



FULL CIRCLE

SIX YEARS AFTER GRADUATING FROM MIDDLEBURY, DAVE CAMPBELL TAKES OVER AS HEAD COACH

By Jonathan L. Brand

The first time Dave Campbell was offered a coaching position at Middlebury, he was still enrolled at the small Vermont college.

Over the summer of 1999, merely a few months before the season in which Campbell captained the Panthers to their first-ever national championship, he received a call from head coach Erin Quinn. Quinn had convinced the college to create an ad hoc post-graduate coaching position for Campbell and wondered if he was interested.

"I hadn't seriously considered coaching until Coach Quinn asked me to come to Middlebury," says Campbell. "At the time I still wasn't sure. I told him I'd let him know."

He eventually resolved to take the position, which led to an assistant job at Notre Dame and then the head gig at Connecticut College in 2004.

This July he was offered another coaching position at Middlebury — by the same guy — and this time he did not demur. The 27-year-old former two-time All-American goalie became the 10th head coach at his alma mater, succeeding Quinn, who retired to become

the college's athletic director.

Campbell's coaching and playing experience at Middlebury definitely helped the young coach land the job, which is considered one of the more desirable positions in lacrosse thanks to DI-caliber facilities and a positive relationship with the administration.

"There's a familiarity with the program, a respect for players and a love for Middlebury that they find refreshingly familiar," says Quinn, who turned the Panthers into a national power that won three straight NCAA Division III titles (2000-2002). "They won't be starting from scratch."

Campbell may only have graduated from college six years ago, but he's earned a great deal of coaching experience since. After two seasons as an assistant under Quinn, he spent two with Notre Dame, helping the Irish to two Great Western Lacrosse League titles. But after two successful seasons in DI, Campbell was ready to ply his trade in the more familiar DIII environment: "I knew I wanted to get back," he says.

Opportunity knocked in the spring of 2003. Connecticut College coach Fran Shields was leaving to become athletic director, so Campbell applied for the

Twenty-six-year-old Dave Campbell takes over what some see as one of lacrosse's most desirable coaching jobs.

position, and he was hired in June.

He returned to the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESAC) ready to make an impact. This time, however, he was affiliated with a program opposite the spectrum from Middlebury.

As the Panthers reeled off league championships, Campbell's Camels struggled to find their place in DIII's most competitive conference. The squad advanced to the NESAC playoffs during his first two years, but this spring, even with what Campbell calls his "strongest team in three years," the Camels fell short of the NCAA Tournament.

"Coaching at Connecticut made me appreciate what Erin has been able to do over the years in terms of consistency of the [Middlebury] program," says Campbell, who was 18-27 during his tenure as the Camels' head coach.

Says Quinn: "He was patient down there. He always kept his feet on the ground, whether they were winning or losing."

Campbell's level-headed approach has been influenced considerably by Quinn. Still, Quinn did not want to "fall into the trap of only liking clones of [himself]" and formed a search committee (a mélange of professors, admissions officers, deans and coaches) to

help select a person that would share what Quinn considered "NESAC and Middlebury ideals."

They interviewed candidates from outside of Middlebury and other alumni, but at the end they wanted Campbell, a candidate with extensive knowledge of both the school and the conference.

With increased parity in the NESAC (Middlebury won its sixth straight league title last spring with only one loss but it did have to win three overtime games in the process) and DIII (the Panthers last season failed to advance to the NCAA Semifinals for the first time since 1998), the need to make a smooth coaching transition is vital.

Campbell has plenty of talent in guys like All-American junior attackman Jim Cabrera, who led the team in goals last year with 43, and seniors Nick Bastis (attack), Peter Mellon (face-off) and Alex Palmisano (goalie), but the Panthers graduated three All-Americans (defenseman Gabe Wood, attackman Henry Sheehan and middle Aaron Herter).

"It is clear that everyone is excited about having Dave as a coach," says Cabrera. "He played for Coach Quinn, which means he is familiar with success, and that only means positive things for our program."

YOUTHFUL EXUBERANCE

Notable DI and DIII head coaches under 30

James Simpson,
Marist (24)

An '04 Salisbury grad, Simpson took over a month before last season, and then coached the Red Foxes to a 6-9 record and the MAAC Semifinals.

Jeff Shirk,
VMI (28)

The '01 Maryland grad and former d-middle previously worked at Brown and Maryland as an assistant before taking over the Keydets this year. He also led Navy Prep and has played in the NLL.

Ryan Curtis,
Vermont (28)

The former NCAA Defenseman of the Year and Team USA member served as an assistant at Dartmouth before taking the Vermont position this fall. He's an '00 Virginia graduate.

Jack Sandler,
Skidmore (26)

He led Skidmore to a 6-7 record in 2006, his inaugural season as head coach. Also served as an assistant at Dickinson College and Bates, where he graduated in 2002.

Peter Toner,
Wheaton (25)

The '03 Springfield grad led Lyons to a 9-7-1 record and a third-place finish in the Pilgrim League last year.

Jon Hunt,
University of
New England (28)

Hunt won five games with the Nor'easters in '06, the highest winning total for the school in 10 years. He's an '00 Plymouth State grad and former assistant at Colby and Quinnipiac.