

Eck says he'll retire after UIS' season

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Joe Eck is retiring as the University of Illinois Springfield men's soccer coach at the end of this season, leaving a program he has been a part of since 1979.

Eck announced Thursday he's stepping down after eight seasons as head coach.

He's leaving the coaching ranks, but not college soccer. Both of his children will play for NCAA Division I soccer programs next year and he doesn't want to miss out on their college experiences.

Eck's daughter, Ashley, is a sophomore starter at Eastern Illinois University. His son, Addison, is a Sacred Heart-Griffin High School senior who has committed to Drake University.

"My family has worked their schedules around my soccer schedule for the past 30-something years," Eck said. "I think it's time for me to work my schedule around my family's schedule.

"I'm missing a lot and family comes first."

For 31 seasons, Eck has been a member of the UIS soccer family. He was an assistant coach to Aydin Gonulsen from 1979 to 2001, when Gonulsen retired.

Eck led UIS to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics National Tournament in 2002, his first season as head coach.

"We won the (NAIA Region VII) semifinals in Wisconsin against Judson in a close match in overtime, then beat Grand View 2-0 in the championship game," he said. "I thought we played really well to get us to the national tournament."

In 2003, the Stars defeated NAIA power Lindsey Wilson twice.

"We beat them 4-3 at Lindsey Wilson and beat them at our place 3-2 on my daughter's birthday," he said.

Last year's 3-2 win over Hannibal-LaGrange also stands out.

"We defeated Hannibal-LaGrange, and they hadn't given up a goal all year and they were ranked in the country," Eck said.

Changing times

Eck's coaching record over eight seasons is 69-55-13. The Prairie Stars are 1-7-1 in their first season playing at the NCAA Division II level.

That's one of many changes Eck has witnessed while coaching the Stars. In addition to the move from the NAIA, UIS changed its name from Sangamon State University and became a four-year university. There are other differences specific to soccer.

"The soccer had gotten more physical and the American soccer player definitely has become much better," Eck said. "You see it across the board. Most of the best teams in college soccer with the exception of a few were dominated by international players. In the early days, usually your goal scorers in the early 1980s were international players.

"Starting in the late '80s, we had some American players that were goal scorers like Mark Moser and John Krohe."

A more recent change also comes to mind.

"We don't have the budget we had in the past and out-of-state tuition is 2½ times greater than tuition for in-state students," Eck said. "We aren't recruiting the out-of-state players, especially from the St. Louis area, as we had in the past. The makeup of the team is almost exclusively Illinois residents."

Eck is keeping his job at UIS with facility services as the assistant director for planning. The process to replace him as coach is under way. UIS athletic

director Rodger Jehlicka said he already has started the paperwork. He would like to have a new coach by December.

Marcia Martinez can be reached at 788-1547.

Year-by-year record

Joe Eck's record to date as UIS men's soccer head coach:

2009 — 1-7-1

2008 — 10-5-3

2007 — 11-9-1

2006 — 8-6-3

2005 — 7-8-3

2004 — 8-7-1

2003 — 13-6

2002 — 11-7-1

Total: 69-55-13

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