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College Notebook: Benedictine to enter NAIA with 3 new coaches

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Three new coaches are helping Benedictine University at Springfield transition from a two-year junior college to a four-year school that will start competing in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics in a few weeks.

Josh White is the coach of Benedictine's first-year men's and women's cross country programs.

Rob Handy, a former assistant softball coach at Lanphier High School, has replaced Todd Howe as softball coach. Handy is still the volleyball coach at Lanphier.

Nikki Bull-Eguez, who previously was an assistant, is the new women's soccer coach. Bull-Eguez replaces Dave Isham, who resigned to coach boys and girls soccer at Lutheran High School.

Whereas Handy and Bull-Eguez are inheriting established programs, White is building a cross country program from scratch.

White ran for Eastern Illinois University in the 1990s. He is a part-time instructor in economics and history at Benedictine.

He coached at the junior high level in Decatur and Petersburg.

White has received commitments from five male runners and one female. The men's team will include Zach Kniery (Lanphier), Matt Lott (Athens), John McCarthy (Ursuline), Trevor Hebert (Lanphier) and Will Burg (Ursuline). McCarthy, Lott and Burg already attend Benedictine. The sole female runner is Cassandra Leonard, who previously attended Lincoln Land Community College.

Handy's softball recruiting class includes, shortstop Kristin Coniglio (Springfield), outfielder Lynsey Monroe (Rochester), catcher Kerri Beasley (Nokomis), catcher Madeline Jiardina (New Berlin), shortstop Jenny Borkus (Plainfield Central), infielder Lisa Peters (Springfield), pitcher Kathy Brown (Downs Tri-Valley), first baseman Syndey Coleman (Auburn), second baseman Shelby Howard (Petersburg PORTA), catcher Brittny Hagen (Lanphier) and Indianapolis' Amanda Britt, a pitcher transferring from Olney Central College.

Handy is excited about the 2011 season. Fueling that excitement is the fact that Monroe, Beasley, Jiardina, Brown and Coleman all played for the Illinois Rock n Fire, which was runner-up at the National Softball Association 18-under World Series that concluded Saturday.

"Based on what I've seen from these kids so far, I guess we're going to do just fine," Handy said.

Comings and goings at RMU

Ronda Schappaugh is Robert Morris University's newest coach, at least for now.

Schappaugh will head the school's newly created women's cross country program. However, she may not be the newest hire for long.

RMU is searching for a softball coach to replace Ron Ferrill, who compiled a 61-25 record in two seasons with the Eagles and led the team to the United States Collegiate Athletic Association national title. Ferrill left RMU in July to become the head coach at St. Ambrose University, an NAIA school located in Davenport, Iowa.

Schappaugh was hired last month to get the Eagles' cross country program off the ground, but she is not new to RMU. She is an assistant women's basketball coach.

Schappaugh was president and held other positions in the Springfield Road Runners Club. She has competed in several marathons and has directed multiple races.

RMU will not field a cross country team this fall. Schappaugh expects to assemble a full roster for the 2011 season. The Havana native has been hard at work recruiting with 15 scholarships to give, but it should be no problem as she has experience putting together a team. She coached one of two American teams at the 2002 Japan Sea Rim Ekiden, a relay race in Niigata, Japan.

"I had to recruit the team, interview everybody and coordinate the trip," she said.

UIS baseball diamond under construction

Things are coming together for the University of Illinois Springfield Prairie Stars' first-year baseball program and coach Brian Grunzke.

A practice diamond is under construction south of The Recreation and Athletic Center on the UIS campus near the soccer practice fields. UIS associate athletic director Scott Reed hopes the diamond will be completed by the time classes begin on Aug. 23.

UIS plays its first season beginning in spring 2011 and the Prairie Stars have secured a field for home games. The team will play its home contests at Chatham's Community Park, according to Reed.

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