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SJR 3/28/02



Ted Schurter/The State Journal-Register

University of Illinois at Springfield athletic director designate Nick Adams, right, announces Kevin Gamble as the school's first men's basketball coach Wednesday just minutes after Adams was named to his position by UIS Chancellor Richard Ringeisen, left.

SJR
3/28/02

UIS takes a Gamble

By HAL PILGER
STAFF WRITER

History was made three ways Wednesday when the University of Illinois at Springfield announced its first full-time athletic director, the formation of a men's basketball team to begin play in the fall and the first coach of that team.

One of the first orders of business for new UIS athletic director Nick Adams was to introduce former Lanphier High School, University of Iowa and NBA star Kevin Gamble as coach of the school's first men's basketball team.

Gamble, who led Lanphier to the Class AA state basketball championship in 1983 and played with the Boston Celtics from 1988 until 1994, said the coaching job is something he has wanted to do for a long time.

"I'm excited about the opportunity to start basketball here, and I'm grateful for the opportunity," said Gamble, who expects to begin working immediately with Adams on the tasks of recruiting players, scheduling games and finding a possible conference affiliation.

"I know basketball, and I've done it for a long, long time," said Gamble, who has become a successful Springfield businessman after playing 11 years in the NBA.

Gamble had been named head basketball coach at Chatham Glenwood High School in the spring of 2000. But he resigned several months later without ever coaching a game following what Gamble described as a lack of support from the Glenwood administration amid charges of recruiting.

He said that unhappy experience didn't damp-

Former Lanphier star named school's first men's basketball coach

en his enthusiasm to become a coach.

"But it probably steered me toward the college ranks more so than high school," Gamble said, adding he likes the idea of coaching at a four-year university conveniently located in his hometown. "You've got to start somewhere, so why not start in your hometown? It's a great opportunity for me, and I'm looking forward to the challenge."

One major challenge will be for Gamble to recruit quality players in time for next season.

"Central Illinois is a big, big basketball area, and I think we have enough teams in this area to provide ballplayers," Gamble said. "We'll probably have to do some tryouts in the summer, and there may be a couple players here on campus that can play the game."

"But we're going to be out hitting the streets, hitting the bushes looking for student athletes. We'll probably cover most of Illinois and look at a couple of guys in the Chicago and St. Louis areas. I'll probably try to concentrate on getting a couple of good junior college players early on and then getting some kids coming out of central Illinois."

"If we can do that, I think we'll be competitive. We're going to struggle our first few years, I believe, but you know me. I think it's a challenge that I'm ready for."

Both Gamble and Adams, who has been associate director of athletics at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville the past two years, signed contracts Wednesday with UIS, subject to the approval of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees.

Adams replaces retiring coach Aydin Gonulsen, who had split his duties as the first athletic director and soccer coach for the school — originally called Sangamon State University — since 1977. Joe Eck, an assistant under Gonulsen since 1979, was named to replace him as soccer coach last fall.

"I am very excited to be here," said Adams, a Roxana native who began his career at SIU-E as coordinator of campus recreation in 1994 and was named assistant director of athletics in 1996. "I spoke with many people about this campus prior to accepting this position, and all of them — to a 'T' — had nothing but good things to say about UIS."

"I expect some rocky roads to start with," Adams said of the new basketball program. "Obviously we're late in the recruiting game. Having been involved in athletics for a number of years, I know that getting the scheduling, getting the athletes is a day-to-day thing."

"Kevin's really going to have his work cut out for him. He's coming in late in March here and the basketball season's over. He's not going to be able

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to evaluate talent based off of performances this year in high school.

"It's going to be a tough task. But I look for great things the first year, too. I'm excited to be coming on board in time to help build this program from the ground up. We have a lot of things going for us (including) student support and the hometown fan base that thoroughly enjoys its local basketball teams."

Initially, men's games will be played in the UIS gymnasium, where the women's games are played. The possibility of renting larger gyms in the area will be explored, and the school is seeking private funding to build a \$20 million recreation center in the next few years that would house a state-of-the-art gymnasium with adequate seating capacity.

The basketball program will start out under the auspices of the National Asso-

ciation of Intercollegiate Athletics with a goal of eventually moving into the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

"I can tell you that the NCAA has very stringent rules as to what the application procedure is," Adams said. "You have one year where you're petitioning — that's called an exploratory period — and then there's a four-year provisional status."

"So if we were to make a move immediately it would be at least five years. It's a long-range plan, and you cannot even petition until you meet their minimum requirements, which are (to have) 10 sports. We are now at six sports, I'm happy to say, with the addition of men's basketball today."

The other intercollegiate sports at UIS are men's and women's tennis, women's volleyball, women's basketball and men's soccer.

Chancellor Richard Ringeisen, in announcing the appointments and the addition of men's basketball, emphasized the sport will be funded through student

fees and through private funding.

"We will not be cutting any other campus programs, including other student activities or groups, in order to add basketball," Ringeisen said. "We won't be shortchanging any students."

"This is an important step for UIS. The students have indicated to me again and again that they would like this program. This men's basketball program, as well as other programs, will help build student life on this campus."

Ringeisen said one of Adams' immediate duties as director of athletics will be to form a group to analyze what sport UIS will add next. Whatever it is, it will be for women, he said.

"We are absolutely committed to gender equity at UIS, and adding men's basketball for next school year means we absolutely will add another women's sport by the (following) school year," Ringeisen said.

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