his first year despite having only those eight players,

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no van and no assistants. "It was the first time they ever made it," he noted. "That was pretty cool."

That was just the beginning. The Eagles won national titles in 1997, 2002, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 and could be in contention again this year.

The string of four straight NJCAA titles stamped Muhl as one of the best in the business. "Coaching is coaching," he shrugged. "You happen to be in the right spot at the right time and it works."

"I just know one thing: If you're happy with what you're doing, the grass may look a little greener on the other side, but it's not so bad where you're at."

"This is a good job."

Muhl does not want to coach forever, though. The national record for most victories by a women's junior college basketball coach is 971, but he's not obsessed with sticking around long to break the mark or reach 1,000 wins.

"If I win the lottery tomorrow, trust me, I'm not coaching here next year," he maintained.

"When it's all said and done, it's just a game. I'm thinking maybe five more years. And maybe longer. But right now I'm thinking five."

Muhl said he doesn't care about 1,000 wins, but does care about winning championships. "I'd love to have another national title," he said. "You have to get a lot of breaks in that stuff."

Muhl has team pictures of all six of his national championship teams on the top shelf of his

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office. He can recite the names of every player on all six of those clubs and where they went to school after finishing at Kirkwood.

He's especially fond of his 2009 national champs. Nine women from that team went on to play NCAA Division I basketball.

"They were not cocky, they were not arrogant, they didn't care who scored. That's why I loved that group," he said.

"I don't like selfish people," he said. "It's a team game. If you want to be selfish, go play tennis or do something else by yourself.

"I want kids who want to play hard, they want to go to the next step in their career. I think that's really important for them. And buy into what we're doing."

Muhl said he's been fortunate to have top-notch assistant coaches at Kirkwood. Joe Hruska has been by his side for 22 years. Jen Francescon, a former Kirkwood player, is in her fifth season with the Eagles.

Kirkwood, ranked No.3 in the country, raised its records to 19-3 overall and 8-0 in the conference Saturday with its 59-point victory against winless Southwestern (0-20, 0-7).

"It's crazy," said Muhl. "With this group, we're dysfunctional, but we win."

Kirkwood hosts DMACC Wednesday night at 5:30, when Muhl will be aiming for victory No.701.

KIRKWOOD (99): Fallon 4 1-1 11, Hobbs 6 2-2 17, Dufelmeier 7 0-0 20, Gray 1 0-0 2, Jacobs 5 4-5 14, Rohrbach 6 0-1 15, Fitzpatrick 2 0-0 5, Faber 3 0-0 6, Henderson 0 0-0 0, Tow 1 1-2 3, Chuol 3 0-0 6. Totals 38 8-11 99.

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SOUTHWESTERN (40): Folkerts 5 0-0 12, Zimmerman 0 0-2 0, Knorr 2 0-0 5, Stumpf 1 0-0 2, Clark 0 1-2 1, Williams 0 2-4 2, Polson 2 1-2 5, Miner 6 0-1 12, Knight 0 1-2 1. Totals 16 5-13 40.

Halftime - Kirkwood 51, Southwestern 26. 3-point goals - Kirkwood 15 (Dufelmeier 6, Hobbs 3, Rohrbach 3, Fallon 2, Fitzpatrick 1), Southwestern 3 (Folkers 2, Knorr 1).