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Commish comes home: GLVC's Naumovich has come long way

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It might come as a surprise to many of the Great Lakes Valley Conference's 3,500 student-athletes that their league commissioner was in a band in high school and college.

Jim Naumovich, a Springfield native, wasn't some tattooed frontman for a wild rock band. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he was the lead singer and played trumpet and trombone for St. Croix, a seven-person cover band that wore suits to many of its gigs.

"The music ranged from Chicago, the Commodores, Beach Boys, Doobie Brothers to Head East," he said. "We played proms, wedding receptions and anniversary gigs. We played the Illinois State Fair on the Lincoln Stage and Illinois Building."

Naumovich, who is one of 10 children, grew up in the north-end neighborhood of Indian Hills in Springfield and graduated from Griffin High School in 1981. The majority of his bandmates attended Griffin, too.

"He was the most fun to be around in the band because he was always in a positive mood," said St. Croix guitarist and Griffin graduate Kraig Catton, who owns a production company in Lake Tahoe, Nev. "He was very good at staying positive and smoothing things out if it got stinky."

"He carried himself as natural and confident, and everyone enjoyed his company. He was smart, respectful of others and tremendously comfortable both within and in front of a crowd, which made him a superb frontman."

Conference frontman

The 47-year-old Naumovich is now the face of the GLVC and has served as commissioner since 2000. He is back in his hometown this weekend for the GLVC basketball championships at the University of Illinois Springfield. The title games of the men's and women's conference tournament are today at The Recreation and Athletic Center.

Naumovich, the longest serving commissioner in conference history, oversees a 32-year-old league made up of 15 schools (soon to be 16 with the addition of William Jewell later this year) located in Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, Wisconsin and Illinois. The league sponsors 17 sports.

The GLVC is one of the largest conferences in NCAA Division II and has one of the smallest staffs. This requires Naumovich to have a hands-on approach. He doesn't have an administrative assistant. He was a one-man show when he first took the job. The staff has since grown to include two full-time staffers and a full-time intern.

By comparison, the Division I Horizon League occupies nearby office space in the same building in downtown Indianapolis as the GLVC. The Horizon League has 10 schools and Naumovich estimates 12 to 15 employees.

"He's very hands on out of necessity, but not only out of necessity," said Tom Daeger, the GLVC associate commissioner. "It's out of willingness and eagerness to do so."

No task is too large or too small for Naumovich.

"Nobody is above packing the car or hanging banners," he said. "When I'm at a championship event, I want a student-athlete to see me hanging a banner and getting ready for a championship because we're here for them."

"That goes back to my days at Quincy. That's what we had to do to get the job done. We didn't have a lot of help."

Volunteering his services at Quincy led to a career in athletic administration.

"When I was in school, I thought maybe I would go the route of broadcast and do play-by-play," said Naumovich, who majored in communications. "I had the opportunity to do some of that at Quincy and really enjoyed it."

Humble beginning

In 1987, Naumovich was Quincy's alumni director and volunteered as a public address announcer at sporting events. As Quincy prepared to host the NCAA Division II softball finals that year, Naumovich offered to help in any capacity that was needed.

"The athletic director dropped a huge file on my desk and said, 'You are the tournament director,'" Naumovich said. "I had never done anything like that. I had no idea. That was a great learning experience. It went off and was very well received. That led me to start thinking that athletic administration is an area I want to pursue."

He later became athletic director and sports information director at Quincy. After 15 years at Quincy, he became the GLVC commissioner. Under his watch, the league has grown from 11 schools to 16. One of the newest is the UIS, which is in its first year of membership.

This time of the year often is the busiest for Naumovich.

"I make campus visits between January and March and meet with the chancellor, president, (faculty athletic representative), athletic director and coaches," said Naumovich, who attempts to attend all championship events. "I make visits in conjunction with basketball games, so I can see games. By the time it gets to be May, I will have been at 11 of the 15 schools in one capacity or another whether it's a championship, a campus visit or some other meeting."

As commissioner, Naumovich is basically on call 24 hours a day. Things slow down during the summer months because there are no sporting competitions. During this downtime, Naumovich plays golf and slow-pitch softball and spends time with his wife, Carolyn, and their four children, Meg, 16, Colleen, 15, Drew, 13 and Jack, 8.

The summer of 2010 should bring something extra special. A band reunion is in the works.

Marcia Martinez can be reached at 788-1547.

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I went to Griffin and to Quincy with Jim. I remember the dances in the Griffin High School cafeteria. I don't remember all the band members, but the lead female singer could really do a good rendition of 'Last Dance'. The band had some real talent and so did Jim as an individual. Glad to see Jim has maintained his success, and my best wishes to him and Carolyn and the kids. From a fellow GHS and QC/QU alum. Congrats, Jim.

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