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New-look UIS basketball team starts practice today

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University of Illinois Springfield Prairie Stars coach Ben Wierzba is counting down the hours to the first day of men's basketball practice.

The first-year coach is just as excited as his players. They don't have long to wait. The season officially gets under way today at 10:15 a.m.

"They're excited," Wierzba said. "We've had a good month. I've been here about four or five weeks and they've had good attitudes every day (in individual workouts)."

This is Wierzba's first head coaching job. The former University of Evansville assistant is working with a team made up of a large number of new players.

"The next challenge is getting in there as a team and practicing together as a team," Wierzba said.

Wierzba replaced Kevin Gamble, who resigned to become director of player development at Division I Providence College. Gamble was 130-79 in eight seasons as UIS coach, including 11-13 last season.

Double duty for Mead

Matt Mead hasn't skipped a beat as he has switched hats from coaching the Robert Morris University Eagles softball team this fall to coaching the RMU women's basketball team.

Mead, who's in his second season as basketball coach, has replaced former softball coach Ron Ferrill this school year.

Ferrill resigned and accepted the same position at St. Ambrose after leading the Eagles to the United States Collegiate Athletic Association national title in the spring.

RMU wrapped up its 15-game fall softball schedule at the same time that women's basketball season started. Mead split his time between two practices, student teaching and finishing up his degree from Benedictine University at Springfield.

Mead started his career coaching his sister's softball team.

"I'm thrilled to be back in softball," he said.

Cass Gym update

The improvements to Lincoln Land Community College's Cass Gymnasium will take longer than expected.

Installation of new lighting and bleachers has been pushed back. The lighting will be replaced in May, according to LLCC athletic director Ron Riggle. The bleacher upgrades will happen later.

One project was completed when the floor was resealed and painted in the summer. Construction of new locker rooms for the baseball and soccer teams should be done by December.

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