

## UE assistant named Illinois-Springfield basketball coach

By Randy Beard

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Ben Wierzba, who spent the past three seasons on Marty Simmons' staff at the University of Evansville, was named the head basketball coach at Illinois-Springfield on Thursday.

The opening came about after Kevin Gamble resigned at the end of June to take an assistant job at Providence College. Gamble, a former NBA player, started the Springfield program and compiled a 130-79 record in nine seasons. The Prairie Stars were 11-13 and 7-11 last season in their first season in the Great Lakes Valley Conference.

"Growing up in a coaching household, it's been a dream of mine to be a head coach for a long time," said Wierzba. "Illinois-Springfield has helped me get to that goal and I'm just very thankful to these people.

"It is bittersweet to leave Evansville. The city has been great to me the last three years and Coach Simmons and his family have been unbelievable."

Wierzba also has been an assistant coach at Southern Illinois-Edwardsville, North Dakota, Saint Joseph's, Lewis University and Army (under former UE head coach Jim Crews).

Simmons said Wierzba was ready for the opportunity.

"Oh yeah, I think he will do a great job," said Simmons. "... He always had great rapport with our players, and he knows the game of basketball extremely well."

Simmons said he expects to fill the vacancy on his staff fairly quickly.

Wierzba began his college playing career at South Alabama before transferring to SIU-Edwardsville, where he was an All-GLVC player in 1999. He said one of the lures of the Springfield job was returning to the GLVC as a head coach.

Wierzba's father Tom is a member of the Illinois high school basketball coaches hall of fame.

"Ben brings a wealth of basketball knowledge and a familiarity with the Great Lakes Valley Conference and what it takes to be successful at this level," said UIS athletic director Rodger Jehlicka. "He has worked with some outstanding head coaches and we feel is ready to take his career and our men's basketball program to a new level."



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