

## **A LOOK BACK, A HUGE THANK YOU and NOW ONTO A NEW ERA FOR WINTHROP SOCCER**

This will be the longest email I have ever written, but after 27 years at Winthrop University and another 10 years at Longwood University and three years as an assistant coach at the College of New Jersey (formerly known as Trenton State College) there is much to say and many to thank.

I will be stepping down as the as head soccer coach at Winthrop University sometime after the completion of the 2015 season. These past 27 years have flown by for me and I loved being the head soccer coach at Winthrop and love this University. In all seriousness, it is hard to figure out when to leave and if it is even the right time or right decision. I have been a college coach for the past 40 years and feel it is time to move on. I fully expect to move on to another position, since I am still young and in good health and feel I still have much to offer. My preference would be to stay on at Winthrop in some capacity or have the opportunity to coach at a smaller program or perhaps be an assistant coach somewhere. However, I do expect to continue to help raise money for the soccer program. We need this funding more than ever, and I want to see the next coach move the program forward as much as possible without always worrying about funding issues. Funding will be needed to do that, so rest assured I will be in contact with you at some point in the future. I will also continue to be involved with raising money for cancer research. We have been able to raise over \$318,000 the past six years from our Kicks Against Cancer Games, Champions Night and now with a group I am part of called the Carolinas Kickin' It Challenge. I will also continue to run the Manchester Cup which brings in top college teams from around the region and is played at the Manchester Meadows Soccer Complex each spring. I will continue to do the social media for the soccer program, twitter, Facebook and keep up the [www.winthropsoccer.com](http://www.winthropsoccer.com) website.

I feel I am very privileged in this day and age of college athletics, to walk away and be able to leave coaching on my own terms. I was also fortunate for most of my Winthrop career to work for one President in Dr. Anthony DiGiorgio and one Athletic Director in Tom Hickman who both shared and supported my philosophy in building the soccer program and Eagle Field. I can't thank each of them enough. The same can be said for Longwood University, where Dr. Henry Willett hired me and was president for much of my time there. I am most thankful for the opportunity that a guy named Gary Hindley (former college and professional coach) gave when he hired me at 22 years old as an assistant at the College of New Jersey and then again ten years later as an assistant with the Houston Dynamos Professional Team. Much of my basic coaching philosophy is based on those early years with Gary. He certainly taught me the importance of work ethic, as did my parents, organization and the value of doing things the right way. When

I arrived at Winthrop there was a very solid foundation in place for the soccer program that was built by founder Dr. Jim Casada. There was a two year gap from the time Coach Casada left coaching and when I was hired to become the head coach. At that point the program was in very poor shape in most areas, but still had the strong foundation and soccer culture he built. I am grateful for what Coach Casada was able to build here and for his friendship over the years. I hope each of you think I was able to build and expand on what he started. No matter how you measure the amount of success we had over the past 26 years, I would hope you appreciated how hard I worked and all the time and effort I put into every aspect of the program. We have been able to have success on both the regional and national level with limited funding and resources. I felt like most years we over achieved with the resources we had available to us. I am also proud of the leadership role Winthrop Soccer has played over the years in the growth and development of soccer in the community. Many of the coaches and directors of soccer in Rock Hill/York County and the surrounding areas have come through our program or have strong ties to the Winthrop Program. We have always led quietly and from behind the scenes. I would like to think that we did something right, since over 30 former players have gone into coaching on the club, high school or college level. Also every assistant coach I have had went on to head their own programs at various schools. We have always tried to bring the highest level of soccer to the community, whether it be Winthrop or other nationally ranked teams on our schedule, to the quality teams competing in the Annual Manchester Cup, to hosting USL Pro games and to hosting the first Major League Soccer team to ever be play in the upstate of South Carolina when the Chicago Fire played at Eagle Field two years ago in a US Open Cup game.

The early years at Winthrop were a struggle to be honest. We had very little funding in terms of scholarship and budget to work with and a soccer facility that needed improvement to be able to attract good players. I feel we worked extremely hard to make the program competitive in those early years, but we just didn't have enough resources to win consistently or win championships. You just can not out work money in today's athletics. Around 2001 we were able to get more funding and we also raised a few hundred thousand dollars for budget, scholarships and building and improving Eagle Field over the next several years. About this time, we also hired our first full-time assistant coach, which was long overdue and much needed. This certainly took some things off my plate and allowed us to do two very important things, raise more money and double our recruiting effort. Around that time is when the program went to the next level. As I tell every recruit, "when you do the research, you will find over the past 12 plus years that Winthrop has been among any of the top programs in the nation in terms of wins, regional and national rankings, championships won, NCAA College Cup appearances and players in the pros". I am extremely proud of what we have accomplished over the past twelve plus years, especially competing in the toughest region in the nation. Of course none of this would have been possible without the help from many of you receiving this email. When asked to help with fund raising projects or things that were needed for the program you were always there to help. At times it felt

like I had three full time jobs with fundraising, maintaining Eagle Field and then all that goes along with coaching at this level. To be perfectly honest, Winthrop has just worn me out to some degree the past several years and I mean that in a good way. I only know one way to do things, and that is to go all in. I am not sure that most people understand what is involved in being a coach at a high level if you are totally consumed by it. It is not just a job, but rather a way of life. You are constantly thinking about some aspect of the program every waking moment and every day. Again, I hope you appreciated my work ethic and the effort I put into the program. There are far too many people to thank personally over a 40 year career, but as always I want you to know how thankful I am, as well as all of our student-athletes are for your help and support over the years. You should take pride in what you helped build here at Winthrop because you were an important part of it. As many of you know, this past year we celebrated our 40th Anniversary of the soccer program and I am extremely proud that we have over 400 wins during that time. This is a real tribute to everyone one of you. To average 10 wins per season, for 40 years in the South Region, is something not many programs have or will accomplish. The biggest thing that I will miss is the day to day relationships with people around the program and the players and coaches. For me, memories were made through relationships and things that happened outside of the wins and championships won. I could write a good book on road trips and things that happened off the field. Over the past 27 years, we have been able to improve drastically the academics of the players. During this time we have maintained around a 3.0 GPA each year. We have improved the overall success of program and have also elevated the coaching position to where both are now perceived as being a very good situation among the college soccer community. I am most proud of what we have done to develop Eagle Field. This is also perceived as one of the best soccer venues in the region. I have put countless hours of physical work and fundraising/camp money into that facility over the years and I hope each of you are proud of how it turned out. From the very first year, I have always tried to upgrade the facility each year by adding something that improved the look no matter how big or small it may have been. There are still things that need to be done in my mind, so hopefully over the next few years we can make them happen through more fund raising efforts. I have been very fortunate to have some first class assistant coaches and outstanding players over the years. All of the credit for our success must be credited to them. In college athletics today it really does take a team effort to be successful, from the university president, athletic director, academic services, compliance director, sports medicine, sports information to professors and the staff that you rely on to help get things done every day.

Over the past 27 years there have been hundreds of people pass through Winthrop that have helped in ways they do not even realize and again I thank each of you. I would also like to thank the older alumni of the program who accepted me and supported what I was trying to do in building this program. My last regular season home game is scheduled to be at Eagle Field on Wednesday, November 4 at 7:00 PM vs Radford University. It is a little ironic since Radford had been one of our bigger rivals in the Big South Conference for the 16 years that Spencer Smith was the head coach there, and

now for the past five years, he has been our women's coach here at Winthrop. We have been good friends for the past 20 years or so and I enjoyed competing against him and now working with him.

My last regular season game as the head coach at Winthrop University, will be at Longwood University on Saturday, November 7. I want to thank the Longwood Athletic Department and Coach Jon Atkinson for making this date happen, even though it is a bit of a hardship on both teams playing so close to the start of the BSC Tournament. Longwood is where I started my head coaching career 37 years ago, so it will have a special meaning for me to end it there. I will always be thankful to Longwood for the opportunity, and taking a chance on a young 25 year old coach who thought he knew everything there was to know about coaching. We took over a program that was 0-14 and four years later were ranked in the Top 15 in the Nation (NCAA Div. II) and remained there for the next seven years until I came to Winthrop. I only hope Longwood thinks I did a good job in my ten years there.

I had the opportunity to rebuild two programs that were in poor shape upon arriving. Longwood was much more difficult since there was no soccer culture or tradition there, but to this day was my most rewarding experience as a coach. The men's side of the athletic program was only a few years old, since it was an all female institution until 1976 or so, very similar to Winthrop's history. However, my Longwood experience prepared me well for Winthrop. I had always dreamed of getting the opportunity to start a new program from scratch. Unfortunately that opportunity never presented itself. Even though I had opportunities to leave both schools on several occasions, I think I always made the right decision. Good soccer jobs are very difficult to come by. You will find there is much less movement in soccer than in some other sports such as basketball and football, so when you have a good job, you stay. I guess time will tell if this decision I am making now, will be a good one as well.

The things I talk about in this email, also apply to all the players, supporters, administration and faculty and staff at Longwood University. I feel I was very fortunate to work with many first class people at two excellent universities.

Continue to follow the Eagles at: Winthrop Athletics: [www.winthropeagles.com](http://www.winthropeagles.com) Winthrop Soccer: [www.winthropsoccer.com](http://www.winthropsoccer.com) Twitter: <https://twitter.com/WinthropSoccer> Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Winthrop-University-Soccer/141064272652049>

Thanks for the memories.

Rich "Gaffer" Posipanko